

American Sociological Association *Footnotes*
March, 1991

A Century of Sociology at Kansas
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Frank Wilson Blackmar, ninth president of the ASA (1919), began lecturing to his “Elements of Sociology” class at 5:00pm, Monday, February 3, 1890. A course bearing the same title has been taught at the University of Kansas ever since, and “no other course bearing this title was then or had been offered in the United States” (Clark, 1965: 95). Blackmar had come to Kansas the preceding fall as Professor of History and Sociology, had two important monographs in press, including a celebrated dissertation under Herbert Adams at Hopkins, and was poised to begin leading what may be called the first department of Sociology in the U.S. (Sica, 1990). On April 5th and 6th, 1991, the Department of Sociology at the University of Kansas will recognize Blackmar and the dozens of sociologists who followed him by holding a Centennial celebration, entitled, “Sociology as a Vocation.” Jill Quadagno, George Ritzer, Richard Scott, Barrie Thorne, William Julius Wilson, and Erik Wright will deliver talks about their works and careers (most of the speakers have ties to Kansas), and sociologists from around the region will also participate. In anticipation of this unusual event, and by way of invitation to all those who might wish to attend or participate, herewith a sketch of the department’s first hundred years. (More detail can be found in Sica, 1983 and Fritz, 1990).

A team of graduate students at Kansas has been working on collective history of the Department, to be published as a special issue of the *Mid-American Review of Sociology* simultaneously with the Celebration. They have discovered that close to 100 sociologists taught at Kansas in its first century, the Department awarded its first doctoral degree in 1916, with nearly 90 more to follow, plus over 275 master’s degrees, all of which required theses. The numerical disparity between doctoral and master’s degrees is due largely to the department’s decision early in the century to send its best graduate students away for the terminal degrees, often to Chicago. A number of faculty followed this path, first studying undergraduate Sociology at Kansas, migrating to Chicago, and then returning to their alma mater to teach. This pattern no longer holds, and Kansas has been producing top-notch doctorates (e.g. Jill Quadagno) for over twenty years.

The Department’s history can be divided into three periods: Blackmar’s hegemony (1889-1926), the depression through the 1950s and the growth period from the mid-1960s until today. Though a graduate program has always been important at Kansas, it was only since about 1970 that a large group of students could be accommodated, owing to the same rapid increase in faculty which so many universities experienced at the same time (from 10 faculty in 1955 to 20 in 1970). Indeed, the Vietnam period of cultural and intellectual history may become known as the halcyon moment for Kansas (and American?) Sociology. Retrenchment occurred during the early 1980s, until the faculty at one point numbered only 12. It has since risen to 15, but is substantially smaller than its maximum size 20 years ago. Graduate cohorts have reacted accordingly.

As Fritz (1990) has shown, Frank Blackmar was an astonishing character, as intellectual, institution builder, educator, and university powerhouse. He was the first Dean of the Graduate School at Kansas, serving from 1886 until 1922. His *Elements of Sociology* (MacMillan, 1905) according to his publisher, was the best-selling text in the country until nudged off the charts by Park and Burgess “green bible” in the 1920s. His persona life was trying, for his wife died soon after arriving in Kansas, leaving him with children to raise. And he seemed to possess that special brilliance and hyper-energetic nature common to innovators which sometimes irritates those of more humility. His properly intellectual work was first-class, including a Coleman-like report on U.S. education (1890), a history of Spanish influence in the American Southwest (1890), which became a standard reference, plus 16 other books and 90 articles. Like so many early American sociologists, he believed wholeheartedly in serving the community by putting to use his sociological knowledge. To this end he gave countless lectures to adult groups all over the state, wrote the Kansas Juvenile Code and otherwise served in official advisory roles for state government. his ethnographic research with, among others, Ernest Burgess resulted in Chicago-styled analysis of small communities before the “Chicago School” began. he seemed to have the energy and vision of several ordinary folk combined, and not unlike others of that sort, wished to be recognized as such. This brought about an unfortunate end to his career, when younger colleagues revolted against his autocracy, rejected the use of his text in favor of Park and Burgess, and forced him into retirement he did not want, nor could afford. His last full academic year was 1928-29, for which he was paid \$4000. In recognition of his extraordinary service to Kansas, he was also given \$1200 per annum as retirement pay, but died in 1931, having survived this enforced retirement only two years. This was 13 years before a pension plan would begin for all faculty in the University. It is fair to say that the Department never encountered anyone like Blackmar again. it is doubtful that a person of his character would survive in today’s academic environment, much less take a commanding role in his or her university.

There were good sociological reasons, in addition to his personality, for Blackmar’s impact. Size of organization created a setting for raw innovation that is now unimaginable. When Blackmar arrived in Lawrence, the University had 33 faculty members (not all of them were what we would call “tenure-track”) compared with over 1200 today; the Graduate School enrolled 10 men and 7 women (today’s figure is over 7000); and the entire student body amounted to 508 (332 men, 176 women) as compared with 27,000 now. This total for 1889 included the Graduate School, College of Liberal Arts, Law School, School of Pharmacy, Fine Arts and the Preparatory School. These same units in 1940 still accounted for only 2487 students and fewer than 200 faculty. Even after adding enrollments in the newer schools of medicine, engineering, education, business, and a large summer session of 1266, the University dealt with only 5484 students taught by 269 faculty. In this sort of organizational intimacy, everybody counted. *Gemeinschaft* becomes real when one reads accounts of these earlier days, with all the pros and cons that meant for learning and professional life.

A publicity photo of the Department in 1940 shows eight faculty, conservatively attired and looking extremely serious. It included Carroll Clark, Seba Eldridge, Mabel Elliott (who died on October 5, 1990 at 92), Mapheus Smith, Loren Eiseley (later a renowned science popularizer), Esther Twente, Marston McCluggage (the first Kansas doctorate to join the faculty) and Hilden Gibson, a part-time instructor about to finish the PhD from Stanford. Preceding them had been

Stuart Queen, chair in 1926 succeeding Blackmar; Victor Helleberg, a virtuoso teacher and Meadian for 30 years; Ernest Burgess; Walter R. Smith; and M.C. Elmer. Other faculty included Noel P. Gist and Alfred McClung Lee, neither of whom stayed very long. During the 1920s, the KKK became an important political voice in Kansas, feuded with the University, and took sharp notice of works published by sociology faculty which disputed its ideology. During the Depression when salaries fell by 25%, the Department continued to publish important work and increased its student audience, only to be thrown into diaspora by WWII.

Master's thesis topics and course titles by our standards were wide-ranging, bold, and distinctly the product of a pre-rationalized discipline. "The Status of Women in Society" was taught to a class of women in 1892 by Blackmar, and the reading list would keep today's students busy for several years. These were written on evolution, the genesis of religion, "Negroes" in Lawrence, suffrage in Colorado, Italians in Kansas City, restriction on immigration, cooperative grangers, the English poor law prior to 1601, Indian agriculture, Korean people, crime and insanity, the consumption of wealth, the evacuation of wounded in modern wars (1913), a text perhaps worth reprinting today, the relation of amusements to modern life, Russian Mennonites, and a theory of world organization—before 1917. Stanton Olinger (AB, Princeton) won the first doctorate in 1916 with a dissertation of Kansas fraternities.

It is painful to summarize a hundred years of dedicated Sociology in so few words. In 1989 the Department entered an entirely new era with the hiring of its eighth chairperson, Carol A.B. Warren, the first woman to hold the position. For some years Kansas had a higher proportion of women faculty than virtually any other doctoral granting department in the U.S. The mighty organizational achievements of previous chairs E. Jackson Baur, Charles K. Warriner, and Scott G. McNall among them—must be noted, and the new direction the Department is taking in gender, comparative-historical, and theory bodes well for an educational and scholarly unit which was there at the beginning of American Sociology. It is a proud past that must inspire a courageous second century.

For more information on the Centennial events, call the Department of Sociology at (785) 864-4111.