



Maxwell School of Citizenship. Source: Wikimedia Commons

Inspired Spirits and an Untapped Area: The Establishment of the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs and the Role of the History Department

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“The purpose is not to teach any one or all of these subjects, but to teach citizenship.”

This was George H. Maxwell’s credo for the newly formed Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.¹ The early twentieth century presented unprecedented challenges. The Great War left nations rattled and at a loss in adapting to a

strange new world. The Allied Powers dismantled two of the greatest empires of the past, the Habsburgs in Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire to the east, the last great Islamic Empire. New political structures were developing that threatened not only

¹ Syracuse University Archives, “Syracuse University: The Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, 1924-1934,” *Maxwell School Collection*, accessed April 12, 2018. This was

a pamphlet commemorating the ten-year anniversary and future goals.

monarchical reign in Europe, but also democratic and parliamentary institutions. The Bolshevik revolution in Russia shifted the political landscape far to the left, legitimizing communism as an option for other nations, whether or not it was viable. Far-right politics was reborn with the rise of Mussolini in Italy, Hitler in Germany, and Franco in Spain.

All the while, the United States became increasingly isolationist. Increased economic regulations and improving workers' conditions were pre-occupations. The Twentieth Amendment extended the right to vote to women. In terms of foreign affairs, Congress vehemently declined entry into the new League of Nations, which President Woodrow Wilson had created as a part of his "Fourteen Points."

Americans seemed to look at these events indifferently, distant as they were. Others sought to eradicate foreign influences at home (for example, the Red Scare of the 1920s). Furthermore, the Teapot Dome Scandal, which lasted from 1921-1923, placed President Warren G. Harding's administration in hot water. It was the worst political scandal in decades. Some businessmen and politicians knew isolationism was a problem, especially for a nation emerging as a world leader and industrial powerhouse.

In this context, many American universities and institutions began introducing citizenship-oriented programs.² For many years, Syracuse University has been renowned for its willingness and ability to adapt to times like these. The establishment of the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs was of key importance in the evolution of the university. In a time when active citizens mattered more than ever, George H. Maxwell and Chancellor Charles W. Flint led America into the next generation.³ One of the prevailing reasons Maxwell approached Flint was in reaction to the Teapot Dome corruption scandal.⁴ Many educators wondered what went wrong in the education system and what they could do in response. George Maxwell decided

to contribute funds to Syracuse University to answer this crisis and to provide instruction in studies that make "citizenship what it is and should be."⁵

In the midst of this fight over political ethics, many departments within Syracuse University now found themselves in a new home college. One such case is the History Department, moved from the humanities and placed within the social sciences.



George H. Maxwell

Source: www.maxwell.syr.edu

The Establishment of the Maxwell School

The original curriculum required a major in Political Science; the other social sciences, including History, became mandatory, foundational courses for Political Science.⁶ A bulletin commemorating the 10-year anniversary of the school states that the head of the Political Science Department, Dr. Finla Crawford, encouraged students to take classes outside of Political Science, unless they were considering employment in politics.⁷ There was therefore a strong liberal arts aspect to Maxwell. The school emphasized analytical skills for the "well-rounded citizen."

² Syracuse University Archives, "Announcement of the School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University," *Maxwell School Collection*, accessed April 20, 2018.

³ "History of the Maxwell School," supplied by Dr. John Western, Professor of Geography at Syracuse University.

⁴ Syracuse University Archives, Alan K. Campbell, Introduction to "From Teapot Dome to Watergate" by David Bennett, *History Department Collection*, accessed April 20, 2018.

⁵ SU Archives, "Syracuse University: The Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, 1924-1934," *Maxwell School Collection*.

⁶ SU Archives, "Syracuse University: The Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, 1924-1934," *Maxwell School Collection*.

⁷ *Ibid.*

History's role in the early years of Maxwell was to 'fill in' gaps of knowledge. Classes at Syracuse were likely to feature Europe, the United States, and North America, and even some African history. However, in the 1934 anniversary pamphlet the Maxwell School called for new history professors to study diplomacy in general, the Far East, and Latin and South American Affairs.⁸ Maxwell was attempting to fulfill an egalitarian mission. New areas were of paramount importance.

History was more visible in Maxwell in a document dating around 1927, outlining the components of the Public Administration program, which required courses in American history.⁹ While this specific program was not originally included at the school's founding, it highlights the growing importance of the History Department.¹⁰

George Maxwell valued research just as much as classroom learning, so that the Maxwell School included graduate studies.¹¹ This new focus on research changed the trajectory of the school, as well as the History Department.

The History Department awarded its first PhD. in 1883.¹² The Political Science Department grew out of History in the following years.¹³ However, when the Maxwell School was established in 1924, the Political Science Department was at the center of its curriculum and History was largely an auxiliary subject.¹⁴ In an article most likely published in the 1950s, there is little mention of the field of History, other than its being one of a few departments providing "supporting courses."¹⁵ A 2014 edition of the "Maxwell Perspective" by Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers confirms the college's tradition of blending disciplines. Rodgers cites a 1924-1925 university bulletin, which states that the citizenship program focused

on "political duties" and "social, economic, and individual life."¹⁶ Then it lists History first among seven other disciplines that "must be increasingly incorporated into a well-rounded program."¹⁷ The focus has always been on developing versatile American citizens, given the title of the college.

This interdisciplinary nature emerges in the various university and Maxwell School bulletins from 1924-1934. These archival materials are all we have from university-originated publications intended to inform and advertise the various programs and classes offered by the newly formed institution. There is no mention of a History Department in the first few, and little mention of history at all in these materials.

The original announcement of the new Maxwell School mentions history only as a way of understanding government and covering the great political debates of the past.¹⁸ While not expressly mentioned, history lurks in the descriptions of undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Political structures and American government are favored topics, but history teachers would be required to cover a variety of them.

The Role of the History Department

In reality, the History Department's duty in the first few years of Maxwell was to build up the citizenship program. It did not specifically house any professors until 1927.¹⁹ In 1926, an historian arrived at the school, but we find no mention of him in that first year.²⁰ The History Department would also have no chairperson until somewhere after 1927 and before

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Syracuse University Archives, "Course in Public Administration (Five Years Tentative Outline)," *Maxwell School Collection*, accessed March 8, 2018.

¹⁰ Syracuse University Archives, "Course in Public Administration," *Maxwell School Collection*.

¹¹ "History of the Maxwell School," supplied by Dr. John Western, Professor of Geography.

¹² "Department of History," Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, accessed April 2, 2018, <https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/hist/index.htm>.

¹³ Syracuse University Archives, "Political Science Department," *Maxwell School Collection*, accessed March 8, 2018.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "History of the Maxwell School," supplied by Dr. John Western, Professor of Geography.

¹⁶ Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers, "The More Things Change," *Maxwell Perspective*, Summer 2014, <https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/news.aspx?id=124554053725>.

¹⁷ Rodgers, "Change."

¹⁸ Syracuse University Archives, "Announcement of the School," *Maxwell School Collection*.

¹⁹ Syracuse University Archives, "Syracuse University: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs Bulletin, 1927-28," *Maxwell School Collection*, accessed April 20, 2018.

²⁰ Syracuse University Archives, "Syracuse University: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs Bulletin, 1926-27," *Maxwell School Collection*, accessed April 20, 2018.

1929, with the appointment of Dr. Ralph V. Harlow. Information on him is limited.²¹

Dr. William Freeman Galpin became the first Maxwell School history professor.²² He arrived in 1926, but he was not a professor of history until the next year. Like other historians, he was in the citizenship program. Some of these instructors were esteemed scholars, but they were not Syracuse University professors. They were visiting professors on loan from institutions such as Duke University.²³



Charles W. Flint, Chancellor of Syracuse University, 1922-1936.

Source: www.news.syr.edu

These professors had to adapt to a curriculum with little powers of input. Adjustments followed in 1927.²⁴ Financial constraints may have been a factor in these policies. Correspondence between Maxwell and Chancellor Flint indicates that

Mr. Maxwell's original donation for the establishment of the school was later doubled, and further supplemented throughout the 1930s and 1940s.²⁵

The Maxwell School taught expansive historical programs throughout the summer, but not in the regular sessions.²⁶ Students seeking history courses had to enroll in summer courses. Incoming students were required to take tests to prove their adequacy for the potential programs.²⁷ One of these tests was in history. The Maxwell School required some historical training for admission requirements, but did not itself offer an adequate number of history courses.

In 1925, substitute and traveling professors taught seven courses in history.²⁸ It is unclear how successful these courses were, but they fostered high school education in history and covered teaching methods as much as history, which was presumably below collegiate level.²⁹ However, the number of courses shrank when the department began to hire its permanent positions, and the number of faculty drastically decreased.³⁰ Only in the summers would they increase to around ten.³¹ By 1935, there were only six courses—three undergraduate and three graduate, a departure from the school's earlier disregard for separating those two levels.³² Furthermore, Drs. Harlow and Galpin received no increased staff support.³³ The department finally grew in 1939, when the number of professors increased to five, and the number of courses skyrocketed to twenty.³⁴ There were two new concentrations, American and European.³⁵ The outlines of a formal department were taking shape. However, the department shrank after the Second World War to pre-1939 levels.³⁶

²¹ Syracuse University Archives, "History Department," *History Department Collection*, accessed April 20, 2018.

²² Syracuse University Archives, "Maxwell School Bulletin, 1927-28," *Maxwell School Collection*.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ "History of the Maxwell School," supplied by Dr. John Western, Professor of Geography.

²⁶ Syracuse University Archives, "Syracuse University: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs Bulletin—Summer Session, 1926 and 1927," *Maxwell School Collection*, accessed April 20, 2018.

²⁷ Syracuse University Archives, "Syracuse University: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs Bulletin, 1925-26," *Maxwell School Collection*, accessed April 20, 2018.

²⁸ Syracuse University Archives, "Maxwell School Bulletin, 1925-26," *Maxwell School Collection*.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Syracuse University Archives, "Maxwell School Bulletin, 1927-28," *Maxwell School Collection*.

³¹ Syracuse University Archives, "Maxwell School Bulletin—Summer Session, 1927," *Maxwell School Collection*.

³² Syracuse University Archives, "Syracuse University: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs Bulletin, 1935-36," *Maxwell School Collection*, accessed April 20, 2018.

³³ Syracuse University Archives, "Maxwell School Bulletin, 1935-36," *Maxwell School Collection*.

³⁴ Syracuse University Archives, "Syracuse University: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs Bulletin, 1939-40," *Maxwell School Collection*, accessed April 20, 2018.

³⁵ Syracuse University Archives, "Maxwell School Bulletin, 1939-40," *Maxwell School Collection*.

³⁶ Syracuse University Archives, "1963 Report," *History Department Collection*, accessed April 20, 2018.

History, therefore, had a minimal presence in the first four decades, despite a small period of wartime growth. The number of historians in 1962, when Professor Bennett took over as department chair, was nine—an increase of four professors in almost fifteen years.³⁷ This is shocking for a department that included two-thousand undergraduates and sixty graduates at the time.³⁸ To exacerbate the issue, only eight teaching assistant positions (TAs) were available for graduate students, and therefore the number of classes (statistics for this year unknown), remained low.³⁹

During the period of wartime growth, the department was the smallest in Maxwell as late as 1936, but it was larger than the majority of others by 1939—perhaps a result of the war in Europe.⁴⁰ This growth led to the department adding a doctoral program in 1946.⁴¹ Interestingly, the department's transfer to the Maxwell School caused it to lose its doctoral program. The Department had to apply for funding from the Maxwell School for this type of program, something it either never did until 1946, or was previously denied. There was at least a twenty-eight-year period with no PhDs in history at Syracuse University; the first granted in 1952.⁴² Over the next eighteen years, there were thirty-two PhDs.⁴³ However, the growth experienced from 1939-1946 flagged until 1962. In that year, the History Department grew to new prominence in the Maxwell School, thanks to the work of Professor Bennett.

In terms of publication, there is no record for Professor Harlow, and Professor Galpin's output was limited mainly to local microhistories.⁴⁴ His work focused on trade laws and local officials, rather than major world events.⁴⁵

From the Mind of Emeritus Professor Ralph Ketcham

After the end of the Great War in 1918, new styles of teaching became popular.⁴⁶ Some believed the average American citizen had shirked commitment to the war effort and failed in protecting and defending democratic values. They believed more effective teaching of civic values would be a remedy.⁴⁷ In organizing and conducting hires for the new citizenship program, Dean William E. Mosher emphasized a scientific approach for Maxwell as a social science institution.⁴⁸ Mosher and other professors valued instruction in History in inculcating democratic values, but they had no clear vision on precisely how to articulate and implement History's contribution to Maxwell's goals. In general terms, at least, they desired a more penetrating, rigorous, and compelling curriculum in History, based on social science models.

Consequently, the History Department changed over the following years. Some persisted in wanting to relegate History to a small role in "citizenship" programs.⁴⁹ Fortunately, they did not prevail, but the History Department's role was restricted to framing how democracy had developed in America. Furthermore, the Department had little to do in the graduate school, as many were still unsure of how historical research would serve the school's mission.⁵⁰ According to Ketcham, Maxwell historians struggled to maintain optimism about the future of the History Department in the Maxwell School during these years.

³⁷ Syracuse University Archives, David H. Bennett, "Years of Growth for the History Department," *History Department Collection*, accessed April 20, 2018.

³⁸ Syracuse University Archives, "Years of Growth," *History Department Collection*.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Syracuse University Archives, "Syracuse University: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs Bulletin—Summer Session, 1936 and 1939," *Maxwell School Collection*, accessed April 20, 2018.

⁴¹ Syracuse University Archives, "A Look Ahead," *History Department Collection*, accessed April 20, 2018. As noted, the first PhD. Degree was awarded in 1883.

⁴² Syracuse University Archives, Bennett, "Years of Growth," *History Department Collection*.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Syracuse University Archives, "Maxwell School Bulletin, 1927-28," *Maxwell School Collection*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

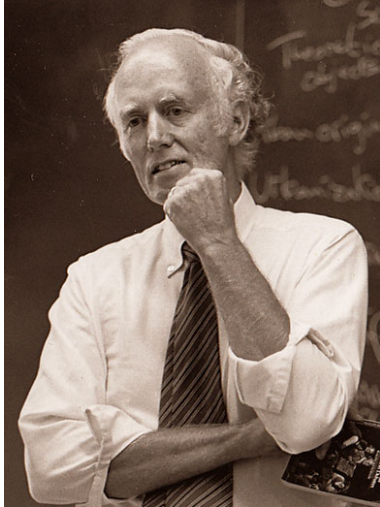
⁴⁶ Ralph Ketcham, "Appendix: The Maxwell School and Citizenship, 1924-2012," in *Public-Spirited Citizenship: Leadership and Good Government in the United States*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2015.

⁴⁷ Ketcham, *Public-Spirited Citizenship*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*



Ralph Ketcham (1927-2018)
Source: www.maxwell.syr.edu

Final Thoughts and Hope for the Future

While he did not place the History Department front and center of his new school, Mr. Maxwell did foster its future growth and development. He wrote,

Professors must be professors and analyzers rather than propagandists, and intelligent comprehension should be their aim rather than promotion of any 'ism.'⁵¹

Maxwell never lost sight of this injunction in creating the foundation for effective higher education in History. He saw political and ideological bias as the enemy of the social sciences. Many European countries suffered from rapid and blind acceptance of "isms." Extreme nationalism led to the Great War, costing millions of lives. Communist ideology, distorted into a nationalist ideology by Stalin, resulted in millions of deaths. In light of these horrors, Maxwell called for "intelligent comprehension." He understood that History's goal is not to further the idea that America is the good guy and its enemies the bad guys. We desperately need the beacon light of his message and the principles of his school in our own troubled times.

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⁵¹ Syracuse University Archives, "Syracuse University: The Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, 1924-1934," *Maxwell School Collection*.

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