

Portrait of "A Physical": A Case Study of Elizabeth Pitt Barron (1904–98)

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In 1925, at the age of twenty-one, Elizabeth Pitt¹ graduated from the Margaret Eaton School of Literature and Expression. Established in Toronto, Ontario in 1907, this women's academy of higher education was one of the first in Canada to prepare women for careers in either dramatic art or physical education. During its early years the School offered courses in literature, rhetoric, drama and physical culture. In its later organization, it boasted the country's most intensive program in physical education, a two year course of study spanning athletics, modern dance, and wilderness education.² The school operated in various forms for over forty years, and had full-time enrolments ranging, on average, from twelve to twenty-five per year.³

As students in the physical education course, Pitt and her colleagues were nicknamed "The Physicals."⁴ At their graduation, Pitt and sixteen others were told that the opening decades of the century offered tremendous opportunities for young women for work and service, and that they were destined to serve "the best interests and ideals of the nation."⁵ For Pitt, this opportunity for service translated into employment in the field of women's physical education for over forty years. This encompassed work at girls' camps, private girls' schools, women's colleges, Young Women's Christian Associations (YWCAs), and a long affiliation with the Eaton Girls' Club—an employee recreational program for women sponsored by the T. Eaton Company.

¹For brevity's sake, Elizabeth Pitt Barron will be referred to as "Pitt" throughout the text, and cited by her full name in the notes.

²Dorothy N. R. Jackson, *A Brief History of Three Schools* (Toronto: T. Eaton Company Ltd., 1953) offers an overview of the three stages of the school's development. See also John Byl, "The Margaret Eaton School, 1901–1942: Women's Education in Elocution, Drama and Physical Education" (PhD diss., University of New York at Buffalo, 1992); and A. H. Lathrop, "Elegance and Expression, Sweat and Strength: Body Training, Physical Culture and Female Embodiment in Women's Education at the Margaret Eaton Schools (1901–1942)" (EdD diss., University of Toronto, 1997) for studies which offer an analysis of the physical education training at the Margaret Eaton School.

³At the School's zenith, annual full and part time enrolments exceeded a thousand students.

⁴Elizabeth Pitt Barron, interview by author, 29 March 1994.

⁵George S. Nasmith, Commencement Exercise Address, 1918, in Dorothy Jackson, *A Brief History of the Three Schools* (Toronto: T. Eaton Company, 1953), 13.

Biographical inquiry offers the opportunity to investigate the particularities of a single life in the hope that this information may shed light on the actions of larger group collectives. For feminist historians, these investigations also reveal the complex layers of privilege and oppression that structure opportunities available to women. In the case of Pitt, one must ask whether or not her experiences were typical of other middle and upper class women who graduated from the Margaret Eaton School during the first decades of the twentieth century. Was her life an exemplar for other women who came after her? What constituted "professional" work for these graduates, and how did their employment within the field of physical education both challenge and conform to European and middle class notions of the "feminine" body?

EARLY LIFE AND FAMILY HISTORY:

*"The McKenzie Connection"*⁶

Pitt's family background generally typified the ethnic, religious and class characteristics of the majority of students who entered the Margaret Eaton School during the 1920s. She was born in Toronto in 1904. Her father, Charles William Pitt, managed a small lumber company on Collins Inlet, on the north shore of Georgian Bay. Her maternal grandfather, John Bertram, emigrated from Germany in 1856, became a Peterborough merchant, and served as a federal Member of Parliament for nine years before moving to Toronto to become president of the Collins Inlet Lumber Company and Bertram Engine Works. John Bertram built a house in Toronto, where Pitt and her younger brother, Bertram, lived for the first five years of their life.⁷ She recalled that the family divided their time between winter months in Toronto and summer months on Georgian Bay. In 1909, the family moved to Collingwood. Here they spent their high school years, with summers at the lumber mill in Collins Inlet and on camping and canoeing excursions in Killarney National Park.⁸

⁶Pitt identified "The McKenzie Connection" as the first chapter in her unpublished autobiography "A Strange Chronicle: The Power and Influence of Dr. R. Tait McKenzie." Personal papers of Elizabeth Pitt Barron, held by author. See also John Byl Archives, Redeemer College, Ancaster, Ontario (JBA) Box 1, "A Strange Chronicle—Correspondence."

⁷Elizabeth Adelaide Pitt was born one week after her grandfather's death in 1904. Her brother, Charles Bertram, was born in 1903, and thereafter called "Bertram" by the family. Elizabeth Pitt Barron, interview by author, 22 April 1994.

⁸Pitt dedicated the memoir "Only Time Will Tell: A Summer Experience in 1888 of R. Tait McKenzie" to her brother Bertram, who "also grew up spending many summers at Collins Inlet." See JBA Box 1, "Only Time Will Tell," 1.

Pitt's particular family history gave her a unique career advantage over other graduates of the Margaret Eaton School. Her grandmother, Helen Bertram, had a sister, Catherine, who married William McKenzie, a minister in the Free Church of Scotland. They immigrated to Canada in 1857, and eventually settled in Almonte, Ontario. Both Helen and Catherine had children in the spring of 1867: Helen a daughter, Isabella Agnes, and Catherine a son, Robert Tait. The children were christened together in Almonte's Presbyterian Church. Isabella's daughter Elizabeth Pitt was thus the second cousin of R. Tait McKenzie, later to become one of the most influential figures in the history of Canadian physical education. After graduating from McGill University in medicine, he became an internationally recognized doctor, scholar, physical educator and sculptor.⁹ Isabella and Tait remained life-long friends, corresponding and visiting each other regularly. As Pitt acknowledged in her personal memoirs, McKenzie exercised profound influence on decisions which would shape her career.

At the age of twelve, Pitt was injured in a severe car accident which left her with chronic back pain and limited flexibility in her back and legs. She had already nearly died, twice, of scarlet fever, and this event deepened parental concerns about her health—and ultimately figured in decisions regarding her educational future.

HIGHER EDUCATION:

*"My mother said it would make me fit"*¹⁰

Despite Pitt's wish to pursue a career in nursing, her mother decided she should enter The Margaret Eaton School of Literature and Expression. It is probable, although not documented, that Isabella sought the opinion of Tait McKenzie, well noted for his experience and scholarship on rehabilitation and physical therapy.¹¹ It is also likely that her decision was influenced by other considerations of the period regarding women's higher education.

⁹See James Day, "Robert Tait McKenzie: Physical Education's Man of the Century" *Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation*, 33, 4 (April-May, 1967), 4-17; and F. Cosentino, *Almonte's Brothers of the Wind: R. Tait McKenzie and James Naismith* (Burnstown, Ontario: General Store Publishing House, 1996).

¹⁰Elizabeth Pitt Barron, interview with author, 29 March 1994.

¹¹During World War I, R. Tait McKenzie served as a member of the Royal Army Medical Corps in England where he worked in orthopaedic hospitals. His publications, *Reclaiming the Maimed: A Handbook of Physical Therapy* in 1918, and *Exercise in Education and Medicine* in 1923, were seminal works in the developing discipline of physiotherapy. See Cosentino, *Almonte's Brothers of the Wind*, 117.

By the 1920s, The Margaret Eaton School had an established reputation as a female academy in Toronto offering "a professional and practical education"¹² for women. When the school opened in 1907, Dean Ramsay Wright of Toronto's faculty of arts welcomed the institution as "another younger daughter of the University."¹³ Women had gained access to the University of Toronto as early as the last quarter of the nineteenth century, but the co-educational environment was not entirely welcoming.¹⁴ During the first decade of the century, debates persisted with regard to the advantages and drawbacks of separate educational institutions for women.¹⁵ Most women who choose the co-educational environment pursued a degree in arts, which generally limited them to employment opportunities in teaching, library and secretarial work—unlike male counter-parts who entered careers in the church, the civil service, and business. Given these limited options, The Margaret Eaton School offered the benefit of a two year course of study that promised opportunities in specific areas of employment exclusive to women. Emma Scott Raff, founder and first principal of the school, believed "all culture should carry with it a bread-winning power."¹⁶ She designed a curriculum offering a broadly based cultural and practical education. Shortly after the school opened, Scott Raff claimed that it had attracted "a new class" of student who desired specialist training in the pursuit of a career.¹⁷ By 1916, the school advertised that their graduates filled positions as teachers of physical education, teachers of expression, public readers, interpreters of drama on the professional stage, supervisors of playgrounds, workers in settlements, and workers in Young Women's

¹²*Margaret Eaton School Calendar, 1908–1909*, 10.

¹³"Social Events," *Globe*, January 8, 1907, 5.

¹⁴Augusta Stowe, the first woman to graduate from a Canadian medical college in 1883, recalled her struggle in the coeducational university environment as a path "not strewn with roses." See Ann Rochon Ford, *A Path Not Strewn with Roses: One Hundred Years of Women at the University of Toronto: 1884–1984* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), iv.

¹⁵In 1908, a senate committee of the University of Toronto, arguing on behalf of the "special" needs of women's higher education, voted in favour of segregation and the establishment of separate colleges for women. The University of Toronto alumnae successfully convinced senate to reverse this decision. See "Report of the committee appointed to enquire in regard to a possible college for women," *University of Toronto Monthly*, 9, 8 (June, 1909), 286–9; and also "Reply of the alumnae," *Ibid.*, 289–91.

¹⁶"Canadian Women in the Public Eye: Mrs. G.G. Nasmith," *Saturday Night* 11 September 1920, 26.

¹⁷Provincial Archives of Ontario—Eaton Collection (PA0-EC), Series 22 Box 6 File 1, "Report from Emma Scott Raff to the Board of Directors," (1908–1910), nd.

Christian Associations.¹⁸ Within a decade, Scott Raff reported to the board that the school lacked sufficient teachers to meet demand.¹⁹

Beyond the possibilities of a professional education, The Margaret Eaton School offered a sheltered and separate environment for daughters of middle and upper class Protestant families. The school was named for Margaret Beattie Eaton (wife of retail department store magnate Timothy Eaton), a passionate patron of the arts with an especial interest in dramatic literature, who convinced her husband to donate funds to construct an impressive school building designed to replicate the architecture of the *Kalokagathon*, or Greek theatre.²⁰ The school served as the main site for classes and activities from 1907 until 1925. Margaret Eaton provided ongoing financial support for the school and served on the school's board of directors, together with members of the Eaton family, T. Eaton Company executives, and representation from Toronto's Protestant ecclesiastical elite.²¹ Students were expected to live in residence and to attend a host of visiting cultural events. Many famous actors, lecturers, and writers were guest speakers throughout the school's history.²²

¹⁸*Calendars* 1916–1917 to 1922–23, 8–10.

¹⁹PA0-EC Series 22 Box 6 File 1, "Report to the Directors from Emma Scott Raff Nasmith," Nov. 4 1918.

²⁰"Social Events," *Globe*, January 8 1907, 5.

²¹The executive council of the school consisted of Mrs. Timothy Eaton, Mrs. Josephine Burnside, Lady Eaton, R.Y. Eaton, The Reverend Chancellor R. P. Bowles, and two T. Eaton Company executives. *Calendar*, 1925–126, 7.

²²Notables included W.B. Yeats, Earl Gray, Frank Benson, Ben Greet and Lilian Braighwaite. See University of Toronto Archives—Dora Mavor Moore Collection (UTA-DMM), 207 Box 1B File 12, "Obituary, Emma Scott Raff: Art and Literary Leader Mrs. George Nasmith dies." Student attendance at concerts, art exhibits and lectures from "outstanding personalities in the religious, social and educational fields" continued into the 1930s. See, *Calendar*, 1932–1933, 5.

Although the school's original emphasis was on dramatic preparation—with such notable graduates as Dora Mavor (later Moore)²³—by the time Pitt enrolled, physical education had become the more popular course of study. The program combined theoretical and applied subjects. Of particular interest for Pitt were courses in “Hygiene” and “Remedial Gymnastics and Massage” which focussed on principles of health and offered strategies in therapeutic treatment for various physical problems—including posture and back deficiencies.²⁴ One assumes that Pitt's mother saw that the school might not only provide an appropriate supervised higher education but also directly assist her daughter's physical recovery. In the fall of 1924, Pitt moved to the school's residence on Toronto's Dundonald St. and began her course of study.

THE MARGARET EATON SCHOOL YEARS:

“Beauty and Fitness”

Pitt attended during the two most volatile years in the school's administrative history. The City of Toronto's decision to expand Bay Street—and the subsequent demolition of the school building—precipitated financial re-examination of the school's viability by Margaret Eaton and T. Eaton company executives. In the wake of declining enrolment in the Department of Literature and Dramatic Art, the dramatic art program was closed and the school reconfigured to offer training exclusively in physical education. During this period Margaret Eaton lost interest in the school, later withdrawing financial support. Angered by what she perceived as loss of faith in her leadership, Scott Raff resigned as principal.

In 1926 Mary G. Hamilton, Director of the Department of Physical Education, was appointed the school's new principal. The school's motto changed from “*We strive for the good and the beautiful*” to “*Beauty and fitness*.”²⁵ Activities shifted to a former YMCA building at 415 Yonge St. which the T. Eaton Company had purchased in 1917. This facility, used for employee recreation programs during the evenings, housed the “extension” work of the expanded Department of Physical Education during the day. Ironically, although the reconfigured school retained Margaret Eaton's name,

²³Dora Mavor was a graduate of the Margaret Eaton School of Literature and Expression in 1912. She was the first Canadian to enter the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in England and became one of Canada's most successful amateur dramatists. See Paula Spurdakos, “Dora Mavor Moore: Her Career in the Canadian Theatre” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1990).

²⁴*Calendar, 1924–1925*, 7.

²⁵Jackson, *Three Schools*, 23.

administrative control passed exclusively into the hands of T. Eaton company executives.

Oblivious to these administrative difficulties, Pitt enjoyed life at the school. The "Expressions" and the "Physicals" shared daily school routines. Roll call began each morning with recitations of monologues from Robert Browning or Shakespeare. All students were required to attend cultural events, such as performances by the Russian ballet and the Isadora Duncan dancers. There were regular visits to the Eaton family home for holiday celebrations. Despite the fact that students from the two streams of study followed separate curricula, some classes were shared. Physical education students were required to take classes in "Voice Training" and "Rhythm and Expression" offered by faculty in the Department of Dramatic Literature and Art, while dramatic arts students were required to study "Classic and Aesthetic Dancing," "Folk Dancing," and "Physical Training" under instructors in the Department of Physical Education.²⁶

New Principal Hamilton was a graduate of the Sargent School for Physical Training in Boston. Her desire was to bring the school to the leading edge of professional preparation for women so that her graduates would be "competent to organize and take charge of every branch of physical activity for girls."²⁷ She hired instructors from England and the United States to teach games, gymnastics, dance, and educational theory. University of Toronto Instructors taught anatomy and physiology. The Theoretical course curriculum consisted of classes in anatomy, physiology, hygiene, anthropometry, gymnastics theory, games theory, applied anatomy, psychology of exercise, methods of teaching, first aid, and home nursing. Practical courses included American and Swedish gymnastics, remedial gymnastics, practice teaching, and folk and aesthetic dancing. Students were also taught fencing, swimming, archery, track and field, ground hockey, ice hockey, basketball, baseball, and tennis. In 1926, Hamilton added a third component: camp counsellor training. Hamilton believed camping for girls to be an important new development in the field of physical education, and saw the graduates of her school supplying demands for future camp counsellors and directors.²⁸ Students spent the month of September at Camp Tanamakoon in Algonquin Park, where they received instruction in riding, canoeing, sailing, swimming, and camping skills.

²⁶*Calendar, 1926-1927, 5.*

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸See Mary G. Hamilton, *The Call of Algonquin: A Biography of a Summer Camp* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1958) for a history of Camp Tanamakoon.

PROFESSIONAL WORK AND SERVICE:

"What was a single girl to do?"

Alumnae records from the Margaret Eaton School indicate that over a forty year period, most students graduated at the age of twenty-one and worked, on average, five years before they ultimately married.²⁹ (In Pitt's graduating class of 1925, for example, eleven students received their diploma in physical education; of these, three remained single throughout their lives.) Once married, these women generally left paid employment. As one 1927 graduate reflected, "When you married in those days you did not even think about working."³⁰ For graduates who chose to pursue a career, the search for sustainable employment presented particular challenges. Pitt recalled:

I didn't want to get married—but what was a single girl to do? What opportunity did I have? How would I keep myself? I chose things that at least provided me with my room and board. That was important, you know.³¹

Placement statistics from the school indicate that the majority of graduates from the Margaret Eaton School entered careers in the YWCA, followed by teaching in private schools and settlement house work.³² Each year the School received requests from YWCAs and private girls camps soliciting graduates for both volunteer and paid positions. Hamilton encouraged students to engage in volunteer work every summer. In the summer of 1924, for example, Pitt volunteered as a counsellor at a 'fresh air' camp in Bolton, Ontario, funded by the Neighbourhood Workers Association.

I was told not to have dollar signs in my eyes. A volunteer job would very often lead to something better. The first job I ever had was at a fresh air camp. This was a camp that teaches you control because you have women, children and babies. This was a summer camp for families who couldn't afford to go away or to give the children a holiday and to teach them swimming.³³

The following summer, the General Secretary for the Montreal YWCA wrote asking for students who could teach at Camp Oolahwan in St. Margueritis, Québec.³⁴ Pitt became sports director for the summer, responsible for one

²⁹Byl, "The Margaret Eaton School," 342.

³⁰Lillian Thompson Armstrong, *Ibid.*

³¹Elizabeth Pitt Barron, interview by author, 28 May 1997.

³²*Calendar*, 1940–1941, 15. See also Cathy L. James, "Practical Diversions and Educational Amusements: Evangelia House and the Advent of Canada's Settlement Movement, 1902–09," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation*, 10, 1 & 2 (Spring/printemps & Fall/automne 1998), 48–66.

³³Elizabeth Pitt Barron, interview by author, 22 April 1994.

³⁴JBA, Box 1 "YWCA Correspondence," F. M. Postill to Director, Margaret Eaton School, 12 March 1925.

hundred young children under the age of sixteen. She received thirty dollars for fifteen weeks of employment.³⁵

In the spring of her graduating year, Pitt accompanied her mother to Philadelphia for a holiday visit with R. Tait McKenzie. Pitt not only renewed acquaintance with her second cousin but made a life-long friend of his wife, Ethel O'Neil McKenzie. McKenzie had moved to the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, to become director of the Department of Physical Education. During this visit, he convinced Pitt she should travel to the United States for physical education teaching experience in the American system. He asked his good friend Constance Applebee, the Director of Physical Training at Bryn Mawr College, to hire Pitt as a junior coach. In exchange for free tuition and residence, Pitt agreed to teach junior classes in swimming, folk dancing and gymnastics.³⁶ She would also teach physical education classes for young girls at three nearby Catholic schools.

Between 1925 and 1927, Pitt taught at Bryn Mawr and volunteered as a camp counsellor at Temple University's girls' physical education summer camp. During this period, she visited McKenzie in Philadelphia every weekend and spent many hours watching him work on his sculptures in his university studio overlooking Franklin Field.

In the summer of 1927, as part of a contingent of twenty-one faculty sent from Bryn Mawr under the auspices of the New York School of Hygiene and Physical Education, Pitt travelled to The Gymnastics People's College in Ollerup, Denmark. Here, she enrolled in a six-week summer course in Danish gymnastics taught by Niels Bukh. Criticizing the Swedish system as stiff and uninteresting for youth, Bukh advocated a new form of gymnastics emphasizing strength, mobility and agility. His system was characterized by instruction in rhythmic stretches and swings. Classes were conducted outdoors or in a large, bright and airy gymnasium. In her diary Pitt recorded watching a sample lesson. She was surprised that children entered the gymnasium singing, rather than marching formally, and that the gymnasium used far less apparatus than the Swedish system. She noted lessons as quite long, but not as onerous and physically stressful.³⁷ Pitt became the first Canadian to graduate from this summer training course in Danish gymnastics, and was to teach this method throughout her career.

³⁵Elizabeth Pitt, "Camp Oolahwan Diary," 1925. Pitt Barron personal papers, held by author.

³⁶JBA, Box 1 "Bryn Mawr College," Constance Applebee to Elizabeth Pitt, 17 September 1924.

³⁷JBA, Box 1, "Denmark trip diary."

When her father became seriously ill in the summer of 1927, Pitt returned to Canada and, acting on Applebee's recommendation, secured a position as a gymnastics instructor at Havergal College, a private Toronto girls' school. For \$1,000 per year, including residence and meals, she would teach gymnastics, dancing, remedial work, and games. Pitt's father died later that year. In 1929, she left employment at Havergal to move back in with her mother. She accepted a position with the T. Eaton Company as an instructor for the Eaton Girls Club—one she would hold for the next sixteen years.

THE EATON GIRLS' CLUB:

'Safe, pure and loyal'

When Pitt returned home to Toronto, she reconnected with friends and colleagues in a network of professional women involved in physical education for girls and women. This network included women associated with the Margaret Eaton School, the YWCA, and the T. Eaton Company.

The Eaton Girls' Club, established in 1923, was a recreational program for young female Eaton employees, offering opportunities for athletic activities, travel, and cultural events. Since the Eaton Girls' club and the Margaret Eaton School shared personnel and resources, Pitt returned to the familiar YWCA building at 415 Yonge Street where she had taken activity classes during her Margaret Eaton School years of study.

The Eaton's Girls Club met at the Y.M.C.A. building. The Margaret Eaton school had it in the daytime, and we had it in the evening. We had a swimming pool and a beautiful gymnasium with a running track, an apparatus room, a sewing room, a cafeteria and a library. We had dances and fashion shows—and travel. We offered the girls safe recreation, social activities and fun. The graduates of the Margaret Eaton School helped me organize it. I had a program person and a swimming teacher. We had girls who visited hospitals—bringing patients toothpaste, brushes combs and candies. The building was buzzing with activity. We'd fill a whole plane full to New York for Easter every year. There was also a theatre next door. It was the Margaret Eaton Theatre. And we could look from our small gym upstairs and peek through the cracks and see all the shows. It was well organized in a way without them realizing it.³⁸

As Susan Forbes notes, the Eaton Girls' Club functioned as an important female recreational program designed to enhance employee loyalty, reduce absenteeism, improve productivity, and reduce labour unrest.³⁹ The Club

³⁸Elizabeth Pitt Barron, interview by author, 20 June 1994.

³⁹See Susan Forbes, "The Influence of the Social Reform Movement and T. Eaton Company's Business Practices on the Leisure of Eaton's Female Employees During the Early Twentieth Century" (PhD diss., University of Western Ontario, 1998).

echoed the social and cultural agenda of other middle class reform agencies — such as the YWCA—concerned that young single women who migrated to the urban centres be provided with proper Christian influences and supervision.⁴⁰ In addition to physical activity classes, the early program included classes in elocution, ladies' chorus, dressmaking, millinery, dress designing, china painting, and embroidery.⁴¹ The club also sponsored an extremely active drama and theatre program. Plays and choral productions were staged in the auditorium of their building and at the nearby Margaret Eaton Hall on 9 McGill Street.⁴² In 1923, Shadow Lake Camp opened in Stouffville, Ontario, to provide low cost summer vacation opportunities for female Eaton employees and to ensure they would remain, in the words of *The Globe and Mail*, "the picture of perfect health and utmost content."⁴³

In 1939, with the outbreak of World War II, the Eaton Girls' Club formed a War Work Auxillary to offer courses in motor mechanics, St. John's Ambulance, nursing, office administration, and nutrition.⁴⁴ Elizabeth Pitt became a member of the Eaton Nursing Division of the St. John's Ambulance. In 1944, she travelled to London, England, and served at the Medical Aid Post at Leicester Square. She also worked at an auxiliary convalescent hospital in Basingstoke, a small Hampshire town south of London. She refers in her diary to this four month period as an incredible opportunity for travel, independence and autonomy:

We were all so busy. The war meant that many went into the forces, like myself and Mary Barker⁴⁵—and then, when we got out—we had a taste of independence. Why marry? I wanted to return to work.⁴⁶

⁴⁰Diana Pedersen, "The Power of 'True Christian Women': The YWCA and Evangelical Womanhood in the Late Nineteenth Century," in Elizabeth Gillan Muir and Marilyn Färdig Whiteley, eds., *Changing Roles of Women Within the Christian Church in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995). See also Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880–1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

⁴¹PAO-EC F 229-162-0-865, "Eaton Girls' Club," (pamphlet) 1923–1924.

⁴²PAO-EC F 229-162-0-890, "Eaton Girls' Theatre/Dramatics Club," nd.

⁴³PAO-EC F 229-182-1, "Shadow Lake," July 13, 1923.

⁴⁴PAO-EC F-229-162-0-856, "Eaton Girls' Club," (pamphlet) 1939.

⁴⁵Mary Ross Barker graduated from the Margaret Eaton School in 1925. During World War II, she served as a member of the Canadian Women's Army Corps. She eventually became the Director of Women's Physical Education at the University of Western Ontario. On 7 July 1999, Barker received the Order of Canada in recognition of her service as "a pioneer in athletics and teaching physical education to Canadian women."

⁴⁶Elizabeth Pitt Barron, interview by author, 28 May 1997.

After her tour of duty, Pitt returned to Canada and continued her position as director of the Eaton Girls' Club and as director of the Eaton's girl's camp at Shadow Lake.

In 1945, the national director of the YWCA asked Elizabeth to take on the executive directorship of the Oshawa YWCA at an annual salary of \$1,800 per year.⁴⁷ She held this position for the next seven years until compelled again to return to Toronto—this time to care for her aging mother. She lived with and cared for her mother until Isabella's death in 1958, at the age of ninety-two. In 1952, drawn back to the Eaton establishment by what she described as a "lucrative salary,"⁴⁸ she resumed her former position as director of the Eaton Girls' Club. Pitt continued her employment with the Eaton Company for another twelve years.

RETIREMENT:

*"The tender trap"*⁴⁹

In 1964, at the age of sixty, Pitt retired from her position at the Eaton Girls' Club. Shortly thereafter, she was asked to serve as executive director of the Welland YM/YWCA, about to close due to financial difficulty. Over four years Pitt successfully raised \$450,000 for a new facility. In 1968, she accepted the directorship of the Niagara Falls YWCA, arguing "As long as a person is able to accept and enjoy work, she should prevent retirement as long as possible."⁵⁰ Finally, at the age of sixty-six, after a life-time of teaching physical activity, she admitted: "My knees were beginning to feel the effort."⁵¹ In 1970 Pitt retired one final time.

It was my third and last effort to retire, and I found myself utterly free after forty-five years of continuous employment. Always stopping a job one day and beginning the new one the next. I had kept in contact with my friends. Thus, I was never lonely. I was a happy bachelor. It seemed that I had not had the time to marry and every time things grew serious, fate would step in and entice me in another direction.⁵²

Pitt eventually "found the time" to marry, succumbing, in her words, to the "tender trap"—but only after a career that had exceeded four decades.

⁴⁷JBA Box 1 "YWCA correspondence," S.K. Jaffary to Pitt, 20 April 1945.

⁴⁸Elizabeth Pitt Barron, "A Strange Chronicle," 38.

⁴⁹Ibid., ii.

⁵⁰JBA Box 1 "Elizabeth Pitt Barron clippings," "Y Director leaves Welland for Niagara Falls" *Evening Tribune*, 26 September 1968.

⁵¹Elizabeth Pitt Barron, "A Strange Chronicle," 48.

⁵²Ibid., 50.

CONCLUSION

Pitt's life was typical of other graduates of the Margaret Eaton School in that her professional career included many of the employment areas that other graduates of the school entered; girl's camps, private schools, women's colleges, and YWCAs. She was particularly privileged by virtue of her familial connections with Tait McKenzie and her long association with the T. Eaton company, which expanded her teaching experiences and also enabled her to travel. But these opportunities, were mitigated by the restrictive social context in which she was embedded. For example, her education at the Margaret Eaton School offered restricted employment opportunities within a relatively narrow band of gender appropriate contexts. These jobs provided low salaries—which made it particularly difficult to sustain an independent living. Further, since the Margaret Eaton school did not grant a university degree, the Ontario College of Education did not recognize its teaching diploma as “professional preparation.” Hence, unlike graduates from the University of Toronto with a general arts degree and a minor concentration in physical education, Margaret Eaton graduates were not recognized by the Ontario College of Education, and consequently not allowed to teach in the public school system.⁵³ This restriction contributed to the eventual absorption of The Margaret Eaton School by the University of Toronto in 1942.

Furthermore, gender constraints regarding marriage and employment forced Pitt to decide between “love and freedom.”⁵⁴ Unlike her brother Bertam, who graduated in 1927 with a degree in engineering from the University of Toronto, married, and pursued both a civil and military career, Pitt was the sibling who assumed responsibility for parental care, thus limiting any opportunity for autonomy and financial independence. The “winding tracks”

⁵³In 1900, the University of Toronto initiated a diploma course in physical training for men to be taken in conjunction with a Bachelor of Arts degree. A year later, a similar program for women was initiated. These programs were not successful in attracting many students. See, Helen Gurney, *The CAHPER Story* (Ottawa: The Canadian Association of Health, Physical Education and Recreation, 1983), 4. Jean Forster, a graduate of the University of Toronto BA/diploma program in 1928, noted that the advantage for these students (over Margaret Eaton School graduates) was that they could directly proceed to the Ontario College of Education and be granted an Interim Specialist Certificate which allowed them to teach in public high schools. Jean Forester, interview by author, 19 June 1991.

⁵⁴See Alison Mackinnon, *Love and Freedom: Professional Women and the Reshaping of Personal Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

of Elizabeth's career pattern were motivated by the need to fulfill family and domestic responsibilities as well as to earn an independent living.⁵⁵

Pitt's personal and professional life was clearly linked to an agenda of middle class social reform that upheld traditional values regarding class and gender. She did not overtly challenge any of the traditional barriers for women in the teaching of girls and women's physical education. Her role was one that reinforced, as Sara Burke has noted, the "highest good" through service.⁵⁶

Like other young women of the period, Pitt entered the ranks of middle class projects of social uplift. Body issues such as health and cleanliness were connected to the discourse of social purity that connected social 'diseases' such as poverty and crime directly to personal habits of hygiene and physical training. As Helen Lenskyj has argued, the 'healthy mind in a healthy body' philosophy not only brought moral and corporal legitimacy to the area of physical education for women, it also fitted the social agenda of training for "true womanhood."⁵⁷ One sees this agenda of volunteer service and the desire to teach principles of social order and self-betterment in Pitt's work at girls' camps, at the Eatons' Girls Club, and through the YWCA. Indeed, reflecting back on her career, she summarized the Protestant middle class values that characterized her work and service:

See beauty, give service, pursue knowledge, hold on to health, be trustworthy, glorify work and be happy.⁵⁸

Despite her compliance to these ideals, elements of Pitt's education, life, and work challenged traditional constructions of gender. The Margaret Eaton School was a female academy, operating on the periphery of the university, and for a time maintained curricular autonomy. The physical training which Pitt and other students of the school received was atypically eclectic combination of a number of traditions: Delsartan movement training, aesthetic dance, formalized folk and social dance, gymnastics, games, and wilderness education. This body training enhanced physical strength and physicality, and placed young women in contexts which tested their physical competence. Pitt recalled that her training made her strong and gave her a sense of possibility. "It made you

⁵⁵Inga Elgqvist-Saltzman, "Straight Roads and Winding Tracks: Swedish Educational Policy from a Gender Perspective," *Gender and Education* 4, 1-2 (1992), 41-56.

⁵⁶Sara Z. Burke, *Seeking the Highest Good, Social Service and Gender at the University of Toronto, 1888-1937* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 53.

⁵⁷Helen Lenskyj, "Training for 'True Womanhood': Physical Education for Girls in Ontario Schools, 1890-1920," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation*, 2, 2 (fall/automne 1990), 206.

⁵⁸JBA, Box 1 "Elizabeth Pitt Barron clippings," Miss Pitt Speaker at Banquet of Mothers and C.G.I.T. Daughters, nd.

strong, muscular and fit and able to move into the world with confidence."⁵⁹ In particular, the wilderness camp experience was designed to make potential camp counsellors, in Hamilton's words, "strong and unwilling to acknowledge defeat by weather or circumstance."⁶⁰

Although Pitt's career largely fulfilled gender appropriate service, physical education as a field had the *potential* to challenge traditional constructions of gender and physicality. As late as the 1940s, students from The Margaret Eaton School complained they were perceived as "unusual freaks of womanhood" and "muscle bound Amazons."⁶¹ Physical strength, motor skill, and muscular development presented difficulty for traditional heterosexual assumptions about feminine physicality.

Was Pitt an exemplar for other young women? During the course of her professional career, she forged collegial connections within her female network at the Margaret Eaton School, the Eaton Girls' Club, and through her YWCA friends. When Tait McKenzie died, his widow asked Elizabeth to become a live-in companion. She refused this offer, but did agree to become a travelling companion to Flora McCrea Eaton, accompanying her on a trip to Europe in 1964.⁶² As part of the fabric of her professional career, Elizabeth functioned as a family caregiver and a female companion. Like other women before her, she found a primary source of love with her female friends, and chose to defer marriage until after a long career. She recalled, "I didn't marry until I was sixty-six years old, after I had tried to retire twice. I had done it all by that time."⁶³ Pitt believed that she had made an impact on her students by providing an example for those who later entered the profession of physical education:

It is hard to look back on it all and believe that I actually did it; but I did. I felt I was opening up new areas for young girls and women. I still receive all kinds of letters from campers and young girls I used to teach. Some of them—quite a number—went into physical education. They sort of felt that I started them on the right track.⁶⁴

After retirement, Pitt wrote an autobiography (unpublished) entitled "A Strange Chronicle: The Power and Influence of R. Tait McKenzie," setting the details of her own life are set within the larger life narrative of Tait McKenzie—a reflection of ambivalence about her own importance as a subject worthy of historical memory. In many ways, the memoir typifies the way she perceived herself: as a woman who struggled for independence despite the "power and

⁵⁹Elizabeth Pitt Barron, interview by author, 22 April 1994.

⁶⁰Mary Hamilton, *Call of the Algonquin*, 174.

⁶¹Elizabeth Seccombe, "Are We Amazons?" *M.E.S. Amies*, 1940–41, 37.

⁶²JBA Box 1, "Eaton correspondence," Helen McBean to Pitt.

⁶³Elizabeth Pitt Barron, interview by author, 28 May 1997.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

influence" of those around her, personified by Tait McKenzie. She described his influence as "a simple force, which stepped in to take over and control a strange chronicle of events that formed an unusual but colourful life pattern."⁶⁵

Elizabeth Pitt Barron died in 1998, at the age of ninety-three. Her autobiography concludes with an epitaph celebrating the independence and autonomy she struggled for throughout her life:

*If it be life that waits,
I shall live forever unconquered.
If death, I shall die at last
Strong in my pride and free.*⁶⁶

NOTE

An earlier version of this paper was given at the Conference of the Canadian History of Education Association, in Vancouver, British Columbia, October, 1998. I thank Alison Prentice, Bruce Kidd, and the reviewers of this manuscript for their comments and suggestions. I would also like to thank John Byl for access to the Elizabeth Adelaide Pitt Barron papers.

⁶⁵Elizabeth Pitt Barron, "A Strange Chronicle," iv.

⁶⁶Alan Mackintosh, "My Creed." See James Day, "Robert Tait McKenzie: Physical Education's Man of the Century" *Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation*, 33, 4 (April–May, 1967), 14.