A Well-Trained Tongue:

The Origins of the Public Speaking Curriculum at the University of Minnesota, 1890-1910

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The Lord God has given me a well-trained tongue,
that I might know how to speak to the weary
a word that will rouse them.
—Isaiah 50:4

Herman Cohen reminds us that members of the speech profession "periodically reinvent our histories, and each time they are different."[1] The National Communication Association's centenary provides a fitting occasion on which to re-examine how speech teachers came to want an independent organization, but the allure of round numbers is not the only reason for doing so. Recent scholarship on the discipline's history highlights the new insights to be gained from investigating archival sources, and there are many important topics that have not received this treatment. In particular, the generation of teachers before the "seventeen who made history," a period that scholars have identified as a time of significant transformation, has received little attention.[2] To the extent that speech education between 1890 and 1910 has been investigated, it has largely been told through a well-established narrative lens using published sources.

With most scholars working from the same limited number of sources, the story looks similar each time it has been told. Cohen's history provides a handy example of this narrative: English instruction preserved the rhetorical tradition against the itinerant, non-academic elocutionists being hired by the universities, an opposition that the new speech profession continued.[3] Cohen's narrative, however, overlooks how public speaking developed in many places, particularly those midwestern institutions that contributed a majority of the association's

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[1] Herman Cohen, *The History of Speech Communication: The Emergence of a Discipline, 1914-1945* (Annandale, Va.: Speech Communication Association, 1995), ix.
[2] Mary Margaret Rob, *Oral Interpretation of Literature in American Colleges and Universities: A Historical Study of Teaching Methods* (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1968), 137, identifies it as the period when public speaking crept back into the curriculum through the English departments. Giles Wilkenson Gray, "Some Teachers and the Transition to Twentieth-Century Speech Education," in *History of Speech Education in America: Background Studies*, ed. Karl Wallace, 422–46. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1954), 422, gives 1890-1920 as the period of transition, but the period from 1910-1920 has been more thoroughly covered.
[3] Cohen, *History of Speech Communication*, 13-36.

founders. These schools lacked a long or deep history of rhetorical training, and, as we will see, elocutionism's impact was not always as a threat to academic integrity.

The University of Minnesota, one of these midwestern schools, provides a particularly good case study. Initially offering only rudimentary, ad hoc rhetorical and elocutionary training—subservient to the needs of its general curriculum—Minnesota hired as its only true elocutionist the graduate of an established academic program. Diverging from the conventional narrative, this history calls for a new interpretation. It also provides a good test of research methods. Published sources tell a story in which Maria Sanford dominated Minnesota speech education prior to Frank Rarig's hiring, but I will argue that she made little impact on the field.[4] This paper will instead focus on one all-but-forgotten figure: Edward Eugene McDermott. He, like his Michigan contemporary, Thomas Trueblood, began as a trained elocutionist, transformed himself into an advocate for the emerging public speaking discipline, and shaped the way that the new field was taught.

This paper, in order to get beyond heavily-mined published sources, will apply techniques that other scholars have found fruitful. William Keith, for example, explored archival sources to produce insightful new interpretations of oft-recounted episodes. His account of the association's founding in *Democracy as Discussion* argues that educators wrestled with three closely interrelated issues regarding the new field: how it fits into society, how it should be taught, and how it should conduct its scholarship.[5] The result was, not the preservation of a rhetorical tradition, but a transformation in pedagogy affected by factors such as increasing

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[4] I do not wish to detract from the tremendous positive impact that Sanford had on students' lives nor from her notable accomplishments in the face of great adversity. It does her a disservice, however, to consider her career in ways that she, as we will see, would have found inappropriate.

[5] William M. Keith, *Democracy as Discussion: Civic Education and the American Forum Movement* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 50.

middle-class professionalism, broadened civic engagement, and the reassertion of argumentation.[6]

Keith's findings parallel claims that Rarig made fifty years ago.[7] Rarig's hypothesis has perhaps been overlooked because he only sketched it out in passing, as part of his 1954 account of the association's founding. He suggested that competitive speech contests, which were perhaps affected by political reform movements of the time, shaped the nature of speech instruction and led directly to the association's founding. Public debates and discussions created "the conviction that public speaking was something more than oral English" and that "perhaps this conviction gave to the new association greater strength, identity, and solidity than any other single belief."[8] This conviction was a major part of James O'Neill's "dividing line," his call to action during the discussions of independence.[9] Rarig, O'Neill, and the other association founders believed that a speech was more than a written work repeated orally; they understood it "as practical, systematic communication whose ideas, organization, style, and presentation were a product of the speaker, his subject, his audience and occasion."[10] The development of speech instruction at the University of Minnesota followed the pattern that Rarig proposed: it changed in response to a transformed political climate and an economic crisis, and this led to the creation of organizations that fostered a distinct self-identity for speech teachers.

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[6] Ibid, 31-33, 59.
[7] Frank Rarig and Halgrave Greaves, "National Speech Organizations and Speech Education," in *History of Speech Education in America*.
[8] Rarig and Greaves, "National Speech Organizations," 502. Rarig begins by quoting that "it would be interesting to know what connection there is between oratory and debate work … and the various political reform movements that are going on all over the country" from "The Minnesota State Oratorical," *The Public Speaking Review* 2, no. 2 (October 1912): 56.
[9] James O'Neill, "The Dividing Line Between Departments of English and Public Speaking," *The Public Speaking Review* 2, no. 8 (April 1913): 234-235.
[10] Rarig and Greaves, "National Speech Organizations," 500.

Speech Education at Minnesota Prior to 1880

The University of Minnesota lacked a strong tradition of rhetorical or elocutionary instruction. The university was founded in 1851 as little more than a preparatory department, and it suspended operations following the Panic of 1857 and the outbreak of the Civil War.[11] Although reopened as a preparatory department in 1867, Minnesota did not begin operating as a true university until 1869.[12] For the next decade training in rhetoric and elocution served only to prepare students for the written and oral exercises that they were required to complete, and the subjects lacked an established departmental home. Minnesota's president and its chemistry teacher taught them for one year; the Department of English assumed responsibility for the next three years.[13] Beginning in 1874, teaching duties shifted to the history teacher and remained with him for the rest of the decade.[14] The marginal academic importance of the courses was reflected in Board of Regents reports that list them, along with military tactics, drawing, and gymnastics and calisthenics, as "other exercises."[15] Moreover, the professor of English, during the years when he was responsible for rhetoric, hardly thought of himself as preserving a valuable tradition. He looked at the subject as a burden to be borne in order to remedy incoming students' poor language skills, one that he gladly shared with other departments.[16]

Freshmen students' lack of English skills was one symptom of a broader problem that Minnesota had in its first decades. Many high schools in the state graduated students who were

[11] James Gray, *The University of Minnesota: 1851-1951* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1951), 13-24.
[12] William Watts Folwell, "Inaugural Address," in *University Addresses* (Minneapolis: H.W. Wilson, 1909), 1.
[13] *The Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the University of Minnesota to the Governor of Minnesota for the Fiscal Year Ending November 30, 1869* (St. Paul: Press Printing, 1870), 24; *The Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the University of Minnesota to the Governor of Minnesota for the Fiscal Year Ending November 30, 1870* (St. Paul: Press Printing, 1871), 65.
[14] *The Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the University of Minnesota to the Governor of Minnesota for the Fiscal Year Ending November 30, 1874* (St. Paul: Press Printing, 1875), 9.
[15] *Annual Report, 1870*, 28.
[16] Ibid., 64-65.

unprepared for college.[17] William Watts Folwell, the university's first president, developed the "Minnesota Plan" as a way to address this deficiency. The plan considered the university as part of the overall education system of the state.[18] It divided the university into secondary and superior departments, where the secondary department assumed the work that had previously been done in the preparatory department.[19] The secondary department began where the high schools left off, preparing students for true university studies during their final years in Minnesota's superior department.[20] According to the plan, the secondary department would be phased out once it was no longer needed.[21]

Folwell's Minnesota Plan was not the only vision, and a faction within the faculty fought with him over the purpose and organization of the university. Folwell, concerned about the educational needs of agriculture and industry, wanted something other than the models of the Eastern liberal arts college, or of the professional and polytechnic institution.[22] Folwell's opponents, whom he dubbed the "Bourbons," wanted the university to turn back to more traditional instruction, with an emphasis on the Greek and Latin classics, to stop teaching modern languages, to downgrade the status of the Agricultural College, and to remove several departments.[23] The group convinced the Board of Regents to pass an 1879 resolution abolishing the chairs of history, French, and physics, but the dispute festered. The next year the Board of Regents fired six faculty members, including the history and elocution teacher, and appointed Folwell to fill five positions: chemistry, French, engineering and physics, mathematics and

[17] *Annual Report of the Board of Regents, 1874*, 30.
[18] Folwell, "Inaugural Address," 35-44.
[19] William Watts Folwell, "Minnesota Plan" in *University Addresses*, 100-118.
[20] Folwell, "Minnesota Plan," 135.
[21] Ibid, 134.
[22] Folwell, "Inaugural Address," 3-9.
[23] William Watts Folwell, letter to Andrew D. White, April 30, 1879, William Watts Folwell Papers, Minnesota Historical Society; Gray, *University of Minnesota*, 64-66.

astronomy, and mental and moral philosophy and history.[24] He and one regent headed east to interview candidates, eventually submitting the names of six, rather than five, teachers to the Board of Regents for election.[25] One of those hired, Maria Sanford, would lead an independent Department of Rhetoric and Elocution for the next three decades.

Maria Sanford and the Traditionalist Style of Education: 1880-1890

When colleagues or former students reminisced about Sanford, they remembered her passion for teaching and her ability to inspire students. Helen Whitney, both a former student and a colleague, described Sanford as "constantly communicating, through her own vigorous personality, a zealous enthusiasm for education, for character-building, and for civic righteousness to all young people with whom she came in contact."[26] Folwell hired Sanford for these qualities, which epitomized the nineteenth century traditionalist view that education served society by building students' character. This educational goal, not concern for an academic discipline, guided how Sanford taught and administered her department.

Sanford's training and first teaching positions were in subjects other than rhetoric or elocution. She graduated from a normal school and began by teaching in local public schools.[27] Her only education beyond this was informal; she never earned so much as a bachelor's degree. Wishing to educate herself in history, but unable to find a university that would admit women, Sanford asked Yale historian John Fiske's advice on what to read.[28] What she gained from this reading boosted not just her classroom teaching, but also public lectures that she began giving to teachers' institutes.[29] These lectures brought Sanford to the attention of the newly forming

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[24] University of Minnesota Board of Regents, Minutes, April 8, 1880, University of Minnesota Archives.
[25] University of Minnesota Board of Regents, Minutes, August 6, 1880, University of Minnesota Archives.
[26] Helen Whitney, *Maria Sanford* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota), iii.
[27] Ibid, 50-57.
[28] Ibid, 60-63.
[29] Ibid, 76-80.

Swarthmore College, which hired her to teach history and English.[30] Sanford continued her public lectures while teaching at Swarthmore, but tension over this outside work was one of several factors that led her to resign her position in 1879.[31] She had returned to the public lecture circuit when she learned that Minnesota was hiring, and she contacted Folwell to apply.[32]

Folwell chose to hire Sanford for her teaching ability, not her mastery of any subject matter. Sanford, in her letter to Folwell, offered to teach history, didactics, or any available subject.[33] She enclosed a letter from Swarthmore President Edward Magill, probably recommending her as an outstanding teacher of history.[34] Folwell initially wrote back to Sanford that none of the open positions suited her talents; he decided to hire her only after meeting with Magill during the trip's Philadelphia stop.[35] Whatever Magill said during this meeting convinced Folwell to hire Sanford, not for one of the five open positions and not for the subject she had taught at Swarthmore, but a position to which the Regents had earlier given conditional approval.[36] Folwell hired Sanford to teach rhetoric and elocution, in spite of her lack of formal training in this area.

Sanford was made chair of a separate Department of Rhetoric and Elocution in 1881, and her handling of the department reflected early nineteenth century attitudes about the purpose of a college education. Maude Shapiro observed that Sanford "perpetuat[ed] an early concept of the

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[30] Ibid, 83.
[31] Maude Shirley Shapiro, "A Rhetorical Critical Analysis of Lecturing of Maria Louise Sanford" (PhD diss, University of Minnesota, 1959), 43-45.
[32] Whitney, *Maria Sanford*, 110
[33] Maria L. Sanford, letter to William Watts Folwell, July 1, 1880, Folwell Papers, University of Minnesota Archives.
[34] This letter may be Edward Magill's letter to "To Whom It May Concern," April 14, 1879, Maria L. Sanford Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul. Sanford asked for the letter back, suggesting that it was not specifically addressed to Folwell. Magill had also written an identical recommendation letter to Cornell President Andrew D. White (April 14, 1879. Maria L. Sanford Papers. Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul), and it is unlikely that any letter to Folwell varied significantly.
[35] William Watts Folwell, note to Maria Sanford on circular announcing stops of hiring committee, July 9, 1880, Maria L. Sanford Papers; Edward Magill, letter to Maria Sanford, July 24, 1880, Maria L. Sanford Papers.
[36] University of Minnesota Board of Regents, Minutes, May 4, 1880, University of Minnesota Archives, Minneapolis.

educated person ... that the development of moral values was basic."[37] Sanford used her public lectures to recommend this approach to all teachers: "Intellectual progress is advanced instead of being retarded by attention to moral culture," she said in a lecture given to teachers' institutes.[38] She gave many such lectures, and her time on professional lecture circuits would only have strengthened this opinion. Shapiro wrote that Sanford found in her audiences "those who were finding it increasingly difficult in an increasingly complex society to live by the values that she expressed, yet they were nostalgic about them ... they could identify with and feel ennobled by the type of spiritual search, voiced by Maria."[39] What Sanford spoke about and observed in her public lectures carried into her university classroom, where "inculcation of subject-matter and the development of skills were for Maria themselves secondary to the development of character and the building of ethical codes."[40]

Sanford's department was unusual in the degree to which it reflected her lack of interest in defining rhetoric and elocution as distinct fields of study. She taught courses in art history and literary criticism that promoted her educational goal of personal improvement through appreciation of fine culture, a goal she pursued without regard to potential disciplinary boundaries.[41] Sanford's eagerness to include courses with only the most tenuous connection to the stated field of her department was matched by a seeming incomprehension that establishing her area as a distinct discipline could safeguard her department and her position. As late as 1907, two years before her retirement, Sanford's defense of her department's independence did not mention that its faculty might have unique qualifications to teach its subject matter.[42]

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[37] Shapiro, "Rhetorical Critical Analysis," 65.
[38] Whitney, *Maria Sanford*, 79.
[39] Shapiro, "Rhetorical Critical Analysis," 619.
[40] Ibid, 64-65.
[41] Ibid, 521-522.
[42] Maria L. Sanford, letter to Governor Johnson, May 21, 1907, Maria L. Sanford Papers.

Sanford's emphasis on character placed her well within one of the two dominant political cultures in the period after the Civil War. This period, known to historians as the Third Party System, saw stable partisan alignments that were sharply divided along religious lines.[43] With very few persuadable, independent voters, and with a voting system that rewarded party loyalty, electoral campaigns focused on turning out their supporters in large numbers, and political rhetoric emphasized shared values, not policy positions.[44] The system has also been described as republican liberalism because political debates centered on defending a unitary public good (the *res publica*), one that could not be negotiated between competing interest groups.[45] The situation rewarded a rhetoric that was heavy on emotional appeal over one that favored argumentation. Sanford's pietistic religious upbringing and her involvement in policy crusades, such as temperance, suited her to teach and practice the oratorical style that predominated in the period prior to 1884.

Edward Eugene McDermott and the Introduction of Elocutionism: 1890-1900

Political cultures and oratorical styles changed with the elections in the mid to late 1880s, but it took more than a decade before another Minnesota speech educator responded. Edward McDermott, hired as Sanford's first assistant, had an education that prepared him to introduce new teaching methods, but he began his Minnesota career as a fairly conventional elocutionist.

McDermott's early training and career were similar to Sanford's. He began his studies at a normal school before going on to earn a bachelor's degree from Northwestern in 1885.[46] He

[43] Richard Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888-96 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971)*, 58-62.
[44] Michael McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 12-42; Andrew Robertson, *The Language of Democracy: Political Rhetoric in the United States and Britain, 1790-1900* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 146-149.
[45] Philip Ethington, *The Public City : The Political Construction of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 6-8.
[46] "Professor McDermott is Dead," *The Minnesota Alumni Weekly*, March 2, 1908, 6; "McDermott, Edward Eugene" in Elwin Bird Johnson, *Dictionary of the University of Minnesota*, January 1908, 135. Charles Atwell,

studied at the Cumnock School of Oratory, where he would have received some training in elocutionism, but the special honor that he earned indicates that he had taken a diverse set of courses, including extensive work in natural history.[47] Following graduation he worked one year in Elgin, Illinois, presumably in a law office, before returning to rural southwestern Wisconsin to work for four years as a high school teacher and supervisor.[48]

McDermott's interest in elocution more clearly manifested itself in 1889, at the time of a fierce political controversy in his native Wisconsin. The state that year passed the Bennett Law, which required all public schools, such as those in the McDermott's district, to teach only in English. He left his job at this time to return to Northwestern for a Master's degree, and several factors suggest that the timing may have been significant.[49] McDermott spent one year at the Cumnock School, teaching elocution to students in Northwestern's preparatory school and taking advanced courses.[50] Likely he would have learned the elocutionary theories of James Rush, Gilbert Austin, and François Delsarte, which at the time made up the two-year "special course in elocution."[51] McDermott would continue to study elocutionism even after being hired by

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Alumni Record of the College of Liberal Arts (Evanston: Northwestern, 1903), 171. Unless otherwise noted, these sources are used for other basic details about McDermott's life.

[47] *Catalogue of Northwestern University and the Garrett Biblical Institute, Evanston, Ill. Vol. 1885–1886* (Northwestern University, 1886), 9, 31, 45, 110.

[48] Alumni of Delta U, *Delta Upsilon Quarterly*, June 1886, 142; Alumni of Delta U, *Delta Upsilon Quarterly*, November 1885, 305; "News and Notes," *Wisconsin Journal of Education*, September 1886, 397; "Official Department," *Wisconsin Journal of Education*, November 1887, 521.

[49] Jenson, *Winning of the Midwest*, 123-148. The Bennett Law became a partisan issue, with Republicans supporting it and Democrats opposed, and McDermott's father was an Irish immigrant, a group that was heavily Democratic at the time. "Capt. John McDermott" *Commemorative Biographical Record of the Counties of Rock, Green, Grant, Iowa and Lafayette, Wisconsin* (Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1901) 149-150. McDermott's home town, and the town and county in which he taught, although predominantly Republican, saw significant Democratic gains in the watershed 1890 statewide election. Thomas Cunningham, ed, *The Blue Book of the State of Wisconsin*, 1891, 217-218. Further evidence that McDermott's home town hosted significant political discussions comes from the fact it elected a fusion ticket in the 1890s, selected by a joint meeting of Democratic, Republican, and Populist parties. David Thelen, *The New Citizenship; Origins of Progressivism in Wisconsin, 1885-1900*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1972), 143.

[50] *Catalogue of Northwestern University, and the Garrett Biblical Institute, Evanston, Ill. Vol. 1889–90* (Chicago: Index Company Printers, 1889), 43, 45, 123; Chapter Correspondence, *Delta Upsilon Quarterly*, May 1890, 238.

[51] *Catalogue of Northwestern University, 1889–90*, 46-47. The catalogue does not list a graduate curriculum, but merely the states that "Bachelors' of three years' standing" need to pursue "professional or other advanced studies."

Minnesota. He pursued additional studies in the summer of 1895 at Emerson College of Oratory, and his obituaries also reported that he had studied at Samuel Silas Curry's School of Expression.[52]

McDermott's teaching at Minnesota initially reflected this elocutionist background. The catalogue for 1892-1893 included four elocution classes, covering voice building, gesture, and interpretative reading of literature.[53] The focus was on training competent public readers, and the offerings bore more than a passing resemblance to those of the Cumnock School. No surviving documents describe how McDermott taught these courses, but clues can be found elsewhere. Student parodies portrayed McDermott as having stereotypically elocutionist interests and possibly a rigid pedagogical style. The yearbook depicted McDermott as "master of the art of yelling" and teacher of voice control and chest expansion, and the student newspaper had him asking Santa Claus for "a doll that will speak just as he tells it to, so that he can make fun of it" and rumored to be in line to "have charge of an Indian Club Swing Class for young ladies."[54]

The elocution curriculum that debuted in 1899 provides better evidence of how McDermott taught, and it more clearly shows him influenced by Rush, Murdoch, and Curry. As previously, the courses taught students how to publicly interpret written texts, but there were significant differences. The most excessively mannered elocutionary practices were downplayed. The title of the basic vocal-expression course is the only one that included gesture, and the course description completely omitted any mention.[55] The description could easily have come

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[52] Biographical file in the Minnesota Historical Society, citing Emerson College of Oratory, *Annual Catalogue of the Emerson College of Oratory, Boston, 1895 and 1896* (Boston: The Barta Press, 1896), 54.
[53] *The Catalogue and Announcement, College of Science, Literature, and Arts* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1892), 77-78, 88. The course cover reading, voice building, interpretation, impersonation, gesture, oratory, and dramatic recitation.
[54] "Hiawatha's Prophecy," *Gopher* (1898), 193; "To Santa Claus." *Ariel,* December 22, 1899, 166; "Home Hits and Happenings," *Ariel*, October, 3, 1890, 10.
[55] *Bulletin of the College of Science, Literature and the Arts* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1899), 94-95. The course is "gesture, voice building and principles of vocal expression."

from Murdoch or Curry, with its emphasis on vocal tones and its insistence that "correct thinking is made the basis of correct expression."[56] The description also emphasized that "interpretation is approached from within not from without," almost a direct paraphrase of Curry and sounding very much like what Trueblood, Murdoch's student, taught at Michigan.[57] Nothing documented any direct Trueblood influence, but the two shared similar concerns. The second vocal-expression course addressed "the psychological side" of delivery, covering "the dramatic instinct, the will, the intellect, the imagination and the emotions" and echoing the way that Trueblood divided public speaking into its physical, mental, and moral sides.[58]

The Development of Public Speaking: Extemporaneous Oratory and Argumentation

Even though we cannot know whether Trueblood influenced the creation of the Minnesota curriculum, he did affect how McDermott taught it. To understand this we must first examine developments outside Minnesota, beginning with changes in the political climate. Electoral campaigns at the end of the nineteenth century demanded a new style of speaking, focused on argumentation and issues, which found its way into college curricula. An economic crisis in the 1890s brought policy debate into the forefront, sparking changes in extracurricular activities that further affected the way that speech was taught.

Shifting political fault lines in the 1880s undid the stability of the Third Party System and introduced a style of oratory that emphasized argumentation. Samuel Tilden was the first major

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[56] Mary Margaret Robb, "The Elocutionary Movement and its Chief Figures," in *History of Speech Education in America*, 189-197.

[57] Samuel Curry, *The Province of Expression: a Search for Principles Underlying Adequate Methods of Developing Dramatic and Oratoric Delivery*, (Boston: School of Expression, 1891), 46-47; see, for example, Trueblood's disparagement of the elocutionist "in-stuffo as opposed to the e-duco method" in Thomas Trueblood, "A Chapter on the Organization of College Courses in Public Speaking," *Quarterly Journal of Speech Education* 12, no. 1 (1926), 1.

[58] Thomas Trueblood, "The Educational Value of Training in Public Speaking," *Werner's Magazine* 23, no. 6 (1899), 528-536. In 1901 the two vocal-expression classes were listed as "the physical side" and "the psychological side," even more closely echoing Trueblood's schema. *Bulletin of the College of Science, Literature and the Arts* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1901), 96.

candidate to use the new techniques, in his 1876 bid for the presidency.[59] Argumentation became a major part of Grover Cleveland's 1884 and 1888 presidential campaigns, as advocacy for changes to tariff policies replaced emotional appeals to the party faithful.[60] The 1892 presidential campaign saw Cleveland regain the White House using a full-blown "campaign of education."[61] At least one influential college noticed this change and altered the way that it taught oratory. An 1883 article in the Hamilton College literary magazine observed that:

> Within the last twenty years there has been a marked change in our College oratory … The appeal of eloquence is more to the intellect and less to the senses. A calmer speech, a more natural, but a no less earnest manner, have taken the place of the "spread eagleism" of our fathers … Without losing a whit of pristine excellence, or yielding in any respect her admitted superiority, Hamilton is training up a class of speakers fitted for the modern arena … Argument must take the place of appeal, and all the skill and training of the rhetorician's art is called into exercise.[62]

Henry Allyn Frink, who taught oratory at Hamilton in 1883, looked for ways to teach the new style after moving to Amherst College in 1885. By 1892 he advocated that colleges should train students to participate in public debates by teaching them to "state their claims in public speech clearly, incisively, [and] earnestly."[63]

Trueblood learned of what Frink was doing at Amherst and adopted it for himself. In 1888, before taking up his position at Michigan, Trueblood visited eastern universities and colleges to see first-hand how speech was taught. He reported that very little was done at any except Princeton and Amherst, where he was impressed by the work that Frink did in argumentation, debate, and construction of speeches.[64] He credited Frink's ideas for providing

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[59] McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics*, 70-75.
[60] McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics*, 75-90; Michael Schudson, *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 158-160.
[61] McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics*, 95-103; Robertson, *Language of Democracy*, 159-160.
[62] "Oratory at Hamilton," *Hamilton Literary Monthly* 18 (October 1883): 24-25.
[63] Henry Allyn Frink, "Rhetoric and Public Speaking in the American College," *Education* 13, no. 3 (November 1892): 133–34.
[64] Thomas Trueblood, "Autobiography," Thomas Trueblood papers, box 1, Bentley Historical Library, 146.

the basis of his debating courses at Michigan.[65] The following year he introduced an oral discussions class at Michigan that directly descended from Frink's 1884 Hamilton exercises in extemporaneous debating.[66] Trueblood wrote that his 1888 tour was inspirational and that he returned determined to make his Michigan courses as academically sound as those offered in other departments.[67]

The 1893 economic crisis created a greater demand for public policy discussions. A banking panic led to an economic depression and massive unemployment that lasted several years, and controversy over the proper response to the crisis embroiled the country.[68] Sanford and other traditionalists continued to use character to analyze the situation. Although Sanford acknowledged the unusual economic situation, she primarily saw moral failings as the cause of "pauperism."[69] Others looked to systematic policy solutions, such as a proposal to inflate the money supply with silver coins.[70] In the midst of this turmoil, university extension classes and intercollegiate policy debate became popular with a public that was desperate for a solution to the crisis and hungry for ways to educate themselves about it.[71] The competitive dimension of intercollegiate debate also proved popular, as witnessed by the prominent articles trumpeting the success of the local university's debaters.[72] Universities, eager to train their students in the skills

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[65] Ibid.
[66] *Calendar of the University of Michigan for 1889-90* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1889), 53 described the class as "designed to develop readiness of extemporization." The course description in the 1891-92 calendar added that it included "practical application of the principles of formal logic. Leading questions of the day debated in class. Lectures on argumentation and persuasion." The course description in the 1895-96 calendar added as a prerequisite completion of a course in formal logic.
[67] Ibid, 148-49.
[68] Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), 169-74.
[69] Ibid, 174; Shapiro, *Rhetorical-Critical Analysis*, 1A, 4-6A.
[70] Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 175.
[71] Thelen, *The New Citizenship*, 55, 68-71.
[72] L.Leroy Cowperthwaite and A. Craig Baird, "Intercollegiate Debating," in *History of Speech Education in America*, 263. An article illustrating Minnesota debate's popularity is a front-page, banner-headlined story, "Magnificent Victory," *Ariel*, January 13, 1900, 183-185.

that they needed to compete successfully, began to adopt the types of courses that Frink and Trueblood introduced.

The Transition from Elocutionism to Public Speaking at Minnesota: 1900-1910

Minnesota adopted extemporaneous speech and argumentation after it began competing with Trueblood's Michigan. McDermott's experience in debate coaching, combined with a personal crisis, prompted him to reform his 1899 elocution curriculum and create some of the first organizations devoted to public speaking.

Minnesota had participated in intercollegiate debates for several years before McDermott assumed primary coaching responsibility, around 1900. It had begun with an 1893 contest against Iowa, and the annual rivalry with its neighboring state became a fixture on the Minnesota calendar.[73] Sanford coached Minnesota through its first seven years, and it was to her that Trueblood wrote when arranging for Minnesota to enter the Central Debating League (CDL) in 1897.[74] She had not done well. Prior to 1900 Minnesota had a record of two wins and nine losses in intercollegiate competition, and McDermott looked back at these years as the "ebb tide" for Minnesota debating.[75] Sanford was accustomed to the intramural literary-society debates that she had previously promoted at Minnesota, which primarily rewarded sharpness of wit.[76] She was not prepared to teach the argumentation skills required to debate policy topics in intercollegiate contests, little surprise given her reported disdain for logic and systematic thought.[77] McDermott assumed responsibility for intercollegiate competition around 1900, when he attempted to

[73] "Debate" in Johnson, *Dictionary*, 58; "Debates with Iowa" in Johnson, *Dictionary*, 59.
[74] Thomas Trueblood, letter to Maria L. Sanford, December 6, 1897, Maria L. Sanford Papers. Significantly, Trueblood's letter indicates that he did not know her before writing to her.
[75] Elwin Bird Johnson, ed., *Forty Years of the University of Minnesota* (Minneapolis: General Alumni Association, 1910), 207; Edward Eugene McDermott, "Then and Now in Debate and Oratory," *Gopher* (1904), 282-283.
[76] David Potter, "The Literary Society," *History of Speech Education in America*, 238-258; Cowperthwaite and Baird, "Intercollegiate Debating," 259-276.
[77] Even her admirer, Whitney, writes that she "was not methodical, and did not adhere closely even to a subject. She was not logical in her thought." *Maria Sanford*, 146. The shift to policy debate is mentioned in "Orators, Attention!," *Ariel*, December 9, 1899, 141.

organize an extemporaneous contest against Nebraska and accompanied Minnesota's debaters to Chicago for their CDL finals loss to Trueblood's Michigan team.[78]

A threatened termination that same year may have motivated McDermott to think seriously about how he might improve his job security. His brush with unemployment was not due to poor performance; in April, 1899, President Cyrus Northrop had recommended to the Board of Regents that McDermott be promoted to full professor.[79] The year 1899 also saw Minnesota's elocution curriculum revamped, suggesting that McDermott had de facto control over this course of studies.[80] Circumstances changed abruptly in June, 1900: with Northrop irritated at Sanford's outside activities, the Board of Regents considered but voted against a proposal to fire both Sanford and McDermott.[81] No surviving account described how he reacted to the incident, but it is not unreasonable to suppose that a middle-class professional like McDermott might have been chastened and worked to make his position more secure. As he had done in 1885, 1886, and 1889, he once again adapted to changing employment circumstances.

If we cannot be certain about the events that motivated McDermott, the results were clear: he transformed himself from a relatively obscure elocutionist into a tireless champion of argumentation, debate, and extemporaneous speech. McDermott did not change his curriculum, but he worked within its nominally elocutionist framework to promote new goals. Speech education became more focused on effective speaking about public topics and less focused on effective public reading of literature. He would have begun this switch by 1897, when he is first reported as teaching extemporaneous speech—a course that necessarily required a student to

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[78] "A New Oratorical League," *Ariel*, November 17, 1899, 121.
[79] University of Minnesota Board of Regents, Minutes, April 6, 1899 and May 31, 1899.
[80] A notice in the student newspaper also spoke of elocution as McDermott's department. Untitled notice ["Professor McDermott …"], *Ariel*, November 1, 1900, 16.
[81] Cyrus Northrop, letter to Maria L. Sanford, April 10, 1900, Maria L. Sanford Papers; "Regents Are to Decide," *The Minneapolis Tribune*, June 5, 1900: 5; "Retained," *The Minneapolis Tribune*, June 7, 1900: 7.

expressing his own ideas and not declaim a written text.[82] McDermott's stress on correct thinking as the basis for expression made possible this change in emphasis: the thought to be expressed was no longer that of the author being interpreted, but the policy that the speaker advocated. McDermott explained the significance of extemporaneous speech in 1900, when proposing a contest against Nebraska: "the wording, the style, and the delivery must be from the reasoning mind."[83] Composition and delivery of extemporaneous speech, although it could be quite polished, must be different from a prepared oration.[84] McDermott further elaborated on this in 1902, stressing several virtues: "power to think when facing an audience," "independent judgment," and "intelligent interest in the great issues of the near future."[85] The introduction of extemporaneous speech increased the need to teach argumentation, and it formally entered the Minnesota curriculum in 1903 with a course taught by one of McDermott's former debaters, Haldor Gislason.[86] Students, noticing the change in emphasis away from elocutionism, parodied McDermott as the author of "How to Win Debates."[87]

McDermott sought to improve his debaters' performance by better educating the high school students who would enter the University as freshmen. In 1902 he established the

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[82] "Changes in Curriculum," *Ariel*, June 3, 1897, 141.
[83] "Extemporaneous Debate," *The Minnesota Daily*, October 6, 1900, 2; "An Assured Fact," *The Minnesota Daily*, December 5, 1900, 1; "With Nebraska," *The Minnesota Daily*, December 5, 1900: 1; Untitled article ["Extemporaneous oratory…"], *Ariel*, April 21, 1900, 355.
[84] "Extemporaneous oratory …" No author is credited for this article, although McDermott was later identified as expressing similar ideas about the benefits of extemporaneous speech. Previously, even contest orations were judged for composition as a written text; only delivery was judged orally. "Students Orate," *Daily Pioneer Press*, April 7, 1894, front page; "Preliminary Pillsbury Contest," *Ariel*, March 17, 1900, 1.
[85] Edward Eugene McDermott, "Professor McDermott's Reply," *Annual Report*, (N.c.: Minnesota High School Debating League, 1902?), 22-24.
[86] "How Michigan Did It," *Ariel*, April 14, 1900, 335. *Bulletin of the College of Science, Literature and the Arts* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1903), 71. Gislason represented Minnesota in the April 1900 debate against Michigan and in the March 1901 debate against Iowa; his team was defeated in both cases, although Gislason had publicly renounced other extracurricular activities to prepare for the Iowa debate. "Debate and Oratory," *Gopher* (1901), 170; "Debate and Oratory," *Gopher* (1902), 262; "A New Editor," *The Minnesota Daily*, November 13, 1900: 2. Before returning to the university as an instructor in rhetoric, Gislason studied for a year at the Emerson School of Oratory and was principal of a rural school district. "Some of Our New Instructors," *Gopher* (1905), 45.
[87] Parody advertisement in "McShure's Magazine," *Gopher* (1905), 193.

Minnesota High School Debating League in order to bring together debaters and teachers from different high schools and publicize their activity. Here he stressed the importance of making "good speakers rather than great orators" and of producing students able to "distinguish between the essentials and non essentials of an argument."[88] He almost immediately noticed the difference when the high school graduates who had honed their argumentation skills through participation in the Debating League began competing at the University. He credited the effectiveness of high school debate training for the unanimous decision won by university freshman debaters over their sophomore rivals in 1904. McDermott observed that the freshman team's rebuttal, a debate element that demanded especially good argumentation skills, was "unquestionably the best ever presented in the chapel by freshmen."[89] The *Minnesota Alumni Weekly* reprinted a piece from the *Minnesota Daily* that observed that "since the organization of the High School Debating League the standard of University debate has risen wonderfully," and that "many [students] are as well prepared now in their Freshman year as there were in the Senior year before the High School League was in vogue."[90] It was even suggested that this approach might provide a model for addressing the continuing problem of students entering the university with inadequate English skills.[91]

McDermott wrote of his activities as belonging to a coherent educational system, and the last step was to create a national organization. He saw his era as one "in which organization counts" and thought of interaction through voluntary organizations as a way to prevent "stagnation and distorted ideas."[92] The success of the High School League would have reinforced

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[88] McDermott, "Professor McDermott's Reply," 21.
[89] Edward Eugene McDermott, "Debate and Oratory," *The Minnesota Alumni Weekly*, December 19, 1904, 8.
[90] "An Appreciation," *The Minnesota Alumni Weekly*, October 24, 1904, 8.
[91] "English Preparation," *The Minnesota Alumni Weekly*, October 5, 1903, 7.
[92] McDermott, "Professor McDermott's Reply," 21; McDermott, "Debate and Oratory." McDermott further wrote about the benefits of organizations in "The Fraternity Chapter House," *The Minnesota Alumni Weekly*," April 12,

this opinion: Minnesota's debaters became consistently completive in the period from 1902 to 1907, a huge improvement over their record prior to 1900.[93] McDermott also credited Minnesota's Forensic Honor League, which he founded in 1904 as a way of maintaining ties between alumni and debaters, with improving the quality of debating at Minnesota.[94] The two organizations, together with other elements, such as the literary clubs, were "knit together into one complete system by faculty control."[95] In 1905 or 1906, McDermott and his Iowa colleague, Glenn Merry, wrote each other to propose a national honor society for debaters. They next wrote to Trueblood, who gave his hearty approval. In 1906 McDermott, Merry, and Trueblood met with faculty from Northwestern University and the Universities of Wisconsin, Nebraska, Illinois, and Chicago, and expanded the Minnesota-only Forensic Honor League into the national society Delta Sigma Rho.[96]

The elocution curriculum that emerged in 1907 from these developments, although nominally little changed from that of 1899, bore characteristics that were strikingly similar to those of the public speaking discipline of the 1910s. McDermott died suddenly and unexpectedly in early 1908, and Minnesota hired Rarig to replace him for the 1908-1909 school year. Rarig convinced Northrop and Dean John Downey to allow him to introduce a new curriculum, the first one to be called "public speaking" rather than "elocution," for the 1909-1910 academic year.[97] In many ways, though, it simply put into writing what McDermott had already been

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1909, 4-7. McDermott's opinions about the value of organization sounds very much like James Winans' in "The Need for Research," *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* 1 (1915): 23.
[93] "Debate" in *The Minnesota Alumni Weekly University Dictionary*, November 10, 1913, 49.
[94] McDermott, "Debate and Oratory."
[95] Ibid.
[96] Edward Eugene McDermott, "Forensic Honor League," *Gopher* (1906), 225; "The Forensic Honor League," *Gopher* (1907), 218; "Delta Sigma Rho," *Gopher* (1909), 55; "Delta Sigma Rho," *Gopher* (1911), 420; Thomas Trueblood, "Delta Sigma Rho." Thomas Clarkson Trueblood papers. Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor.
[97] Draft of "National Speech Organizations and Speech Education" chapter for *The History of Speech Education in America* [different from published text], Frank Miller Rarig papers, folder 108, University of Minnesota Archives. Although Rarig wrote this some forty years after the events mentioned, no one other than he and Gislason had an

teaching. Even the change that appears at first to be most radical, the replacement of the two vocal expression classes with a two-semester "general course in public speaking," as significant as it was for the further development of the discipline at Minnesota, was more evolutionary than revolutionary. The course no longer included elocutionary terms in its description, but it continued to focus on "the principles of breathing, voice production, articulation and gesture."[98]

Conclusions

Minnesota's history does not fit the familiar narrative for the transitional period from 1890-1910. The university, far from having a tradition of rhetorical education that instructors wanted to preserve, eagerly sought to put behind itself a history of providing little more than the remedial instruction required by its students to survive their required written and oral exercises. It is probably no accident that Minnesota first hired rhetoric and elocution teachers with experience teaching in rural schools. Elocutionism, rather than threatening the academic integrity of the curriculum, provided structure and discipline to what had been an ad hoc and idiosyncratic course of study. Not only that, but the elocutionism that McDermott practiced proved adaptable enough to welcome extemporaneous speech, argumentation, and debate—a public speaking curriculum in all but name.

Rarig's hypothesis offers a better explanation of what happened at Minnesota, beginning with his claim that contemporary political controversies prompted changes in teaching methods. Rarig's manuscript drafts for "National Speech Organizations and Speech Education" provide clues on where he had hoped to take this argument. In seven typewritten pages he described the situation at the end of the nineteenth century: "when extemporaneous speaking and debating

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interest in the public speaking curriculum, and nothing in either the Board of Regents or SLA Curriculum Committee minutes for 1908 or 1909 contradicted his account. *Bulletin of the College of Science, Literature and the Arts* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1909), 198-99.

[98] *SLA Bulletin*, 1909, 198.

were suplanting (sic) elocution and declamation, the whole country was a vast field of political controversies arising from clashes of economic interest."[99] Rarig could not directly tie these controversies to the curriculum changes and decided to drop this section from the chapter that he submitted for publication. What he hadn't realized was that the changes had begun a decade earlier, with the changes in political rhetoric caused by the breakdown of the Third Party System. Frink's and Trueblood's responses to that situation provided a model for McDermott to follow when the 1890s depression created a demand for policy discussion and increased interest in extemporaneous speech and argumentation.

The model for teaching extemporaneous speech and argumentation spread beyond Hamilton, Amherst, and Michigan through the "invisible college:" the "disciplinary ties that make it possible to see oneself as part of a community of teachers and scholars."[100] Trueblood's career offers our best glimpse into how these ties worked. His 1888 circuit of Eastern schools offered him the best option for gathering the type of information that later educators would get from journals and conferences, and he undertook a similar tour the following year.[101] Later in his career Trueblood's reasons for travel expanded; he visited campuses in 1909 in order to recruit new chapters for Delta Sigma Rho.[102] Gathering information remained important to Trueblood, and as part of his 1909 tour he met with prominent colleagues to discuss academic matters, among them Craven Laycock and five future National Association founders: James Winans, Irvah Lester Winter, Henry Bainbridge Gough, Rarig, and Gislason. Although it is difficult to know how widespread the practice was, trips to share information were not unique to Trueblood,

[99] Rarig, unpublished draft of "National Speech Organizations and Speech Education," 12.
[100] Keith, *Democracy as Discussion*, 39.
[101] *Werner's Magazine* published articles about elocutionary education, but they tended to be polemical pieces advocating the philosophy of either Rush or, more typically, Delsarte. Trueblood's 1889 tour is described in a small black diary of his "trip east to visit colleges," in Thomas Trueblood papers, box 2, Bentley Historical Library.
[102] Red diary labeled "Record," in Thomas Trueblood papers, box 2, Bentley Historical Library.

or even to faculty. McDermott, for example, during his senior year traveled with one of his fraternity brothers to visit Eastern chapters, stopping at Hamilton and returning determined to incorporate extemporaneous debates into his home chapter's programs.[103] Informal contacts between academics continued into the twentieth century, as did the springboarding from debate topics to matters related to the emerging discipline. A series of letters between Rarig and O'Neill, begun to coordinate a contest between their two schools, concluded with possible plans to meet with other speech educators to discuss the need for an independent academic organization.[104] Meetings between speech educators had begun to foster a self-identity as members of a distinct discipline.

The self-identity that they formed drew inspiration from the prominent public speakers of the 1890s. Curry depicted the speaker in 1891 as "a man face to face with his fellow-men, in full possession of his personality, with power to reveal the action, emotion or condition of his whole nature," and the implication was that he "must express differently from the writer at his desk."[105] Curry perhaps had in mind the union organizers and populist political leaders of the late 1870s and 1880s, the era of the Greenback Party, the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, the Knights of Labor, and the Haymarket Riot, and a time when "champions of the community seemed to materialize everywhere all at once."[106] Charismatic reform leaders, such as William Jennings Bryan, Eugene Debs, and Jacob Coxey, became more prominent in the 1890s, the decade when

[103] Delta U. News Items, *Delta Upsilon Quarterly*, February 1885, 45; Letters from Chapters, *Delta Upsilon Quarterly*, February 1885, 29.
[104] Frank Rarig, letter to James O'Neill, November 4, 1913, in Department of Speech, Communication and Theatre Arts papers, 1911-1961, box 1, folder Debate 1911-1914, University of Minnesota Archives, Minneapolis; James O'Neill, letter to Frank Rarig, November 13, 1913, in folder Debate 1911-1914.
[105] Curry, *Province of Expression*, 42.
[106] Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 77. Alan Trachtenberg provides a classic summary of the era in *The Incorporation of America : Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*. 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 70-100.

many of the founding generation were in their teens.[107] Reform-minded public speakers captured Rarig's imagination, and his undergraduate papers cast the orator as a political activist and the mineworker as engaged in a righteous struggle against an oppressive capitalist class.[108] Following the events of the 1890s—what Rarig had called the "vast field of political controversies"–speech educators took Curry's fantasy theme of the powerful public speaker and elaborated upon it.[109] Charles Woolbert, shortly after he had helped to found the National Association, exemplified this when he contrasted the English scholar, "sitting at ease … taking in the ideas and feelings of the ages to himself," to the speaker "in action, elevated upon a public platform … giving forth vital ideas and feelings to the people before him."[110]

Speech education had undergone a series of changes at Minnesota between 1890 and 1910. The well-trained tongue began the period as an instrument for reinforcing the character of its listeners and then became the medium for presenting and interpreting written works. It ended the period in partnership with the well-trained mind as a way for the average person to contribute to policy discussions.[111] In the process speech teachers found that they needed to separate themselves from their English colleagues if they hoped to achieve this final goal: to educate the well-trained tongues that would rouse the weary to action.

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[107] Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 181-192.
[108] Frank Rarig "The Influence of the Orator," Frank Miller Rarig papers, folder 115, University of Minnesota Archives; Frank Rarig, "A Few Dangers Threatening American Democracy," Frank Miller Rarig papers, folder 115, University of Minnesota Archives.
[109] This self-identity resembles what Ernest Bormann called a fantasy theme: "Rhetorical innovation … also often results, however, from small group meetings of people drawn together by a similar impulse. During these meetings, members share fantasies and in the process come to symbolic convergence; they create the raw material for the new rhetorical vision." *The Force of Fantasy: Restoring the American Dream* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 10.
[110] Charles Woolbert, "The Organization of Departments of Speech in Universities," *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* 2 (1916), 67.
[111] McDermott, "Professor McDermott's Reply," 10-11.

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