

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT ASHEVILLE**

**“As Always You Prove Your Loyalty to Us Girls:”  
Fred Seely’s Attitude Toward Women in the Workforce and in Education**

**A SENIOR THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
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**by**

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Considering the time period in which he lived, Fred Seely, the President of the Grove Park Inn from 1913 to 1927, possessed a notably advanced attitude toward women. As a businessman, Seely trusted women to perform significant tasks in his company. Correspondence with female employees reveals the opportunities he provided for them. As a father, he valued the education of his daughters. Documented communication between Seely and his daughters, Gertrude and Louise, reflects his commitment to provide his children with higher education. His support of women's involvement in the professional workforce and in education reveals the forward thinking of one of Asheville's wealthy businessmen during the Gilded Age.

The women in Seely's life are all remarkable in their own ways. Archivist Helen Wykle has focused on a few of these impressive women on the UNC Asheville Special Collections Biltmore Industries Archive website. The women she highlights are Laura Joy Hawley, a female employee; Annie Rankin Dukes, his secretary during his earlier career in Georgia; and Susanna Cocroft, a business associate. Wykle states that, "Seely's women' kept him organized, energized and, at times, exasperated."<sup>1</sup> This paper will focus on his relationship with a selection of female employees and with his daughters, Gertrude and Louise Seely, with respect to their education. Seely was a product of his society and thus held many of the views of the Gilded Age. Specifically he acted as a paternal figure to his female employees and accepted the belief that college educated women could abandon study for marriage and motherhood. Although Seely held these beliefs, he also possessed an unusually progressive attitude toward women in society and in the workforce during the time in which he lived.

The academic work that has been done on Fred Seely focuses on his relationship with his father-in-law, E. W. Grove. Bruce E. Johnson's works familiarize the reader with Seely's

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Wykle, "Fred Loring Seely-Biltmore Industries," *Biltmore Industries Archive*, n.d., <[http://toto.lib.unca.edu/findingaids/mss/biltmore\\_industries/history/historydefault.htm#Fred%20Seely,%20Sr.](http://toto.lib.unca.edu/findingaids/mss/biltmore_industries/history/historydefault.htm#Fred%20Seely,%20Sr.)> (30 October 2004).

general biography, especially in relation to Grove. In Johnson's *Built for the Ages: A History of the Grove Park Inn* there is a brief biographical section on Fred Seely.<sup>2</sup> In the article, "Built Without an Architect: Architectural Inspirations for the Grove Park Inn," Johnson highlights interactions between Grove and Seely during the construction of the Grove Park Inn.<sup>3</sup> Another historian, Lucy A. Claber, focused her attention on Seely's relationship to the growth of Asheville. She notes his affluence in the community and how his efforts attracted large numbers of people to Asheville.<sup>4</sup> By exploring his ideas about women, education, and the workplace, this thesis examines an unexplored facet of Seely's character.

Seely's lifestyle reflected the Progressive Era ideals of 1920s America. Seely advocated Prohibition and during his younger years he campaigned for Temperance in Georgia. Since he was a voice in the Progressive activists' chorus, one wonders if he shared the Progressive Era ideal of the New Woman. Nancy Woloch defines the New Woman as an energetic single woman who assumed leadership roles in professions, reform, and women's education.<sup>5</sup> Seely supported women by hiring them for leadership roles in professions and by encouraging his daughters to pursue higher education.

In 1905 psychologist G. Stanley Hall proclaimed that professionalism was incompatible with the female brain. While some men used explanations like Hall's as an excuse not to permit women in the workforce, Seely placed female employees into prominent positions. He and a few other employers of women were advanced in hiring women for professional positions that were

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<sup>2</sup> Bruce E. Johnson, *Built for the Ages: A History of the Grove Park Inn* (Asheville: The Grove Park Inn and Country Club, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Bruce E. Johnson, "Built Without an Architect: Architectural Inspirations for the Grove Park Inn," in *May We All Remember Well, Volume 1: A Journal of the History & Cultures of Western North Carolina*, ed. Robert S. Brunk (Asheville: Robert S. Brunk Auction Services Inc., 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Lucy A. Claber, "Fred Loring Seely: the Entrepreneur and his contribution to the growth of Asheville, North Carolina, USA" (M.A. thesis, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1994), 274.

previously held by men.<sup>6</sup> As the business world expanded in America during the 1920s, more opportunities arose for women to participate in the corporate world. The Progressive Era's New Woman was rising in society. As Woloch points out "single women were at the peak of their careers, in proportion to all women, than at any other time, before or since."<sup>7</sup> She also notes that, in 1930 female office workers such as secretaries, typists, and file clerks made up one-fifth of the female work force.<sup>8</sup> Angel Kwolek-Folland points out that in 1870 women in clerical positions were 2.5 percent of all workers, but by 1930 they rose to fifty-three percent of all clerical workers.<sup>9</sup> Julia Kirk Blackwelder reports there were 588,609 female clerical workers according to the 1910 United States Census. By the 1920 census there were 1,421,925 female clerical workers. This occupation continued to employ an increasing number of women and by the 1930 census there were 1,986,830 females listed as clerical workers.<sup>10</sup> Seely's female employees were a part of this growth. In correspondence between Seely and his secretary, Ruth B. Hatch she described different roles female workers did in the office. Hatch mentioned women who sat at desks, answered phones, and were tour guides for visitors to Biltmore Industries.<sup>11</sup> These women were all a part of the feminization of clerical work in the early 1900s.

One female who was especially notable in her business abilities was Laura Joy Hawley. She graduated from a university in Wisconsin and then pursued a career in teaching dietetics. She left the teaching profession because of the low pay. She began traveling across the country and selling "gifts and ribbon novelties." Her merchandise sold so well that she began renting out

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>7</sup> Woloch, 282.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 391.

<sup>9</sup> Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Incorporating Women: A History of Women and Business in the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998), 97.

<sup>10</sup> Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Now Hiring: The Feminization of Work in the United States, 1900-1995* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 63.

<sup>11</sup> Ruth B. Hatch to Fred L. Seely, February 1, 1938 and January 28, 1938, Secretaries and Representatives File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

space in hotels as a venue to sell her merchandise. Her prosperity attracted the attention of a Chicago storeowner who invited her to sell her items in his store. Hawley's success also attracted Seely's attention. He offered to lease a permanent shop in his hotel for \$2,700 per year. Hawley was hesitant to make this large of an investment. In response Seely offered to donate the shop to her and pay her a salary. Hawley reasoned, "...if he were willing to do this as a good business proposition she might as well venture the whole thing and reap the full benefits of it, she accepted his first proposition."<sup>12</sup> Hawley then signed a contract leasing her "...the show or store room on the ground floor of what is known as Building 'A' of Grove Park Inn..."<sup>13</sup> She then traveled to New York City and purchased several thousands of dollars' worth of supplies and goods. As she prepared to return to Asheville, she was anxious, "...I had besides my ticket \$18.50 in the world and I was head over heels in debt!" Her shop, "The Hawleys" opened and sold ladies gowns and lingerie. She employed three women--two seamstresses and one fitter--to assist her in the shop. Hawley described her strategy in hiring her employees: "I paid two seamstresses to fit gowns on the customers, simply because they had the confident manner and could make the customers think that they knew it all, and in the rear I had my real fitter, a very bashful but most capable woman." Her logic was very clever and benefited her sales. Hawley prospered and her shop attracted customers from all over the United States. She explained to a newspaper reporter, "I enjoy very much venturing and doing my utmost to build up some new business. It is like playing a fascinating game, but when it is in smooth running order and no longer needs pushing I lose my zeal and want to start something else. Money alone doesn't

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<sup>12</sup> "Success Is Merely a Matter of 'Getting Things Across,' Asserts Western Girl Who Goes to France to Manage Diet Kitchens," *The Evening Sun*, 25 April 1918.

<sup>13</sup> Contract between Fred Seely and Laura Hawley to lease space for "The Hawleys," North Carolina, Grove Park Inn, Incorporated, F. L. Seely, 1 May 1916, 1.

interest me. There is not enough to it.”<sup>14</sup> She mastered being a saleswoman and a small business owner, but these successes became boring and monotonous. Hawley heard the call to aid the World War I effort.

When Hawley learned that there was a need for dietitians to feed soldiers, she was immediately interested in assisting. She offered to provide monetary support for other dietitians, but she was informed that women like her “...were needed above all others, women who had proved their value and demonstrated their ability to make a success of whatever they undertook.”<sup>15</sup> Interestingly a society that made it difficult for women to participate in business dealings like those in which Hawley engaged now praised her virtue and success. Hawley concluded that it was her duty to assist in the war effort. Seely seemed wary of her choice. He took a paternal concern and interest in Hawley’s decision. Just like a father would worry about his child going overseas to contribute to the war effort, so does Seely worry about Hawley’s decision. Despite Seely’s warnings and worries, Hawley remained firm in her convictions. She wrote to him, “If I were not absolutely sure of going to France, I certainly would not sell out a lucrative business which I have built up...”<sup>16</sup> Hawley and Seely continued correspondence through 1925. Not only did Hawley serve in France for the Red Cross, she returned to America after the war and worked for advertising firms and art councils. Her ambition fascinated her peers, making her the subject of several newspaper articles. Her achievements were remarkable.

After Hawley left Asheville, Seely hired Beaumont Hazzard to take over management. Seely arranged for Hazzard to confer with Hawley in order to gain knowledge on managing the

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<sup>14</sup> “Success Is Merely a Matter of ‘Getting Things Across,’ Asserts Western Girl Who Goes to France to Manage Diet Kitchens,” *The Evening Sun*, 25 April 1918.

<sup>15</sup> “Success Is Merely a Matter of ‘Getting Things Across,’ Asserts Western Girl Who Goes to France to Manage Diet Kitchens,” *The Evening Sun*, 25 April 1918.

<sup>16</sup> Laura Joy Hawley to Fred L. Seely, September 28, 1917, Biltmore Industries File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

shop, instructing Hazzard to consider the meeting with Hawley “very important.”<sup>17</sup> He arranged for Hazzard to travel to Marshall Fields, a department store in Chicago, and complete their four-week sales training. He wished for her to learn all of the skills of the “Ready-To-Wear Department.” He promised D. M. Yates, the manager of Marshall Fields that “no one will be the wiser as to her motives for working at the store.” Then Seely’s tone becomes uncharacteristically threatening in the end of letter. He wrote, “I am taking the liberty of sending her to you without going thru the formality of writing you again for I know you will do it, and if you don’t Brother David, who is our bosom companion, and from whom we buy every yard of everything we own in your line, will boycott you.”<sup>18</sup> He is once again displaying a paternal attitude toward his female employee. However in this situation he is the aggressive protector of, in his opinion, the weaker female.

Seely’s fatherly attitude toward Hazzard is also seen in correspondence that arranged her hotel accommodations. In a letter to Tracy Drake, the manager of the Blackstone Hotel in Chicago, Seely suggested “...if you can do any little thing to befriend her while she is there, I hope you will be her Godfather...”<sup>19</sup> Drake replied, “I will keep a watchful eye upon on her...”<sup>20</sup> When she traveled on to New York City to study the latest fashions and purchase goods, Seely wrote to E. M. Statler, the manager of the Pennsylvania Hotel, requesting that he personally see that “fatherly care...be extended to her for she is alone.” Seely continues, “She is a business girl and a handshake from you will be a big boost to her as well as a pleasant moment

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<sup>17</sup> Fred L. Seely to Beaumont Hazzard, not dated, Biltmore Industries File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

<sup>18</sup> Fred L. Seely to D. M. Yates, December 8, 1921, Biltmore Industries File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

<sup>19</sup> Fred L. Seely to Tracy Drake, December 8, 1921, Biltmore Industries File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

<sup>20</sup> Tracy Drake to Fred L. Seely, December 21 (no year given), Biltmore Industries File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

to you.”<sup>21</sup> This comment reinforces the female’s subordination to these businessmen. She is patronized and objectified. She is a vulnerable object to be adored and protected. The men assumed that any attention that successful businessmen, such as themselves, gave to a female employee would be esteemed. Nevertheless, it is advanced for the time period for a female employee to be given such travel and management opportunities.

Seely’s letters to female employees reveal his respect for their work. He openly praised the performance of former employee, Ida M. Dewey, wistfully stating that “...[I] want to assure you that Life would not be half as bad if you were here to carry the load you formerly carried. Nothing ever will dim the glory of the work you did, and it seems to me we miss you just as much today as we did the day you left.”<sup>22</sup> Seely believed that Dewey’s work was exceptional and the fact that she was a female did not dim her professionalism.

Seely’s respect for employee Julia E. Brookshire is evident in the exceptional responsibility he assigned her. She was sent on several expeditions to purchase dyes and exhibit Biltmore Homespun cloth. In a telegram to Brookshire at the Waldorf-Astoria, Seely asked for her opinion on which dyes would be the best for the Homespun cloth. He wired, “Write at once what you think. Let me know if you need more money.” He demonstrated faith and trust in her financial sense and opinions.<sup>23</sup>

Later Seely sent Brookshire to Scotland to observe traditional ways of weaving homespun cloth. Seely’s trust in Brookshire’s financial sense is evident in the fact that he advanced her money with no hesitation, “...as I have told you, Mr. Carson will

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<sup>21</sup> Fred L. Seely to E. M. Statler, January 14, 1922, Biltmore Industries File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

<sup>22</sup> Fred L. Seely to Ida M. Dewey, March 19, 1923, Employees File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>23</sup> F. L. Seely to Julia Brookshire, July 9, 1920, Employees File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

advance whatever (sic) you happen to need.”<sup>24</sup> Brookshire pursued her task with great interest and shared her fascination with Seely after seeing the shops at Killin, Loch Tay Perthshire, Scotland. She wrote to Seely, “Can you really believe I have been this afternoon to the place from which our first loom came and its sisters and brothers are still in motion, altho very slow. Our shops are Paradise compared to these,--in more ways than one. Dirty, dark, bad air, and little room. Do wish you could see them.”<sup>25</sup> Brookshire obviously had knowledge of and pride in the Biltmore Homespun Shops’ equipment and conditions.

Employing a woman to gather important corporate information was unique when compared to Kwolek-Folland’s research on male and female secretarial roles. She examines the 1925 Bureau of Vocational Information survey taken by secretarial workers. Employees reported that male secretaries, not women, traveled with the business executives.<sup>26</sup> However during Brookshire’s stay in Scotland, Seely did openly criticize her for an unknown offense: “I...believe that some day you girls will realize you are holding responsible business positions and that there are many times when you could handle yourselves in a more business-like manner than you do.” He never explicitly stated what offense she committed. He continues, “My conception of sending you to Europe was for your benefit and to give you a rest, as well as to try to get some valuable information for me in connection with our business...Have a good time and come back a little wiser, as you will be a little older.”<sup>27</sup> He rebuked her in a paternal manner for this mysterious offense. Whatever the wrongdoing was, he seemed to believe it was a childish mistake made out of inexperience. In an undated letter, Brookshire responded to Seely, “Mr.

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<sup>24</sup> Fred L. Seely to Julia E. Brookshire, June 12, 1922, Employees File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>25</sup> Julia E. Brookshire to Fred L. Seely, June 26, 1922, Employees File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>26</sup> Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate Office, 1870-1930* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 57-58.

<sup>27</sup> Fred L. Seely to Julia Brookshire, June 12, 1922, Employees File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

Seely I'm sorry if in trying to carry out your wishes, I have failed,--and hope this trip will teach me more How to do,--What to do,--and When to do. I trust that later I can show you that I do appreciate your sending me and that you'll never have to say again you wish you hadn't done it."<sup>28</sup> This behavior is similar to the paternal role Seely assumed with Hawley and Hazzard. He saw himself as protector and guardian over his "girls."

Another female employee in whom Seely entrusted much responsibility was Grace Phillips. He sent her to New York City and Philadelphia in pursuit of new dyes and fashions for Biltmore Industries. Seely wrote to her in one letter, "I suppose [by] the time this reaches you you will have conquered Philadelphia and be conquering New York." This statement shows his confidence in his female representative to enter the male dominated business world and succeed. He continued in the letter, "Don't be timid but just go right after these people and get what you want."<sup>29</sup> It was expected for Phillips to be passive in business negotiations because of her sex. However since her paternal boss figure instructed her to be assertive, it was acceptable that for her to assume this supposed male trait.

Not only did Seely trust women with responsibility in their travels, but also in his home offices. Correspondence with his female secretaries reveal how much he respected and trusted them. Isabel Harris is referred to as "...one of our right hand men."<sup>30</sup> Another secretary, Ruth B. Hatch was in a supervisory position. In a memorandum, Seely writes to Hatch about her department.<sup>31</sup> Obviously she was in charge of a group of employees. In other letters, Hatch offered suggestions on work schedules for employees and reported on sales. She also gave

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<sup>28</sup> Julia Brookshire to Fred L. Seely, (not dated), Employees File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>29</sup> Fred L. Seely to Grace Phillips, May 22, 1917, Secretaries and Representatives File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>30</sup> Fred L. Seely to D. S. White, July 30, 1923, Secretaries and Representatives File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>31</sup> Fred L. Seely to Ruth B. Hatch, September 17, 1924, Secretaries and Representatives File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

opinions on new colors for Homespun cloth. Seely's reply in several letters is simply, "Do as you think best."<sup>32</sup> This response shows that he trusted Hatch's business sense and abilities.

Correspondence with two women, Mary Perry and Mary Weeks, conveys the hardships that single women faced during this time when they tried to support themselves. When Seely's secretary, Ruth B. Hatch, wrote to Perry asking for her salary expectations, she replied, "I hardly know what to say as to salary I would expect. It is necessary for me to live on what I earn, as I have but little outside income."<sup>33</sup> Perry exemplified the submissive female in business relations, but her words also illustrated the importance of her earnings as a single woman. Correspondence with Seely's former employee, Weeks identifies a more desperate situation. She writes, "...I am very tired of being a breadwinner, a mother and father; I hate being poor...most of all I want security and the love and affection of some nice man—one that could be a real father for my little boy." Weeks voiced the feelings of a woman who did not conform to the traditional female roles of the time. Whereas she was taught to be dependent on males, there was no male authority figure present. She felt that she and her son were ostracized from society. She longed to be accepted into society again. She ended her letter by expressing her trust in Seely, "...I feel that in you I have a kind and interested friend."<sup>34</sup> Undoubtedly Seely provided Weeks with the same paternal support noted in previous relationships. In this letter she trusted him as a confidant.

Earlier in Weeks' life Seely tried to help with her educational pursuits. Before she was married, Seely interceded on her behalf and wrote letters to the President of Antioch College. He spoke very highly of her, described her as "...one of those individuals who seem to be

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<sup>32</sup> Ruth B. Hatch to Fred L. Seely, February 1, 1936 and January 28, 1938, Secretaries and Representatives File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>33</sup> Mary Perry to Ruth B. Hatch, November 29, 1932, Secretaries and Representatives File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>34</sup> Mary Weeks to Fred L. Seely, February 5, 1940, Biltmore Industries File #3, Biltmore Industries Archive, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

determined to have an education, and I have felt that anything I could do to assist her was time well spent.” He continued to praise her, “I have an idea that she will not be with you more than a week before you will discover her exceptional ability, and that you will be using it to your advantage.”<sup>35</sup> Presumably she did not attend Antioch College, or she discontinued her studies to get married. She wrote to Seely nine years later, “...I am still interested in Science, not however, as much as I should be. Of course working, managing an apartment, small son and husband takes a lot of time...”<sup>36</sup> Seely no doubt attributed Weeks’ frustration in her later letters, after she was divorced or widowed, to the fact that she never completed her college education. He believed that higher education provided more opportunities for a single woman.

Seely bred tremendous loyalty among his “girls.” When employee Julia B. Lynch took time away from work to attend to her husband who suffered from an eye affliction, Seely offered sympathy and monetary support. She expressed her gratitude for his support, “as always you prove your loyalty to us girls and we assure you we appreciate everything.”<sup>37</sup> Annie Dukes, a retired employee, wrote “I want you always to know that it is one of the greatest joys of my life to work for you.”<sup>38</sup> Seely’s high opinion of his female workers can also be seen in correspondence with Eleanor Swain Clayton. When he received her wedding announcement, Seely replied:

Needless to tell you that the news your letter brings robs us of our fond hope of having you come back, and it is a disappointment so great that I haven’t words which will express my feelings...But during the year you were here you will recall that I was never selfish enough to want to stand in the way of a girls mission in life for the selfish benefit of this business...Please tell him however,

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<sup>35</sup> Fred L. Seely to Dr. Arthur E. Morgan, December 28, 1929, Biltmore Industries File #3, Biltmore Industries Archive, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

<sup>36</sup> Mary Weeks to Fred L. Seely, January 6, 1938, Biltmore Industries File #3, Biltmore Industries Archive, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

<sup>37</sup> Julia B. Lynch to Fred L. Seely, January 15, 1938, Employees File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>38</sup> Annie Dukes to Fred L. Seely, August 3, 1918, Biltmore Industries File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

that, you are thoroughly independent of him, and that if he doesn't treat you the best in the world we will be coming up there after you, for there will always be a place here for you.<sup>39</sup>

The last sentence particularly reveals Seely's belief in a woman's autonomy from a fiancé or boyfriend. However it also reveals that he believed that women needed a paternal figure, like himself, who could provide protection if necessary for his "girl." This passage also shows that he possessed the common attitude that women's business employment was simply a temporary occupation before marriage. It was expected that, if and when the Progressive Era's New Woman married, she would leave her salaried job and focused her energies on her household and family.<sup>40</sup> He stated clearly that "a girls mission in life" of matrimony and motherhood was clearly more important than her job. In another situation he repeated this belief. He wrote to secretary Isabel Bowles about another employee, "Miss Ball is a wonder, but, of course, like all women you don't know how long it will last."<sup>41</sup> Therefore Seely respected women as capable in the business world, but he saw their presence as temporary. Their occupation was secondary to the future roles of wife and mother.

Seely's support of women in the workplace perhaps can be explained by his support of his daughters' education. His own thirst for knowledge made headlines when, in his thirties, he left his business career of seventeen years to study law at Yale University. When a newspaper reporter questioned him about this decision, Seely replied, "There are more worlds to conquer."<sup>42</sup> He wrote to Anson Phelps Stokes, a secretary at Yale University, "...I have...prospered in business to an extent to make it possible to give up for the time being and devote myself entirely

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<sup>39</sup> Fred L. Seely to Eleanor Swain Clayton, September 21, 1932, Employees File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>40</sup> Woloch, 269.

<sup>41</sup> Fred L. Seely to Isabel Bowles, November 9, 1931, Secretaries and Representatives File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>42</sup> "Gives Up Business to Enter College: Fred L. Seely Retires from Paris Medicine Company to Engage in the Study of Law," (name of paper and date lost).

to study...”<sup>43</sup> When he wrote this letter he was thirty one years old with a wife and one infant. Stokes introduced him to a trusted tutor, Dr. Geo L. Fox. Seely wrote to Fox, “...[I] hope to realize my cherished hope of a better education.” His son, Fred L. Seely, Jr. also reported that Seely attended architectural school for three months.<sup>44</sup>

Seely asserted that his sons and daughters had a right to higher education. Interestingly, his experiences with his sons’ education were no better—maybe even worse—than his daughters’. Seely supported his sons in their educational pursuits, but John and Grove seemed ambivalent about higher education. His attitudes towards his older sons, John and Grove, are revealed in letters between Seely and his daughters. In numerous correspondences with his daughters, Seely refers to his older sons’ academic failures. In a letter to Louise about her brothers’ academic progress, Seely wrote:

“They get along about as poorly as ever. Grove is on General Warning nearly all the time but they have written that they will permit him to try it again, although they have advised him to resign from the College and had him sign a pledge that unless he gets off warning he will resign without any action on their part. The best he hopes for now if he can stay in, is to graduate in two more years.”

In this same letter, he informed Louise about John’s status as a student. Seely explained that John hoped to catch up on his studies during the summer and enter as a senior in the fall, but Seely concluded that he was “...not at all hopeful of our boys as students.”<sup>45</sup> John eventually completed his coursework at Yale University. The youngest of Seely’s children, Fred Seely, Jr., was a graduate of Yale University and retired as a lieutenant in the United States Navy. When Fred, Sr. died in 1942, Fred, Jr. returned to Asheville and co-managed the Biltmore Homespun Industries with Alec Gover. These men implemented new marketing and advertising campaigns

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<sup>43</sup> Fred L. Seely to Anson Phelps Stokes, October 24, 1902, Schools File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>44</sup> Laurel Shackelford, ed. and Bill Weinberg, ed., *Our Appalachia* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 174.

<sup>45</sup> Fred L. Seely to Louise Beard, July 20, 1929, Biltmore Industries File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

that were not well received by the public. The business declined until it was sold in 1953.<sup>46</sup>

More research is needed to complete the complex life story of the Seely family.

Clearly, Seely valued higher education. He left school at the age of thirteen to work at a pharmaceutical company in order to provide financial assistance to his family.<sup>47</sup> As he prospered in the business world, he was determined to provide each of his children the opportunity to attend college. He wrote to his daughter, Louise's tutor, Alice Gentry, "I do not think there is anything in the World that will mean as much to me as to have all the children successfully through College..."<sup>48</sup> Yet Seely's noble goal presented a challenge for his daughters, Gertrude and Louise. While they wished to please him and make him proud, society advocated marriage and motherhood to women their age. Many wealthy parents sent their daughters to college during the 1920s. Yet it was clear that the ultimate goal for these women was marriage and motherhood. When Seely's daughters considered abandoning their academic endeavors, they were met with hard opposition from their father.

In his letters, Seely referred to college-educated women as "lovely cultured people."<sup>49</sup> Weary of his daughters' complaints concerning the rigors of academe, he explained to Abby A. Sutherland, President of the Ogontz School, where Gertrude and Louise attended, "...they are too young to realize that I am trying to have them to be more than just ordinary women without exceptional educational equipment."<sup>50</sup> While education was more accessible for women than it had ever been before in America, it was still a privilege to attend college. In 1910 five percent of

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<sup>46</sup> Helen Wykle, "Fred Seely, Jr. and Alec Gover Years," *Biltmore Industries Archive*, n.d., <[http://toto.lib.unca.edu/findingaids/mss/biltmore\\_industries/history/historydefault.htm#Fred%20Seely,%20Sr.](http://toto.lib.unca.edu/findingaids/mss/biltmore_industries/history/historydefault.htm#Fred%20Seely,%20Sr.)> (30 October 2004).

<sup>47</sup> Bruce E. Johnson, *Built for the Ages: A History of the Grove Park Inn*, 4.

<sup>48</sup> Fred L. Seely to Alice Gentry, February 26, 1923, Seely Family File #4, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>49</sup> Fred L. Seely to Alice Gentry, March 14, 1934, Seely Family File #3, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>50</sup> Fred L. Seely to Abby A. Sutherland, October 26, 1923, Seely Family File #4, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

college-age Americans actually attended college, and of that five percent, forty percent of the students were women.<sup>51</sup> By 1920, 47.3 percent of the college population was women. This percentage declined during the next decade and by 1930, 43.7 percent of the college population was female.<sup>52</sup> Gertrude and Louise attended the Ogontz School in order to prepare for college in the mid 1920s. Gertrude went on to Smith College in the late 1920s. Seely recognized that education was a way of ensuring security for his daughters. If they choose not to marry, they would still be able to independently support themselves because of their education.

Seely also strictly oversaw his children's moral education. While most women in college during the 1920s attended larger coeducational universities, he discouraged his daughters from turning into "modern" girls.<sup>53</sup> He gave his daughters information on Smith, Wellesley, and Vassar Colleges, focusing their sights on these private, elite, women's institutions. He supported the Ogontz School for Girls even after his daughters graduated. In one of his recommendations for a female student, Patricia Paine, who wished to attend the school, Seely wrote, "She is just as fine as she can be, doesn't smoke or do any of the modern things that young women think they have to do nowadays."<sup>54</sup> Seely was not supportive of "modern" women, like flappers. He perceived them as immoral for rebelling against the Progressive era ideas, such as Prohibition, that he staunchly supported.

Both Gertrude and Louise considered discontinuing their education for matrimony and both encountered opposition from their father. Gertrude did very well in school. It was only when she began to consider marrying W. Jenkins Richardson in 1922 that her grades suffered. Just as he later addressed Louise, Seely handled Gertrude sternly about the proposition of giving

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<sup>51</sup> Woloch, 276.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 403.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Fred L. Seely to Miss Abby A. Sutherland, January 23, 1936, Seely Family File, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

up her education for marriage. He wrote to Gertrude, "...I am rather annoyed this morning to find that one of the newspapers was called up yesterday and informed that you were engaged to a Mr. Richardson...and that you were to be married...I should be able to give...all of the children their education with less embarrassment and annoyance than I have had."<sup>55</sup> Gertrude confirmed the rumor when she asked for her father's consent to her engagement. She acknowledged his dismay when she wrote, "...I know what a disappointment it is to you that I will not finish college."<sup>56</sup> However, Seely managed to discourage Gertrude from ending her academic pursuits. In a telegram only a week later, she wrote, "please don[']t worry about me any more my only plan is to finish college."<sup>57</sup> To Seely's elation, Gertrude then excelled at her college studies. Almost a year later he expressed his happiness with her decision, "I am very proud of your work and more than happy that you are getting an education."<sup>58</sup> Two months after that, he admitted, "Probably I don't tell you enough how proud I am of you but I think you know all about it."<sup>59</sup>

Fred Seely often disagreed with daughter Louise Seely on ideas about her future. Louise did not excel at the Ogontz School and Fred Seely was "broken-hearted" that she failed the College Board examinations in 1923.<sup>60</sup> He confessed to Sutherland that it was a "terrible disappointment" for him.<sup>61</sup> He declared that "...there are only two things open to her—

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<sup>55</sup> Fred L. Seely to Gertrude Seely, October 28, 1922, Seely Family File #3, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>56</sup> Gertrude Seely to Fred L. Seely, December 12, 1922, Seely Family File #3, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>57</sup> Gertrude Seely to Fred L. Seely, December 19, 1922, Seely Family File #3, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>58</sup> Fred L. Seely to Gertrude Seely, September 26, 1923, Seely Family File #3, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>59</sup> Fred L. Seely to Gertrude Seely, November 19, 1923, Seely Family File #3, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>60</sup> Fred L. Seely to Alice Gentry, July 16, 1923, Seely Family File #4, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>61</sup> Fred L. Seely to Abby A. Sutherland, June 4, 1924, Seely Family File #3, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

marrying if she wishes to or receiving an education whether she wishes or not...”<sup>62</sup>

Interestingly, Seely never stated that marriage was mandatory. Education was not negotiable with him, but marriage seemed to be optional. Her father’s fervent desire that she continue in academics often exhausted Louise. After failing courses despite intense study with her tutor Alice Gentry, she began to feel that she would never attain a college degree. Gentry explained to Fred Seely that Louise “wants to measure up to your high standard for her.” In another letter five months later Gentry wrote to him again that Louise was “...so anxious to measure up to your standards.”<sup>63</sup> Indeed, the Principal of the Ogontz School, Abby Sutherland, relied on Seely’s harshness to help discipline Louise. When she believed Louise was taking too much time out of her studies for leisure activities, Sutherland asked Seely to “talk to Louise in your usual forceful and helpful way.”<sup>64</sup> Seely made it clear that he disliked those who had the opportunity for higher education, and did not pursue it. In a letter to Louise he referred to two young women as failures because they showed no interest in college.<sup>65</sup> Louise’s determination pushed her to continue trying in school. A year later, she wrote to her father, “Am more anxious to go to Smith.”<sup>66</sup> Seely responded with joy, “the miracle has happened...thanking you for waking up.”<sup>67</sup>

Despite her intentions to continue her education, Louise felt incapable of providing her father the same happiness that Gertrude did. Gertrude attended Smith College after she

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<sup>62</sup> Fred L. Seely to Alice Gentry, August 13, 1924, Seely Family File #3, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>63</sup> Alice Gentry to Fred L. Seely, February 21, 1924 and July 26, 1924, Seely Family File #3, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>64</sup> Abby A. Sutherland to Fred L. Seely, February 5, 1924, Seely Family File #3, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>65</sup> Fred L. Seely to Louise Seely, October 17, 1924, Biltmore Industries File #1, Biltmore Industries Archive, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

<sup>66</sup> Louise Seely to Fred L. Seely, April 27, 1925, Biltmore Industries File #1, Biltmore Industries Archive, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

<sup>67</sup> Fred L. Seely to Louise Seely, n.d., Biltmore Industries File #1, Biltmore Industries Archive, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

graduated from the Ogontz School. She was fulfilling Seely's dream that his children would earn college degrees. Louise expressed her feelings of inadequacy in a letter to her father. She wrote, "I wish I could do something to...make you as proud of me as of Gertrude."<sup>68</sup> Louise craved the favor that Gertrude had earned from their father by attending Smith. Louise wrote to him, "All I hope now is that I pass my exams, as I have every intention of doing, and can get in Smith next fall. My diploma from Smith college will be the best proof I can give you of my sincerity and my desire to have an education in order to be a woman worthy of the duties and able to cope with the complexities of life."<sup>69</sup> However, Louise never earned her father's approval for the achievement of educational accomplishments. Eventually, as her father feared, Louise abandoned academic pursuits for matrimony.

In 1925, Louise wrote to her father for permission to marry Jack Beard, thus beginning an intense struggle of wills over her future.<sup>70</sup> After she received a disapproving message from her father, Louise began to plead with her mother, Evelyn Seely, for support. She assured her mother that Jack Beard, "really is the right one."<sup>71</sup> Fred Seely responded sternly. He sent her the following telegram:

This probably the last of our educational efforts with you and as so far they have been series of failures I am determined to have you pass College Board if it can be done Stop As you have decided to marry you will then have plenty of freedom and be able to go as you please which I am sure will be great relief to you and all of us Stop. For the remainder of the school year however we will get down to business even at the sacrifice of society<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Louise Seely to Fred L. Seely, January 11, 1925?, Biltmore Industries File #1, Biltmore Industries Archive, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

<sup>69</sup> Louise Seely to Fred L. Seely, January 12, 1924, Biltmore Industries File #1, Biltmore Industries Archive, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

<sup>70</sup> Louise Seely to Fred L. Seely, December 10 (no year given), Biltmore Industries File #1, Biltmore Industries Archive, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

<sup>71</sup> Louise Seely to Evelyn Seely, January 19, 1925, Biltmore Industries File #1, Biltmore Industries Archive, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

<sup>72</sup> Fred L. Seely to Louise Seely, January 22, 1925, Biltmore Industries File #1, Biltmore Industries Archive, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

Evidently Seely was not pleased with his daughter's decision. Whereas traditionally parents were thrilled for their daughter's union in marriage, Seely discouraged Louise's desire to marry until she finished her educational pursuits. He obviously had faith that if Louise worked hard enough, she could earn a college degree. He continually urged Louise to postpone marriage in order to finish her studies at the Ogontz School and go on to Smith College the next year. He wrote, "Whatever you do do not disappoint me about this matter."<sup>73</sup> Gentry served as his ally in the situation. When it seemed as if Louise had decided to put off marriage in favor of college, Gentry wrote to Seely, "I am so glad she is going on with her school work, for when the excitement of the romance dies down, she may be thankful for an 'anchor.'"<sup>74</sup> Several months later, Gentry again wrote to Seely, "We are so glad the affair was postponed for we love her dearly and want her to live up to the best that is in her."<sup>75</sup> Seely believed that he had convinced Louise that college was the most advantageous path for her future. He responded to Gentry, "I really think she is on the way to success now."<sup>76</sup> Louise seemed to accept his plea for education, when she wrote "I am entering Smith in the fall Papa—I give you my word on that."<sup>77</sup> But Seely did not win in this battle of wills with Louise. She did leave the Ogontz School to marry Jack Beard.

Unfortunately, after Louise's decision to be married and Gertrude's brush with matrimony, Seely was at times paranoid that Gertrude was going to forego her education in favor of marriage. This lack of trust angered Gertrude. She responded to his suspicions, "I thought

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<sup>73</sup> Fred L. Seely to Louise Seely, June 5, 1925, Biltmore Industries File #1, Biltmore Industries Archive, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

<sup>74</sup> Alice Gentry to Fred L. Seely, January 16, 1925, Seely Family File #3, "Biltmore Industries Archive," Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>75</sup> Alice Gentry to F. L. Seely, April 25, 1925, Seely Family File #3, "Biltmore Industries Archive," Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>76</sup> Fred L. Seely to Alice Gentry, April 20, 1925, Seely Family File #3, "Biltmore Industries Archive," Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>77</sup> Louise Seely to Fred L. Seely, April 29, 1925, Biltmore Industries File #1, Biltmore Industries Archive, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

you had more faith in me than to think I am going to rush off like a silly schoolgirl...” She continued that nothing could stop her from finishing college, “not even you, Papa...it makes me mad that you should put me in the class of Louise’s affair. Nothing is farther from my mind than getting married. Naturally I expect to some day but just now I fully realize that there are few girls in this world as fortunate as I. I enjoy college thoroughly...”<sup>78</sup> Her conviction that marriage would “naturally” be a part of her future shows that she complied with society’s ideal of the “educated housewife.” This belief ranked domestic duties over an occupation outside the home. Yet it is impressive that she valued her education. Completing her degree took priority over immediately practicing the traditional female roles of wife and mother. Gertrude continued in her attempts to ease her father’s worries by openly showing him gratitude for his support of her education. She wrote, “I just can’t realize that a week from today I will actually possess a degree. There is nothing in the world that I could be more proud of because of what it has taken to get it...I know that I couldn’t have done it without your encouragement and I certainly appreciate your wanting me to do it.”<sup>79</sup> Thus Gertrude Seely saw her life from both ends of the argument—for education and for marriage. To Seely’s delight she chose to complete her education.

Both Louise and Gertrude experienced marriage and motherhood during their lifetimes. Louise remained married to John M. Beard (Jack) and Gertrude married John Eller. Louise and Jack traveled extensively, following Jack’s employment. They lived abroad in London, Paris, Manila, and Penang. Louise wrote to her parents about her children and considered authoring children’s books. Gertrude and John lived in Winston-Salem, North Carolina and she focused

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<sup>78</sup> Gertrude Seely to Fred L. Seely, April 28 (no year given), Seely Family File #3, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

<sup>79</sup> Gertrude Seely to Fred L. Seely, June 14, 1926, Seely Family File #3, Biltmore Industries Archive, Grovewood Gallery, Inc., Asheville, NC.

her energies on tending to her children. There is a wealth of unexamined material about the daughters' lives as wives and mothers.

Seely's support of women's education and his support of his female workers offers a new glimpse into this complex figure of Asheville's history. It is evident in Seely's correspondences that he believed a woman could be autonomous if she received a college education. Therefore he perceived education as a means to having more opportunities in society. However, he also recognized the social phenomenon of the "educated housewife." He seemed to agree with the notion that after a woman gained her independence through education, marriage and motherhood were the next logical steps. However, his opinion that single women could hold an occupation outside the domestic sphere, added to the complex persona that was Fred Seely. While he entrusted his female employees with great responsibility, he monitored them in a paternal manner. Although he possessed these conflicting beliefs, his support of women in the work place and in education made Fred Seely one of the most forward-thinking elite American businessmen during the 1920s.

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<[http://toto.lib.unca.edu/findingaids/mss/biltmore\\_industries/history/historydefault.htm#Fred%20Seely,%20Sr.](http://toto.lib.unca.edu/findingaids/mss/biltmore_industries/history/historydefault.htm#Fred%20Seely,%20Sr.)> (22 September 2004).

This website offers great information on Seely as well as women and others associated with the Biltmore Homespun Shops.

## Appendix



Figure A. Portrait of Fred L. Seely. Photographed by Higgason in Asheville, NC. Photograph courtesy of Grovewood Gallery, Inc.



Figure B. Woman showing Biltmore Homespun cloth. Photograph courtesy of Grovewood Gallery, Inc.



Figure C. Biltmore Industries spinning display at Neiman-Marcus in Dallas, Texas. Photograph courtesy of Grovewood Gallery, Inc.



Figure D. Women washing blankets on Harris Island, Scotland. Based on the author's research, it is very possible that Julia Brookshire photographed this during her travels for Biltmore Industries. Photograph courtesy of Grovewood Gallery, Inc.



Figure E. Seely family portrait. Based on the author's research it is possible that the figures in the photograph are (left to right): Gertrude Seely (seated), John Seely, Grove Seely, Evelyn Seely (seated), Fred Seely, Louise Seely Beard (seated), Jack Beard (seated), and Fred Seely, Jr. (seated on floor). Photographed by George Masa[?]. Photograph courtesy of Grovewood Gallery, Inc.



Figure F. Seely family portrait. Based on the author's research, it is likely that the women in the photograph are (left to right) Louise Seely Beard and Gertrude Seely Eller. Photograph courtesy of Grovewood Gallery, Inc.

