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“A (Blind) Woman's Place is (Teaching) in the Home”: The Life of Kate Foley, 1873-1940

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“A (BLIND) WOMAN’S PLACE IS (TEACHING) IN THE HOME”:
THE LIFE OF KATE FOLEY, 1873-1940

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Information

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Library and Information Science

by

Angela Gates

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The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled

“A (BLIND) WOMAN’S PLACE IS (TEACHING) IN THE HOME”:
THE LIFE OF KATE FOLEY, 1873-1940

by

Angela Gates

APPROVED FOR THE SCHOOL OF INFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

“A (BLIND) WOMAN’S PLACE IS (TEACHING) IN THE HOME”: THE LIFE OF KATE FOLEY, 1873-1940

by Angela Gates

This thesis examines the life and career of Kate Foley, home teacher of the blind with the California State Library from 1914-1940. The purpose of this investigation is to determine how Foley, who was disabled, built a successful career with the state library despite facing significant discrimination and prejudice. Using a wide variety of primary source material, including letters, library publications, conference proceedings, newspaper articles, and census data, this biography evaluates Foley’s pioneering role as well as the challenges she faced. Home teaching provided a new vocational opportunity for blind women, whose professional choices were extremely limited. Despite her unique career, the extensive contributions she made, and the fact that she was lauded upon her death as a pioneer and asset to the State of California, Foley’s life has been largely ignored in the historical literature. This biography remedies the omission, drawing upon the history of library services, the history of disability, women’s history, the history of Progressive Era California, and the history of state and federal welfare systems to provide context for her life and achievements. Chapters include discussions of the cause of Foley’s blindness, her education at the California School for the Blind, her volunteer teaching work, her career with the California State Library, the early organized blind movement, and the development of social services for blind individuals.

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This thesis would not have been possible without the advice and enthusiasm of my committee chair, Dr. Debra Hansen. I became interested in the topic of library services to blind readers after researching the National Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped for a class on the history of books and libraries taught by Dr. Hansen and her colleague Dr. Linda Main. During the course of my research, I repeatedly came across the name of Kate Foley, home teacher of the blind in California, in primary sources. Dr. Hansen encouraged me to investigate Foley further as a potential topic for a master's thesis and has provided unfailing support throughout the process.

I would also like to thank Dr. Anthony Bernier and Elizabeth Wrenn-Estes for agreeing to serve as committee members and for taking the time to read this thesis and provide invaluable input. Finally, I would like to thank the helpful staff members at the California State Archives, the California History Room at the California State Library, and the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley. This project has given me a newfound appreciation and respect for archives and archivists and their essential role in the preservation of history.

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Introduction

In June of 1887, the California Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, as it was known at the time, held its annual commencement ceremony. Every year the public was invited to attend. This provided superintendent Warring Wilkinson the opportunity to show off the capabilities of his students in front of an audience and thereby demonstrate the efficacy of his administration. The residential school was publicly supported, and Wilkinson was continuously justifying its cost to the state government.

Kate Foley, who was blind, was one of Wilkinson's star pupils and a regular performer at the commencement exercises. She was fourteen years old at the 1887 event, during which she was called upon to demonstrate her impressive skill in both reading by touch and typewriting. According to the article in the *Oakland Tribune*, Foley first read a page from a raised type publication of *A Tale of Two Cities* in a "clear, musical voice." A handkerchief was then placed across the page, "and the girl read the lines with the same facility." The handkerchief was folded, and Foley's "fingers still interpreted the form of the letters" through the fabric. "Again and again was the linen folded," the reporter continued, "until six thicknesses covered the letters, and the girl continued to read." When it had been folded four times, she read yet again, "[drawing] the cloth very tight with her right hand and [pressing] hard with her left," eliciting "the wonder and admiration of the audience" and "the surprise of a newspaper man, who asked several doubting questions."¹

1. "They Are Silent," *Oakland Tribune*, June 8, 1887.

Later in the program, Foley recited a poem from memory with another student and then demonstrated “some remarkably rapid typewriting” during which she “wrote a letter to the audience stating that it was her desire to earn her living by this work.”² Although Foley was not able to obtain employment as a typist when she graduated—despite the fact that it was a burgeoning professional field for women, she found that no one was willing to hire a blind woman—she later credited her ability to speak persuasively in front of an audience to Wilkinson and the public performances that she participated in each June as a student.³

Born in 1873, Foley became blind during early infancy. She attended the California School for the Blind from 1880 until 1895, which at the time was the only school for students with visual disabilities in the western United States. Foley was discouraged by the discrimination she encountered when she tried to find work as an adult. She turned to volunteer teaching instead, which she did for nearly twenty years until she was hired in 1914 by the California State Library as home teacher of the blind.⁴ The primary function of her role as home teacher was to instruct other blind adults in reading raised type. Foley had a lengthy and notable career with the state library, retiring shortly before her death in 1940. She was a lifelong advocate for civil rights and social

2. Ibid.

3. Kate M. Foley, *Five Lectures on Blindness* (Sacramento, CA: California State Printing Office), 10; Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 8 April 1918, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 799, California State Archives, Sacramento, CA [hereafter referred to as CSA].

4. Foley, *Five Lectures*, 10.

services for visually disabled persons. Her work spanned library services, social work, public education, and public health.

This biography evaluates the specific challenges that Foley faced as a woman with a visual disability and demonstrates how she achieved agency during a time when blind individuals experienced significant discrimination and prejudice. Foley essentially took advantage her blindness to pioneer a new professional field in rehabilitation services for disabled persons. Key factors that enabled her to do so included the supportive relationships she had, the education she received, the popularity of women's voluntarism, the growth of state and federal welfare, and the interest of the California State Library in providing services to blind residents. These elements together provided a foundation for the successful career trajectory of an intelligent and determined individual who was both visually disabled and an amputee.

Foley became blind when she was two weeks old due to a bacterial infection known as ophthalmia neonatorum, or "babies' sore eyes." This infection was the most common cause of childhood blindness in the nineteenth century. There were no effective treatments available. The use of silver nitrate drops in newborn babies' eyes as a prophylactic was developed in the 1880s in Europe but was not employed regularly in the United States until the early decades of the twentieth century.⁵

5. Diane D. Edwards, "Microbiology of the Eye and Ophthalmia," in *The History of Ophthalmology*, ed. Daniel M. Albert and Diane D. Edwards (Boston: Blackwell Science, 1996), 158; Adela Matejcek and Ron D. Goldman, "Treatment and Prevention of Ophthalmia Neonatorum," *Canadian Family Physician* 59 (November 2013): 1187-90; Antonio Alberto Zuppa et al., "Ophthalmia Neonatorum: What Kind of Prophylaxis?," *Journal of Maternal-Fetal and Neonatal Medicine* 24, no. 6 (June 2011): 769-73, doi:10.3109/14767058.2010.531326 (accessed October 2, 2015).

Traditionally blindness was considered a tragic affliction that rendered people helpless and dependent. This pervasive stereotype contributed to profound sexual and vocational discrimination. Blind adults were considered undesirable marriage partners and few careers were open to them. Blind individuals confronted barriers to literacy due to lack of educational opportunities and the scarcity of reading material in raised type print. Limitations around mobility and transportation restricted independence. Foley later described this situation as “enforced idleness.”⁶ It kept blind individuals from fully participating in and enjoying marriage and family life, financial independence, intellectual stimulation, and mobility.

Foley experienced this herself after leaving the school in Berkeley and moving to Los Angeles, where she was frustrated by the lack of opportunities available to her. At the time the most suitable role for a woman, as Foley herself stated in her commencement speech, was to be a wife and mother.⁷ However, blind and other disabled women contended with considerable sexual discrimination. Women who became blind in childhood had lower rates of marriage than sighted women or blind men. Social Darwinism fed concerns over hereditary disability, and blind women were deemed unfit to keep house or raise children.⁸

6. Foley, *Five Lectures*, 27.

7. “Sightless and Dumb,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 12, 1895.

8. Catherine Kudlick, “Modernity’s Miss-Fits: Blind Girls and Marriage in France and America, 1820-1920,” in *Women on Their Own: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Being Single*, ed. Rudolph M. Bell and Virginia Yans (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 205-206; Deborah M. Allen, “Desire Denied: A Bibliographic Overview of Sexual Inequality and Blind Women,” *McNair Scholars Research Journal* 2, no. 1 (2006), accessed January 8, 2016, http://scholarworks.boisestate.edu/mcnair_journal/vol2/iss1/4; United States Department

The majority of occupations were closed to blind women as well. For an educated blind woman such as Foley in the late nineteenth century, the two professional careers available were in music or teaching at a school for the blind. Although Foley was a skilled typist, she was unable to find a job in the burgeoning clerical field. She began volunteer teaching to give her life a sense of purpose. Voluntarism was a common occupation for middle-class women in the United States in the nineteenth century, who became involved in causes such as abolition, temperance, and suffrage and who began to participate more fully in the public sphere.⁹ Foley did not challenge societal norms to escape “enforced idleness.” Her role as volunteer teacher was a suitable occupation for an unmarried, middle-class, visually disabled woman.

Foley’s success as a volunteer teacher led eventually to her professional career with the California State Library, where the influence of progressivism created a flourishing environment for the implementation of library extension services, such as traveling libraries.¹⁰ The California State Library’s Books for the Blind division was established in 1904 as part of its Extension Department. In order to meet the library’s objective of ensuring that all residents of the state, including blind residents, were able to take advantage of library services, it was deemed necessary to hire a home teacher to

of Commerce, *The Blind in the United States, 1910* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917), 56-61, 95.

9. Anne Firor Scott, “Women’s Voluntary Associations: From Charity to Reform,” in *Lady Bountiful Revisited: Women, Philanthropy, and Power*, ed. Kathleen D. McCarthy (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 37-42; Glenna Matthews, *The Rise of Public Woman: Woman’s Power and Woman’s Place in the United States, 1630-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 93-112.

10. Hannah Josephine Kunkle, “A Historical Study of the Extension Activities of the California State Library with Particular Emphasis on Its Role in Rural Library Development, 1850-1966” (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1969), 117.

provide instruction on reading raised type.¹¹ Foley had consulted the department informally for a number of years before she was offered a paid position in 1914. She was based in the Los Angeles area where she lived with her mother and sister, without whose support her career may not have been feasible.

Foley underwent a period of personal and professional adversity beginning in 1917 when she was transferred from Los Angeles to work as home teacher the San Francisco Bay Area. The sources of her troubles included issues regarding transportation and mobility, an ongoing professional rivalry, and the nationwide shift toward conservatism. Firstly, Foley had to navigate a new environment with less family support. Her mother was in poor health, and Foley's sister needed to remain at home to care for her. As a result Foley had to locate and pay for guides to accompany her throughout the Bay Area, and securing the services of a reliable guide proved to be perpetually challenging. Secondly, Foley faced intense hostility from a professional rival, a fellow home teacher; given the dearth of career opportunities for blind women, both felt threatened by the other.¹²

Finally, Foley was affected by the growing conservatism of the country after World War I in various ways. The social Darwinism of the Progressive Era evolved into the eugenics movement in the 1920s as the state sought to eliminate, or at least control, disability. World War I contributed to an increase in nationalism that fostered anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic sentiments, which Foley, as the child of Irish-Catholic

11. California State Library, *Biennial Report of the Trustees of the California State Library* (Sacramento, CA: State Printing Office, 1914), 11.

12. United States Department of Commerce, *The Blind*, 61-62.

immigrants, experienced directly. The enthusiasm for social reform associated with progressivism receded. Foley's position as home teacher was temporarily eliminated in 1923 when the new conservative governor of California slashed the state's budget.¹³

As this thesis will demonstrate, Foley persevered during this difficult period by taking advantage of the successful professional relationships that she forged and the status that she attained through her constant public speaking work and travel. She was a popular lecturer, and she developed a national reputation by traveling to various conventions and participating in national organizations such as the American Association of Workers for the Blind (AAWB). In appealing to the public, she used language that was congruent with dominant values. She established valuable connections with prominent figures in public health, public education, and state government and drew upon these relationships to have her position at the state library reinstated by the state's Board of Control in late 1923. She also worked in conjunction with other social agencies and institutions to expand state control over the lives of other blind persons, through public education, public health, and social services, and sought to delineate a sharp contrast between state work and charity work.

A biography of Foley expounds upon the history of library services during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly the development of both library services and social services for disabled individuals. It also illustrates attitudes toward disability and the specific barriers, such as illiteracy, faced by disabled persons during

13. James J. Rawls and Walton Bean, *California: An Interpretive History* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 275.

this time. Analyzing how a turn-of-the-century blind woman achieved agency despite intense discrimination enhances the limited historiography of blindness in the United States, which has focused on a very small number of blind individuals and their primarily sighted educators.

Writing Foley's biography prompted an array of research questions: firstly, how were Foley's life and career circumscribed by her experiences as a woman who was also disabled, and how did she both conform to and act against society's expectations of disability? What forces and events led to the California State Library's decision to include home teaching among its services? How did Foley's work contribute to the lives of other blind individuals, and in what ways did she both reinforce and challenge social stereotypes regarding disability? What was her relationship to the institutions that dominated discussions on blindness? What was her impact on the development of the field later known as vision rehabilitation services? And, finally, the central research query: how did Foley contend with the challenges she faced as a disabled woman in order to pioneer a new professional field?

Uncovering the answers to these questions was a fruitful exercise that yielded a voluminous quantity of information on the history of library services for blind persons, women's voluntarism, the history of the Progressive Era (especially in California), and the history of social services. Foley herself was revealed, from the frustration that she experienced to the satisfaction that she derived from her professional achievements. She provided a voice for a community of people who had largely been spoken for by sighted educators and medical specialists. Foley built a successful career at the California State

Library and distinguished home teaching as a profession distinct from charity work. As a disabled woman, her opportunities to become educated, to work, to marry, and to take part in civic life were limited. A combination of factors—including family support, literacy, voluntarism, progressivism, and the emergent state welfare bureaucracy—facilitated Foley’s success as home teacher.

Historiography

Despite evidence of activism among librarians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries regarding the delivery of library services to blind persons, this topic has received scant attention. The historical literature that is available tends to be buried in individual chapters in works with a broader focus or found in a handful of theses and dissertations. For example, *That All May Read: Library Service for Blind and Physically Handicapped People*, published by the National Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped in 1983, contains two brief historical essays. There are also no scholarly historical studies of librarians that were blind, such as Gertrude Rider or Adelia Hoyt, both of whom were influential in the development of the National Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped and yet, like Foley, only receive passing mention in secondary sources. A biography of Foley augments the scarce amount of historical literature on both visual disabilities in general and library services to blind patrons.

Due to the limited information available, the following review will evaluate the historiography of blindness in the United States in order to situate the founding of library services for the blind and physically handicapped, and Foley’s home teaching work, in context. Two distinct, yet overlapping, approaches characterize this historiography. The

first phase of historical discussions of blindness were tightly controlled by institutions, such as residential schools and the American Foundation of the Blind (AFB). The second phase, which originated during the mid-twentieth century, has been heavily influenced by the modern disability rights movement and has sought to expand upon and critique the previous phase.

The institutional approach dominated the historical literature on blindness throughout the twentieth century. This early history was primarily written by sighted educators at residential schools for blind students. Experts in sociology and medicine also contributed to historical literature, as did the American Foundation of the Blind (AFB), which became the predominant organization for blind people in the United States after its founding in the early 1920s. Biographical works on blind people were limited to a small number of individuals, such as Louis Braille and Helen Keller.

During the first phase of the historiography of blindness in the United States, people with visual disabilities were generally lumped together and referred to as “the blind”: a nameless, faceless group devoid of individual experiences and agency. Blindness was a problem to be solved. It rendered men and women unfit for both work and reproduction and was thus a burden to the state, as social scientist Harry Best asserted in 1919 in *The Blind: Their Condition and the Work Being Done for Them in the United States*.¹⁴ The history of blindness was conceived of as a linear progression from a state of “darkness” to a state of “enlightenment” in which blind persons were increasingly integrated into a sighted society. The elimination or minimization of blindness could be

14. Harry Best, *The Blind: Their Condition and the Work Being Done for Them in the United States* (New York: MacMillan, 1919), 92-93.

achieved through scientific advances and literacy.

One of the earliest historical works commissioned by the AFB on blindness was Richard Slayton French's *From Homer to Helen Keller*, published in 1932. French served as principal of Foley's alma mater, the California School for the Blind, and taught education at the University of California. Not surprisingly, his chapters on the development of schools for the blind over the course of the nineteenth century reaffirmed the primacy and authority of institutions and the "splendid men and women whose devotion has forwarded the work for the blind in America to its present degree of efficiency."¹⁵ French's work set forth the predominant themes of the history of blindness: the founding of schools for blind students, the invention of raised type printing, and the development of state-supported institutions.¹⁶ Historical discussions of blindness in the United States rarely veered from these topics.

Like other professionals involved in educating blind persons during this time period, French strongly reinforced limiting stereotypes. He conveyed a patronizing attitude toward the possibility of marriage between blind individuals that exhibited contemporary concerns about eugenics. "A blind man in his right mind is not going to contract marriage with a blind woman," he wrote, "and if he is not in his right mind, then he has no right to be married."¹⁷ In one of his book's chapters, titled "Gropings Toward the Light," French described the history of blindness as a trajectory. The mechanism of education delivered blind persons from a pathetic state of "groping" about in the darkness

15. Richard Slayton French, *From Homer to Helen Keller* (New York: American Foundation for the Blind, 1932), 121.

16. *Ibid.*, 123-24.

17. *Ibid.*, 229.

and enabled their integration into a sighted society. The use of these types of metaphors regarding darkness and light, with all of their social Darwinist implications, were rife.

The pattern of institution-sponsored historical writing on blindness continued for several decades. In the preface to his 1956 work, *The Story of Blindness*, Gabriel Farrell, who was director of the Perkins School for the Blind from 1931 to 1951, noted that “there may seem to be a tendency to refer too often to the school with which I was associated,” which he deemed a matter of “authority” rather than “impartiality.”¹⁸ Farrell did not depart from the standard historiography, again covering the history of schools for blind persons and the invention of braille. Like French twenty years earlier, Farrell expressed concern for hereditary blindness, writing that it would be eliminated “if those whose blindness is of that nature would refrain from the bearing of children.”¹⁹

The eugenics movement ceased to be influential by the middle of the twentieth century, and by the 1970s historical works on blindness portrayed blind people in a more positive manner. However, the benefits of integration and rehabilitation remained strongly entrenched in historical discussions. For example, in 1975 Berthold Lowenfeld, former superintendent of the California School for the Blind, published *The Changing Status of the Blind: From Separation to Integration*. In the preface he described the book as “the story of the ascent of one minority group” (and somewhat defensively justified his persistent use of generalizations about “the blind,” writing, “[I] expect some objections

18. Gabriel Farrell, *The Story of Blindness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), vi.

19. *Ibid.*, 232.

from some quarters”).²⁰ According to Lowenfeld, the factors that made integration possible included education, rehabilitation, innovations such as raised type and the use of guide dogs, state and federal legislation, and the activism of organizations of blind persons.²¹

Also in the 1970s, the AFB commissioned the most comprehensive history of blindness in the United States to date, Frances Koestler’s seminal work, *The Unseen Minority: A Social History of Blindness*. Updated with a revised introduction in 2004, Koestler’s book is the most comprehensive history of blindness in the United States and is cited frequently by scholars (even though Koestler herself was a journalist and not an academic historian). Koestler did not depart from the standard tropes of the founding of schools, the invention of raised type, and the development of federal and state programs, but her book is far more thorough and detailed than other works and contains extensive discussion of library service for blind readers, including home teaching.

Koestler’s writing reflected the social changes that occurred during the 1960s, particularly in regards to sexuality and race. Unlike French and Farrell, she wrote critically of the eugenics movement in the early twentieth century. She also noted racial disparity in schools and other services for blind people, an important but neglected topic.²² Finally, Koestler alluded briefly to Helen Keller’s involvement in socialism, a fact that was suppressed during the Cold War Era (although she attributed it to the

20. Berthold Lowenfeld, *The Changing Status of the Blind: From Separation to Integration* (Springfield, IL: Thomas, 1975), vii-viii.

21. *Ibid.*,

22. Frances Koestler, *The Unseen Minority: A Social History of Blindness* (New York: American Federation for the Blind, 1976), 455-56.

influence of Anne Sullivan's husband, John Macy, rather than to Keller herself).²³

Prior to the publishing of Koestler's book, a significant shift began to occur in the historiography of blindness, leading to the second phase of historical writing on visual disabilities. This phase can be characterized by a greater critique of institutionalism, the consideration of disability as a social construct, the identification of agency among blind individuals, and more complex and nuanced historical analysis.

Hope Deferred: Public Welfare and the Blind, written by Floyd Matson and Jacobus tenBroek and published in 1959, offered one of the first critiques of institutionalism and was influential in later discussions of disability. TenBroek, who attended the California School for the Blind beginning in 1919 and was mentored by Foley's former classmate Newel Perry, was the founder of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB). The NFB (like the early American Association of Workers for the Blind, of which Foley was a member) was intended to be an organization consisting primarily of blind persons advocating for other blind persons. The NFB frequently found itself in conflict with other organizations, such as the AFB, as to what was considered best for blind people.²⁴

A constitutional law scholar and social welfare reformer, tenBroek became involved in the civil rights movement of the 1960s while teaching at the University of California at Berkeley and was one of the first to articulate the concept of civil rights for disabled persons. In *Hope Deferred* he decried the continued influence of "poor laws" on

23. Ibid., 60.

24. Kenneth Jernigan, "Shifting Balances in the Blindness Field" (address delivered to the National Federation of the Blind annual convention Charlotte, NC, July 2, 1992); Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 560-63.

the development of social welfare policy during the Progressive Era, noting that the blind assistance laws developed in the early twentieth century “represented at best only a slight modification of poor law theory and practice . . . the recipient of aid was still subject to the discretionary whim of the modern counterpart of the overseer.”²⁵

Another important transition in the historiography of blind and other disabled persons occurred with the introduction of the idea of disability as a culturally dependent social construct, rather than an inherent physical condition. The concept of blindness as a “learned social role” was introduced by sociologist Robert A. Scott in 1969 in *The Making of Blind Men: A Study of Adult Socialization*.²⁶ This concept was further elucidated in Jacques Henri Stiker’s groundbreaking *A History of Disability*, first published in 1982. Stiker questioned the liberal tendency to value integration and normalization. He used Michel Foucault’s philosophy as a starting point to examine disability from an historical-anthropological perspective, writing, “There is no disability . . . outside precise social and cultural constructions; there is no attitude toward disability outside a series of societal references and constructs.”²⁷

These works by tenBroek, Scott, and Stiker inspired some historians to present disability as a category of historical analysis comparable to—and as critical as—gender, race, and class. The modern disability rights movement, which was fueled by the civil rights movement of the 1960s, sought to establish disabled persons as actors in their own

25. Jacobus tenBroek and Floyd W. Matson, *Hope Deferred: Public Welfare and the Blind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 47.

26. Robert A. Scott, *The Making of Blind Men* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1969), 14.

27. Henri Jacques Stiker, trans. William Sayers, *A History of Disability* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1999), 14.

histories rather than as the passive recipients of aid. Paul K. Longmore, who taught at San Francisco State University and founded the Institute of Disability prior to his death in 2010, was particularly influential in the development of disability history as a field of scholarship. *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, which he edited with Lauri Umansky, created a framework for current historical analysis.

The framework outlined by Longmore and Umansky acknowledged the diversity of experiences of people with disabilities throughout history while maintaining that “cultural devaluation and socially imposed restrictions” were common to all disabled groups.²⁸ Longmore and Umansky called for historians to consider power relationships and access to resources in their analyses, and to broaden approaches beyond a dominant medical perspective in which disabled persons occupy a passive role.²⁹ As Catherine Kudlick, the current director of the Institute of Disability and one of the few historians writing about blindness, noted, historical discussions of disability have been limited to “unglamorous backwaters primarily of interest to people in rehabilitation, special education, and other applied professional fields.”³⁰ Longmore and Umansky posited that fear has kept historians from addressing disability beyond these contexts, despite the fact that rich and varied primary source material exists on disability, touching on nearly all aspects of United States history, from immigration to labor.³¹ In his essay, “Disability and the

28. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, “Introduction: Disability History: From the Margins to the Mainstream,” in *The New Disability History*, ed. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 4.

29. *Ibid.*, 5-8.

30. Catherine J. Kudlick, “Disability History: Why We Need Another ‘Other,’” *American Historical Review* 108 (June 2003): 765.

31. Longmore and Umansky, “Introduction: Disability History,” 2-3, 6-7.

Justification of Inequality in American History,” Douglas C. Baynton made the critical observation that “disability is everywhere in history, once you begin looking for it, but conspicuously absent in the histories we write.”³² This omission has created meaningful opportunities for historians to contribute to and enhance a narrow historiography.

One of the most salient changes in historical approaches to the topic of blindness has been the critiquing of the role of institutions and public policy. In *Why I Burned My Book*, Longmore, who was disabled as a result of childhood polio, explained his personal frustrations with social services for disabled persons, drawing on tenBroek and Matson’s earlier critique of the welfare system.³³ Other works that have addressed the problematic relationships between blind individuals and institutions include Mary Klages’s *Woeful Sentiment: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America* and Nielsen’s *The Radical Lives of Helen Keller*.

Two publications by historian Kudlick provide noteworthy examples of a more nuanced and complex interpretation of the experience of blindness. In her article “The Outlook of *The Problem* and the Problem with the *Outlook*: Two Advocacy Journals Reinvent Blind People in Turn-of-the-Century America,” Kudlick outlined the struggle between organizations *of* the blind and organizations *for* the blind in what is quite possibly the most nuanced interpretation of blindness during the Progressive Era to date. “Scrutinizing the publications’ role in creating an image and identity for blind people also

32. Douglas C. Baynton, “Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History,” in *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, ed. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 52.

33. Paul K. Longmore, *Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays on Disability* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2003), 241-42.

raises broader questions about how studying disability can help scholars explain more fully turn-of-the-century ideas about identity, community, and politics,” Kudlick wrote.³⁴ Kudlick also authored an essay exploring historical issues regarding sexuality and marriage for blind women, titled “Modernity’s Miss-Fits: Blind Girls and Marriage in France and America, 1820-1920,” and published in *Women on Their Own: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Being Single*. This important topic was not adequately addressed in earlier literature, having been limited to references to the dangers of hereditary blindness. By comparing and contrasting the individual experiences of a French and an American blind woman through their own writings, Kudlick emphasized individual agency.

In summary, the nascent field of disability history has created new opportunities for the historical analysis of blindness during the Progressive Era. With the advent of disability history, the social construct of blindness—which was both related to and distinct from others forms of disability—can be examined more critically, and previously marginalized individuals can be brought into historical discussions in a more meaningful way. The complexities of Foley’s life as a disabled female library worker present an opportunity to analyze the social attitudes and institutions of the Progressive Era and post-World War I periods and enable a deeper understanding of library history, women’s history, and disability history.

The relationship between library service and disability is not simply important from

34. Catherine J. Kudlick, “The Outlook of *The Problem* and the Problem with the *Outlook*: Two Advocacy Journals Reinvent Blind People in Turn-of-the-Century America,” ed. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, *The New Disability History* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 192.

a historical perspective, but also provides implications for the present and future.

Technological advances have enabled the library to provide information in new formats more rapidly, to more people, while legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has reshaped the physical form of the library. Delivering services equitably to blind and disabled individuals continues to be a critical part of the library's mission. As a white, middle-class, literate woman, Foley benefitted from certain advantages that other disabled persons did not. Historians writing in the future may find additional opportunities to bring topics of racial and economic inequality into the literature and further broaden historical discussions of disability.

Methodology

Despite the fact that Foley was a fairly well-known figure during her time in the state of California—her name appears frequently in searches of newspaper archives, she spoke on the radio regularly, she served on various boards and committees, and she was an associate or family member of other prominent residents of the state—her contributions as home teacher and activist receive only brief mention in secondary historical works. Fortunately, a wide range of primary source material exists in order to document her life and fill this gap in the historical literature, including manuscript collections, official reports, newsletters, conference proceedings, vital records, census data, and newspaper articles.

One of the most critical primary sources used in this research were the letters that Foley wrote to her superiors at the California State Library, including James Gillis, Mabel Gillis, and Milton Ferguson. These letters are located in the Home Teacher of the

Blind files, which are part of the State Library Records housed at the California State Archives. These files contain voluminous correspondence, with the years 1916-1924 especially well documented. Foley wrote multiple times per week during this period. She detailed her personal struggles as well as her work. Aspects of her personality, particularly her strong opinions and sense of humor, emerge through these letters.

The manuscript collection of Warring Wilkinson, former principal of the California School for the Blind, proved to be a second essential source. This collection, which is stored at the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, includes several letters that Foley wrote to Wilkinson, as well as a substantial amount of information pertinent to the time she attended the school, such as newspaper scrapbooks, letters from students and colleagues, student publications, and Wilkinson's speeches. One of the most unique finds in this collection was a composition that Foley wrote when she was twelve years old, titled "The Advantages and Disadvantages of Blindness."

Published conference proceedings and other speeches given by Foley proved to be rich primary sources. In particular, a series of lectures that that Foley gave at the University of California during the summer of 1919, which were later published by the state library with the title *Five Lectures on Blindness*, provided invaluable details on Foley's early childhood experiences as well as her work. Foley spoke about home teaching at the California Library Association annual meetings and the American Association of Workers for the Blind biennial conventions, both of which published their proceedings.

Archived newspapers include interviews with and articles about Foley, announcements of her public speaking engagements, obituaries of her and her family members, and descriptions of the commencement exercises at the California School for the Blind, in which she is regularly mentioned. Foley's name appears in issues of the *Los Angeles Times*, the *San Francisco Bulletin*, the *Oakland Tribune*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the *Los Angeles Herald*, among other state publications.

Library publications from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as *Library Journal*, addressed the topic of library extension services frequently. These publications were used to document the history of these services, including home teaching for blind patrons. The California State Library's newsletter, *News Notes of California Libraries*, was a particularly valuable source of data on Foley's professional activities. It provided quarterly updates on Foley's work for the duration of her career at the state library, including statistics on number of pupils visited, number of public addresses given, etc. In addition, publications for and about blind persons, such as *Outlook for the Blind*, offered historical context on the experience of blindness.

Official reports—such as a series of trustees' reports from the California State Library that were published every two years throughout Foley's career—proved useful in providing details such as salary information. The California School for the Blind issued regular reports to the state legislature that described what the curriculum covered, the physical layout of the campus, and the key issues faced by the administration.

Other primary sources consulted were vital records on Foley and her extensive Irish-American family; census data to support overviews of the employment and

marriage rates of blind adults; publications by Foley's colleagues, such as Mabel Gillis and Laura Steffens Suggett; and records from clubwomen on the history of traveling libraries.

Summary

Foley devoted her life to what she referred to as "the Cause."³⁵ Her achievements were multiple: she increased literacy for blind adults and children both within the state of California and outside of it, she spoke out against stereotypes and discrimination and advocated for equal opportunities and social services for other visually disabled persons, and she was fundamental in establishing the professional field of vision rehabilitation services.

Foley was removed from her family at a young age and placed in an institutional environment. When she graduated from school and tried to find a job she discovered that no one was willing to hire a blind woman. She conformed to societal expectations of disability and sexuality and did not marry nor have children, and she engaged in unpaid volunteer work for twenty years before the California State Library hired her in 1914. Although her career was occasionally tumultuous, she managed to carve a niche for herself as state home teacher. She wasn't the first to occupy the position, but she was the first to comprehensively document the nature of the profession. She became nationally known for her work over the duration of the twenty-six years that she was employed by the state library.

35. Foley used this phrase in multiple letters. For example, see Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 29 December 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA.

Foley was fortunate to have a supportive family that assisted her in achieving her professional goals. She also took advantage of her education in order to work in the new field of state-supported home teaching, one of the rare vocations open to blind women. Progressive library leaders such as the Gillises adopted library extension services, such as circulating books to blind patrons, and in this environment social services were readily implemented by the state. The welfare system grew larger and more centralized. Budget reductions enacted by California's new conservative governor in the 1920s resulted in the brief elimination of Foley's position as home teacher, but she was quickly reinstated.³⁶ She had built a reputation and her work for the state was valued.

This thesis draws together library history, disability history, and women's history, and incorporates the histories of progressivism, the state of California, and the development of the welfare system. The next chapter presents what is known about Foley's early life and family and provides context for the experience of blindness in the nineteenth century. Subsequent chapters address Foley's education at the California School for the Blind, her voluntarism, her early career with the state library in Los Angeles, and her transition to San Francisco. Foley was a fascinating figure whose rich life allows for a historical analysis that is highly relevant. Many of the issues addressed in the following pages—such as literacy and access, independence and mobility, technology, sexual and vocational discrimination, the delivery of social services, and the welfare state—continue to be impactful in the lives of people with disabilities today.

36. "Revised Practice," *News Notes of California Libraries* 18, no. 3 (July 1923), 288; "Home Teaching," *News Notes of California Libraries* 19, no. 1 (January 1924), 49.

Chapter 1

“A Severe Cold in the Eyes”: Kate Foley’s Early Years, 1873-1880

During the nineteenth century the lives of blind individuals fell increasingly under the control of medical and educational professionals. Schools and libraries for blind persons were founded in the United States and literacy was enabled by the invention of raised type printing. Medical advances led to the development of ophthalmology as a medical specialty. Concern over eye health intensified as a result of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. Employment opportunities were extremely limited and rates of unemployment and poverty among those with visual disabilities were high. Blind people, particularly women, encountered significant sexual discrimination. Stereotypes were far-reaching and frequently ugly. These were the challenges that Kate Foley faced when she became blind as a young infant. This chapter introduces Foley’s family, discusses the cause of her disability, and attempts to place her early life in context by describing the experience of blindness in the nineteenth century.

Foley was born on May 26, 1873, in East Saint Louis, Illinois, a growing industrial center located on the other side of the Mississippi River from Saint Louis, Missouri. She was the third child of Bridget Dunn Foley and her husband James Foley. Their daughter Alice was born in 1870, followed by son John in 1872. Foley was baptized at St. Patrick’s Church in East St. Louis.¹ Approximately two weeks later she

1. St. Patrick Church Baptisms, 1861-1889, Diocese of Belleville, Catholic Parish Records, 1729-1956, Catholic Church of Southern Illinois, Belleville, accessed October 2, 2015, familysearch.org.

was blind, the result of a pernicious bacterial infection known as ophthalmia neonatorum. At the time, this infection was the most common cause of childhood blindness.²

Foley's parents immigrated to the United States from Ireland. Her mother, Bridget Dunn Foley, arrived on the ship *General Dunlap* in March 1852 as a three-year-old with her parents, Owen and Alice Dunn, and seven siblings.³ The Dunns and their children were originally from County Cavan, Ireland, in the province of Ulster.⁴ According to Kerby A. Miller, author of *Emigrants and Exiles*, County Cavan was among the most "impoverished" and "overcrowded" counties in the northern part of the country.⁵

The Dunns were in many ways typical of an Irish-American immigrant family. After emigrating from Ireland they settled in Albany, New York, an area that swelled with Irish newcomers. Between 1830 and 1855, the number of Irish in Albany grew from 2000 to over 23,000, or 40 percent of the total population. Railroads, stockyards, foundries, and lumber mills provided abundant jobs.⁶ Despite coming from a farming background, Owen Dunn was listed as a laborer in the 1855 and 1865 censuses.⁷ Like most of his compatriots, he did not turn to farming in the United States. Purchasing land

2. Edwards, "Microbiology of the Eye," 158; Matejcek and Goldman, "Treatment and Prevention," 1187-90; Zuppa et al., "Ophthalmia Neonatorum," 769-73.

3. New York, Passenger Lists, 1820-1957, Records of the U.S. Customs Service, 1745-1997, Record Group 36, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C., accessed October 2, 2015, ancestry.com.

4. "John P. Dunn Dies Suddenly," *Los Angeles Herald*, May 30, 1906.

5. Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 198.

6. William E. Rowley, "The Irish Aristocracy of Albany, 1798-1878," *New York History* 52, no. 3 (July 1971): 284, 289.

7. Census of the State of New York, for 1855, New York State Archives, Albany, accessed October 2, 2015, ancestry.com.

was expensive, while jobs were readily available in cities. Furthermore, Irish-American social networks were strong, and immigrants tended to prefer to live together in urban areas rather than isolated on farms.⁸ Like most of the Irish who immigrated during the middle of the nineteenth century, the Dunns were Catholic. They contributed to an expansion of Roman Catholicism in the United States that made it the country's largest denomination by 1850.⁹

The family was probably poor, like many first-generation Irish Americans; census records show that their house was modest compared to their neighbors' despite the large size of the family.¹⁰ Only about half of the Irish immigrants in New York were unskilled laborers (the other 50 percent held skilled, business, or professional positions), but they tended to be poorer than their British or German counterparts.¹¹ Historians of Irish Americans have described two conflicting aspects of immigrant life in the United States. On one hand, Irish newcomers met with significant prejudice: they were portrayed as drunkards and criminals, they faced employment discrimination, and they were subjected to the virulent xenophobia of nativist political movements. However, many Irish Americans were eventually able to benefit from a high degree of social mobility.¹²

8. Jay P. Dolan, *The Irish Americans: A History* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008), 85.

9. *Ibid.*, 110; Lawrence John McCaffrey, *The Irish Catholic Diaspora in America* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 65.

10. Census of the State of New York, for 1855, microfilm, New York State Archives, Albany, accessed October 2, 2015, ancestry.com.

11. Rowley, "Irish Aristocracy of Albany," 287; Dolan, *Irish Americans*, 87.

12. The assimilation and social mobility of Irish Americans has been well covered by historians. See Kevin Kenny, "Twenty Years of Irish American Historiography," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 28, no. 4 (Summer 2009): 67-75, for an overview of scholarship.

Despite efforts, little information has been discovered about Foley's father, James, and it is not known when the couple migrated to East St. Louis from New York or under what circumstances. Railroad work drew many men westward of whom the Irish made up a significant proportion. From 1850 to 1880, the number of Irish living outside northeastern cities grew from 22 percent to 36 percent of the total population.¹³ East St. Louis was an industrial suburb generated by the post-Civil War railroad boom.¹⁴ Commerce and industry flourished in the burgeoning town. The building of the Eads Bridge, a major feat of engineering that linked the western and eastern banks of the Mississippi River, began in 1867 and was completed in 1874. In addition, East St. Louis boasted of a grain elevator and a huge stockyard that opened in 1873. A contemporary writer noted the abundance of "cheap labor."¹⁵

Foley was born during a turbulent year. The Panic of 1873 in September initiated the Long Recession, which closed the New York Stock Exchange and bankrupted the entire railroad industry, affecting life in East St. Louis as well as the rest of the United States. For the Foleys, however, the latter half of 1873 must have been marked primarily by concern for their infant daughter and her eyes.

13. Patrick Joseph Blessing, "West Among Strangers: Irish Migration to California, 1850 to 1880" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1977), 163-65.

14. Andrew J. Theising and Debra H. Moore, *Made in USA: East St. Louis, the Rise and Fall of an Industrial River Town* (St. Louis, MO: Virginia Publishing, 2003), 7, 11.

15. Robert A. Tyson, *History of East St. Louis: its Resources, Statistics, Railroads, Physical Features, Business and Advantages* (East St. Louis, IL: John Haps & Co, National Stockyards, 1875), 90.

Ophthalmia neonatorum (also known as “purulent conjunctivitis” in the medical literature of the time, or commonly as “babies’ sore eyes”) is an eye infection caused by different types of bacteria. The bacteria are transmitted to the newborn via the mother during birth. In the nineteenth century, the bacterium responsible for the most severe ophthalmia was *N. gonorrhoeae*.¹⁶ At the time of Foley’s birth there were no truly effective ways to prevent or treat the infection.

Ophthalmias in both youth and adults were extremely common throughout history. Ancient texts contain references to them; half of the 237 remedies in the Ebers papyrus from 1500 BCE were for eye treatments.¹⁷ The connection between maternal infections and eye infections in newborns was first noted in the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁸ However, initial medical investigations into the infection, which occurred before the advent of bacteriology, did little to promote widespread understanding or effective treatment. As Nancy S. Dye pointed out in her study of the history of childbirth, in the nineteenth century medical advances were not necessarily adopted by day-to-day practitioners.¹⁹

16. Edwards, “Microbiology of the Eye,” 158; Zuppa et al., “Ophthalmia Neonatorum,” 770.

17. Edwards, “Microbiology of the Eye,” 147.

18. Thomas G. Benedek, “Gonorrhea and the Beginnings of Clinical Research Ethics,” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 48, no. 1 (2005): 54-73, doi:10.1353/pbm.2005.000356 (accessed October 2, 2015); C. A. Smith and Laura Halse, “Ophthalmia Neonatorum,” *Public Health Reports* 70, no. 5 (May 1955): 462-70, 463; Edwards, “Microbiology of the Eye,” 145, 158.

19. Nancy Schrom Dye, “History of Childbirth in America,” *Signs* 6, no. 1 (1980): 97-108, 102, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173968> (accessed October 2, 2015).

Foley later stated that she became blind when she was two weeks old.²⁰ This is consistent with the type of ophthalmia caused by gonococcal bacteria, which leads to corneal scarring, ulceration, panophthalmitis (i.e. inflammation of the entire structure of the eye), and the rapid rupture of the outer membranes, or globe, of the eye.²¹ Nineteenth-century doctors were distressed by the infection. The rapidity of onset, the degree of suffering, the lack of effective treatments, and the irremediable consequences confounded them. As Dr. Richard H. Lewis, who served as the president of the American Public Health Association, stated emphatically, “[T]he inflammation of the eyes of the newly born is the most destructive to sight of all the diseases of the eye, and consequently, there can be none in that class of more interest to the physician, or more deserving of our careful consideration.”²² Dr. Henry Williams, the first chair of the ophthalmology department at Harvard University, concurred, noting that the potential for corneal ulceration made this infection “a source of great anxiety to even those of most experience.”²³

It was a painful condition. “The child suffers greatly, is fretful and uneasy, and can not sleep,” wrote one physician in an 1876 medical journal.²⁴ Likely Foley’s worried mother turned to whatever remedies were at hand—breast milk, for example, a tried and

20. “Books for the Blind,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 1, no. 6 (October 1906): 299.

21. Matejcek and Goldman, “Treatment and Prevention,” 1189.

22. Richard H. Lewis, M.D., “Ophthalmia Neonatorum,” *North Carolina Medical Journal* 3, no. 3 (March 1879): 136.

23. Henry W. Williams, M.D., *Our Eyes, and How to Take Care of Them* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1871), accessed October 2, 2015, <https://archive.org/details/oureyesandhowto03willgoog>, 81.

24. Richard C. Brandeis, M.D., “Purulent Ophthalmia of Infants,” *Richmond and Louisville Medical Journal* 22, no. 3 (September 1876): 226.

true method of relieving minor eye infections in babies, or perhaps one of the “receipts” for eye washes, or *collyrium*, that abounded in nineteenth-century manuals for at-home medical care. For example, *Gunn’s New Domestic Physician*, a popular handbook, contained three recipes for eye washes, including the following concoction: “Take Sugar of Lead and Sulphate of Zinc, of each one drachm; common Salt and Loaf Sugar, of each two drachms; Rose Water (or Rain-water), four ounces; let stand and digest four days, then carefully pour off clear. Bathe the eyes and inside of eye-lids with this two or three times a day. Good in all cases of sore or inflamed eyes.”²⁵ Poultices and salves were also recommended by some, though warned against by others. Experts disagreed about what constituted the proper treatment.²⁶

Most people remained skeptical about physicians and hospitals and were more comfortable turning to folk and home remedies.²⁷ Ophthalmologists and other specialists bemoaned the dismissive attitudes and ineffective treatments that they alleged were offered by midwives and family doctors. Dr. Lewis wrote in 1879: “[W]hile the outlook is exceedingly bright and promising if the suitable treatment be used, it is very gloomy if

25. John C. Gunn, *Gunn’s New Domestic Physician, or, Home Book of Health: a Complete Guide for Families, Giving Many Valuable Suggestions for Avoiding Disease and Prolonging Life, and Pointing Out in Familiar Language the Causes, Symptoms, Treatment and Cure of the Diseases Incident to Men, Women and Children: with the Simplest and Best Remedies, also, Describing Minutely the Properties and Uses of Hundreds of Well-known Medicinal Plants* (Cincinnati: Moore, Wiltach, Keys & Co., 1863), 905.

26. For example, Dr. Williams warned against both poultices and applications of “sugar of lead” (which was lead acetate, a white crystalline substance widely used in medicine prior to the twentieth century). See Williams, *Our Eyes*, 82, 89.

27. Peter John Brownlee, “Ophthalmology, Popular Physiology, and the Market Revolution in Vision, 1800–1850,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 28 (Winter 2008): 605–06, 614.

the disease be neglected, as it so often is through the ignorance of parents or midwives, in thinking it a trifling matter, and in relying upon ‘a little mother's milk,’ an ‘alum curd,’ or some such remedy until irreparable damage is done.”²⁸ He urged his fellow doctors to impress upon their patients and the midwives they knew to treat any eye discharge in newborns as though it were serious. Unfortunately, the voices of physicians and other medical specialists dominate the historical record. The lack of sources from parents, midwives, and practitioners of folk medicine limits modern understanding of the experience of the infection during the nineteenth century and the types of treatments that Foley’s parents may have attempted to help their daughter.

Without adequate understanding of the science of bacteriology and the germ theory of disease, which were still in their nascent stages in the 1870s, even trained ophthalmologists could do little to help infants like Foley. A typical treatment method offered by a physician involved removing the pus from the eye every half hour with a “soft rag or brush” and dropping a solution of alum or argent nitrate into the eye every 1-2 hours, with occasional cold compresses.²⁹ It was not until the introduction of prophylactics and antibiotics, however, that ophthalmia neonatorum could be treated reliably.

The connection between gonorrheal infections in mothers and ophthalmias in newborns had been observed, as previously noted, but was not confirmed until Neisser identified the bacterium that causes gonorrhea in 1879. Unaware of the bacterial link,

28. Lewis, “Ophthalmia Neonatorum,” 140-41.

29. S.C. Ayres, M.D., “Ophthalmia Neonatorum,” *The Cincinnati Lancet and Observer* 21 (January 1878): 27-29.

physicians believed that an infection could be triggered by maternal “leucorrhoea,” which (according to *Gunn’s New Domestic Physician*) was caused by factors as varied as “deranged menstruation, cold, want of exercise and fresh air, late hours, exciting reading, company, and conversation, depression of spirits, vicious habits . . . exciting food and drink . . . thin shoes . . . and every thing that weakens or debilitates the system.”³⁰

The “bad air” or “miasmatic” theories of disease persisted into the nineteenth century and, as a result, ophthalmia neonatorum was also blamed on environmental factors such as lighting and temperature changes.³¹ The infection developed a strong association with poverty and immigration. A prominent physician who specialized in eye, ear, and throat diseases, Dr. Richard C. Brandeis, claimed that it was more common among the “the poorer and more ignorant classes.”³² Dr. Lewis blamed the housing conditions of immigrants and African Americans as causes of ophthalmia neonatorum: he named the smoky, dirty air of tenements in the case of the former, and the “cabins of a single room” of the latter that let in too much light when the door was opened.³³ Physicians were unrelenting in their scorn for “ignorant midwives,” who were frequently immigrant or African American women.³⁴ Foley was likely delivered by a midwife, given that women preferred midwife-assisted births up until the 1920s.³⁵

In 1881, when Foley was eight years old, a German physician named Carl Siegmund Franz Credé initiated the practice of applying silver nitrate drops to babies’

30. Gunn, *Gunn’s New Domestic Physician*, 467.

31. Smith and Halse, “Ophthalmia Neonatorum,” 463.

32. Brandeis, “Purulent Ophthalmia of Infants,” 225.

33. Lewis, “Ophthalmia Neonatorum,” 137, 141.

34. Ayres, “Ophthalmia Neonatorum,” 28.

35. Dye, “History of Childbirth in America,” 103.

eyes immediately after delivery. This resulted in the widespread elimination of blindness caused by ophthalmia neonatorum (and will be discussed later in this thesis, as Foley campaigned for its mandated use as an adult). Although silver nitrate was a common longstanding ingredient in various home remedies and medical compounds for the eyes, it was not effective in treating infections that had already taken hold. The adoption of silver nitrate as a prophylaxis in newborns happened slowly, however, as Credé's theory was met with opposition from the medical community.³⁶

Foley later said that she was told she was blind due to “a severe cold in the eyes.”³⁷ This was a phrase that was commonly used—how “a mother or nurse” might describe the infection, as one doctor stated condescendingly.³⁸ The campaign against midwives that began in the nineteenth century and transformed the experience of childbirth in the United States was in large part due to the blame that was assigned to them by physicians and public health officials for two infections: ophthalmia neonatorum and puerperal sepsis.³⁹ However, it has been well documented that physician-assisted hospital births during this period were actually no safer than midwife-assisted home births—and, in some cases, were actually less safe.⁴⁰

36. Smith and Halse, “Ophthalmia Neonatorum,” 462-63.

37. Foley, *Five Lectures*, 40.

38. William Aitken, M.D. and Meredith Clymer, M.D., *The Science and Practice of Medicine* (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1872), 231.

39. Frances Kobrin, “The American Midwife Controversy: A Crisis of Professionalization,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 40, no. 4 (1966): 351.

40. Katy Dawley, “The Campaign to Eliminate the Midwife,” *American Journal of Nursing* 100, no. 10 (October 2000): 52-53, accessed October 11, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3522317>; Joan M. Jensen, “Politics and the American Midwife Controversy,” *Frontiers* 1 (Spring 1976): 19-33, 20, accessed November 10, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3346066>; Kobrin, “American Midwife Controversy,”

Ophthalmia neonatorum was addressed frequently in the medical literature of the time and was of great concern to medical professionals, particularly those in the new and increasingly prominent specialty of ophthalmology. Control over ophthalmia neonatorum served as a vehicle for greater state involvement in blindness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ophthalmia neonatorum, as one physician stated, presented a cost to society as a whole and was therefore a target for intervention:

Our blind asylums bear evidence of the frequency of its occurrence, and the great loss which accrues to the State, not only by the direct tax imposed in consequence of the cost of maintaining these unfortunates, but the indirect loss incurred by the withdrawal of so many workers who might contribute to the productiveness and industry of the nation.⁴¹

The intersection of midwifery, immigration, sexually transmitted infections, and maternal-child welfare made ophthalmia neonatorum a prime candidate for early-twentieth-century public health campaigns, in which Foley herself became heavily involved. As an adult she related a story about an examination with an eye specialist that she had when she was twelve years old and was a student at the California School for the Blind. “[I] remember distinctly every word of the great doctor when, after looking at my eyes, he turned to the superintendent and said sadly, ‘Needlessly blind! Her eyesight *could* have been saved.’ These words made a profound impression upon my childish mind.”⁴²

It is impossible to know for certain what bacterium was responsible for the infection developed by Foley. Thirty to fifty percent of ophthalmia infections are caused

351; Carolyn Conant Van Blarcom, “Ophthalmia Neonatorum as a Cause of Blindness,” *American Journal of Nursing* 10, no. 10 (July 1910): 732.

41. Brandeis, “Purulent Ophthalmia of Infants,” 225.

42. Foley, *Five Lectures*, 40.

by non-gonococcal bacteria, such as staphylococcus or streptococcus; however, their effects tend to be mild.⁴³ Pseudomonas, Chlamydia, and herpes simplex have all been identified as causative agents in ophthalmias that can lead to blindness, but *N. gonorrhoeae* was most commonly responsible for the severest form of ophthalmia neonatorum in the nineteenth century.⁴⁴ Precisely how Foley contracted the infection is unknown. It is possible that her mother had a sexually transmitted infection and passed the bacteria along to her daughter, or the infection might have been spread by the midwife or physician through unsanitary practices (for example, by reusing a cloth to wipe the eyes). What is certain is that Foley experienced severe damage to her corneas at a very young age—enough to cause permanent and complete vision loss.

Blindness in the nineteenth century was generally regarded as a terrible affliction. Infants like Foley who lost their vision were thought to be particularly disadvantaged, having never had the opportunity to see. “They are . . . not capable of as high as intellectual development, and are compelled to occupy a lower plane in the scale of spiritual being,” Dr. Lewis wrote.⁴⁵ This was a common belief that Foley likely internalized. As will be addressed in subsequent chapters, Foley reflected prevailing attitudes about the impact of visual disabilities on child development. She later described the relative “normalcy” of her own childhood, negating the experience of blindness and its potentially deleterious effects: “I was in my sixth year before I understood the meaning of the word ‘blind.’ Up to that time, I had romped and played with other

43. Zuppa et al., “Ophthalmia Neonatorum,” 770.

44. Matejcek and Goldman, “Treatment and Prevention,” 1188; Zuppa et al., “Ophthalmia Neonatorum,” 769-70.

45. Lewis, “Ophthalmia Neonatorum,” 135.

children, climbed trees, jumped ditches, accepting bumps and bruises as part of the game, and having no sense of fear, since some child always held my hand.”⁴⁶ Likely two of the children that frequently held her hand were her sister Alice, who was four years older than she, and her brother John, who was a year older, both of whom she remained close to for her entire life, particularly her sister.

East St. Louis was a busy, noisy place, full of sounds and smells that would have provided a vibrant sensory experience for any child. The construction of the Eads Bridge dominated the city at the time of Foley’s birth and provided a source of entertainment for residents. The upper roadway was completed in April 1874, and on May 24, when she was just shy of her first birthday, 25,000 people paid five cents each to visit it.⁴⁷ Twenty-two railroad lines terminated in East St. Louis and the noise of the trains would have been a constant feature of life.⁴⁸ So was the Mississippi River, with its floods, its ferries, its busy wharf, and its numerous tributaries and springs. Nearby was Falling Springs, where the water plunged seventy feet and in the spring could be heard from “a considerable distance.”⁴⁹ The National Stockyards—which held 15,000 cattle, 10,000 sheep, and 20,000 hogs—added pungency to the air.⁵⁰ Foley might have been old enough to remember the excitement generated by the major strikes that occurred in 1877 in East St. Louis and spread nationwide, largely due to the lowering of railroad workers’ wages.

46. Foley, *Five Lectures*, 8.

47. James Neal Primm, *Lion of the Valley: St. Louis, Missouri 1764-1980* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1998), 288-90.

48. Theising and Moore, *East St. Louis*, 64.

49. Paul Selby, et al., eds., *Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois and History of St. Clair County* (Chicago: Munsell Publishing Company, 1907), 660.

50. Theising and Moore, *East St. Louis*, 102.

And surely, woven into the fabric of her life, were the sounds of voices: those of her family members, the Irish and German accents of her neighbors, the Latin of the Catholic mass.

Never having known what it was like to have sight, Foley might not have felt deficient—but others certainly made her feel that way. Stereotypes were difficult to overcome. Attitudes toward blindness and other differences have varied over time and place but have always been problematic. In ancient civilizations infanticide of disabled infants was common. In other times a lack of sight was believed to bestow the individual with special powers—such as a “sixth sense,” as evidenced by the portrayals of blind individuals as sorcerers and soothsayers in literature and myth. In Christianity blind people were either feared, as a result of a pervasive association of blindness with sin, or pitied and treated as beggars and objects of charity. During the early Christian era monastic orders provided hospices for blind persons, with the earliest example at Caesara in what is now Turkey. The first state supported institution was founded in Paris in 1254 by Louis IX (possibly inspired by the condition of soldiers blinded in the Crusades).⁵¹

Attitudes toward blindness underwent a historic transformation as a result of the Enlightenment. Scientists and philosophers were interested in exploring human development and the acquisition of knowledge. The theories of John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire, and Denis Diderot provided the foundation for modern attitudes about childhood and education, including special education. Diderot, in

51. Margret A. Winzer, *The History of Special Education* (Washington D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2002), 20-21; Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 8. The first chapters of both books provide detailed overviews of historical attitudes (primarily Western) toward blindness.

particular, was interested in the education of deaf and blind persons. His *Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those Who Can See*, published in 1749, explored the question of how a blind person acquired knowledge. The publication of this work has been considered a turning point in Western attitudes toward blindness. Diderot was fascinated by the effects of cataract surgery first performed in 1747 by Jacques Daviel. This operation had the potential to restore functional vision to those who had been blind all their lives and gave philosophers and scientists an opportunity to test what was called the “Molyneux problem.” This referred to a question that William Molyneux, whose wife was blind, had posed to Locke: if someone who has never seen suddenly regains sight, would that person be able to distinguish visually between a sphere and a cube?⁵²

The question of how a blind child perceives the world around them and the nature of the senses was the focus of Diderot’s *Letter* and has been revisited over the past two centuries.⁵³ A quote from Foley herself reveals the way she used touch, hearing, and smell:

I was eight years old when I first examined a horse, although I was familiar with the sound of its feet on the pavement, and knew whether it walked, trotted or galloped. The horse I examined had been driven a long distance, and so was very warm; when my hand was placed upon its mane, the hair was damp and clung to the back, and there was an odor of steaming flesh. A fly was tormenting the animal, and, as it tossed its head impatiently, I could hear the rattle of harness, and the sound of its restive foot upon the ground. These impressions have always

52. Curtis E. Margo, MD, MPH, Lynn E. Harman, M.D., and Don B. Smith, M.D., “Blindness and the Age of Enlightenment: Diderot’s *Letter on the Blind*,” *JAMA Ophthalmology* 131, no. 1 (2013): 98-102, accessed October 2, 2015, doi:10.1001/jamaophthalmol.2013.559.

53. For a recent study testing Molyneux’s question, see Richard Held, et al., “The Newly Sighted Fail to Match Seen With Felt,” *Nature Neuroscience* 14, no. 5 (May 2011): 551-53, accessed October 8, 2015, <http://www.nature.com/neuro/journal/v14/n5/full/nn.2795.html>.

remained with me. My knowledge of the horse was acquired through the senses of hearing, touch and smell. And so with the cow. I can hear its low ‘moo, moo,’ hear the milk dropping into the pail, feel the hard outer shell of the horns, and catch the odor that is ever present in the cow’s domain.⁵⁴

The questions put forth by Diderot regarding blindness were of interest to Valentin Haüy, who opened the first school for blind students in France in 1784. According to an oft-repeated story, Haüy was initially inspired when he witnessed a group of blind street musicians, dressed in ridiculous costumes and performing to the taunts of spectators. A later encounter with a blind pianist named Maria Theresia von Paradis, who had devised her own system of reading through raised dots pricked into paper, prompted Haüy into taking on his first blind pupil. Later Louis Braille became one of his students. Other schools were founded in Europe based on Haüy’s model, to be followed in the 1830s by schools in the United States.⁵⁵

The 1830s and 1840s were a time of rapid expansion of volunteerism in the United States. The abolitionist, temperance, and women’s suffrage movements originated during these decades, fostered by the tenets of Jacksonian democracy and the rise of evangelical Protestantism with the Second Great Awakening.⁵⁶ Benevolent efforts extended to blind adults and children, with schools for the blind founded in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. It was also the time when the concept of the “Friendly Visitor” arose, which directly influenced Foley’s career as home teacher and eventually coalesced into the modern social worker. William Moon inaugurated the systematic

54. Foley, *Five Lectures*, 9.

55. Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 440-41.

56. Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 59-60.

practice of home teaching of blind individuals in England. “When he became quite blind in 1840, he purchased a few books in embossed type; and as he had nothing to occupy his time, he at once began to seek for and teach other blind persons at their homes.”⁵⁷ This is a telling sentence: like many other disabled individuals, Moon’s choices of employment were limited. He turned to teaching fellow blind women and men—as did many of his successors, including Foley—not simply out of altruism, but for lack of other opportunities.

Moon devised his own version of raised print, which became known as Moon type. It used simplified Roman letters and was designed for the elderly and those whose touch was not sensitive enough to read the other forms of raised print that were in use at the time. In 1855 Moon formed the Society for Supplying Home Teachers and Books in Moon’s Type for the Blind.⁵⁸ He later brought his model of home teaching to the United States, founding the Pennsylvania Home Teaching Society and Free Circulating Library for the Blind in Philadelphia along with his daughter Adelaide and John P. Rhoads of the American Bible Society.⁵⁹

The materials that Moon offered were primarily religious, as the initial purpose of home teaching was to provide spiritual nourishment to blind persons by enabling them to read Scripture. The earliest items printed for blind readers were books of the Bible. The first raised type book made in the United States was the *Gospel of Mark* in 1833

57. John Rutherford, M.A., B.D., *William Moon, LL.D., F.R.G.S., F.S.A. and His Work for the Blind* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898), 11.

58. *Ibid.*, 49.

59. Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 320.

(although it was “hand-embossed as a volunteer effort” and “turned out to be illegible”).⁶⁰

Shortly afterward the director of the first school for blind students in the United States had the *Acts of the Apostles* printed in Boston line type.

In addition to its religious nature, another characteristic of volunteer work in the nineteenth century was its close alignment with women. Moon relied on his daughter Adelaide and a female associate, Miss Graham (first name unknown), to carry out his plan of building a network of home teachers to bring Christianity to blind individuals throughout the world. Women were active and enthusiastic founders of and participants in benevolent associations, which encouraged them to make the transition from the private to the public sphere and, later, petition for the right to vote.⁶¹

The Civil War marked a transition in the purpose of charitable endeavors: after the war, they became less about “moral regeneration” and more about “a responsibility to control the poor and ‘vagrant.’”⁶² When Foley was born in the early 1870s, it was the beginning of the Gilded Age, when wealth and industry dominated. Class-consciousness was rife and tensions between workers and owners intensified. In this atmosphere benevolent work shifted from radicalism to conservatism.⁶³ It became, in the words of historian Michael B. Katz, “more secular, bureaucratic, and professional.”⁶⁴ This impacted the type of work that was done (largely by sighted individuals) on behalf of

60. Ibid., 443.

61. Scott, “Women’s Voluntary Associations,” 45-46.

62. Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1990), 5.

63. Ibid., 207.

64. Katz, *Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 59.

blind persons. The emphasis moved away from religion and toward education and employment, with the purpose of mitigating the burden that blind and disabled individuals placed on the state.

The United States underwent profound transformations during the nineteenth century, changing from primarily agrarian to an urban, industrial society. Millions of immigrants flooded major cities. Between 1860 and 1910 the percentage of newcomers and their children that made up the populations of these cities nearly doubled, increasing from 40 percent to 70 percent.⁶⁵ These shifts were unsettling and fueled anxiety about blindness and other disabilities. Peter Brownlee's article "Ophthalmology, Popular Physiology, and the Market Revolution in Vision, 1800–1850" analyzes the growing interest in and "theoretical shift" regarding vision that occurred during the nineteenth century.⁶⁶ He posits that urbanization, commercialization, and the increase of printed materials together contributed to an expansion of white-collar work that required "perceptual . . . acuity."⁶⁷ Concern over conditions affecting the eyes contributed to the development of new tools, treatments, and techniques. Ophthalmology became established as a medical specialty over the course of the nineteenth century: journals were published, societies formed, and departments created at medical schools. After notable developments between 1800 and 1850, ophthalmology entered a "Golden Age," heralded

65. Susan L. Mizruchi, *The Rise of Multicultural America: Economy and Print Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 77, accessed October 2, 2015, ProQuest Ebrary.

66. Brownlee, "Ophthalmology, Popular Physiology," 601.

67. *Ibid.*, 602.

by the invention of the ophthalmoscope in 1851 that allowed a view into the interior of the eye.⁶⁸

An interest in blindness—its causes and cures, its impact on society, its implications for human development—began to preoccupy the minds of some American scientists and educators, inspired by their European predecessors. Jacksonian democracy influenced the growth of state-supported public schooling in the United States and the notion that blind children should also have access to educational opportunities.⁶⁹

Blindness, along with other disabilities, became “medicalized.”⁷⁰ The first school for the blind in the United States was established and directed by two physicians, John Fisher and Samuel Gridley Howe. Schools for the blind were initially referred to as “asylums,” then as “institutions,” connoting a hospital-like environment.

Innovations in print culture that occurred during the nineteenth century also had a fundamental impact on the lives of Americans, blind and sighted alike. Advances in mechanization enabled the invention of machine printing. The first steam-powered press was produced in 1812. This was followed by the cylinder press, which could print 1,000 to 4,000 impressions per hour, and then the rotary press, which could print 8,000 impressions per hour.⁷¹ These developments, along with improvements in paper production, fostered the growth of printed materials in the late nineteenth century.

68. Ibid., 599; Stanley M. Truhlsen, “The American Academy of Ophthalmology,” in *The History of Ophthalmology*, ed. Daniel M. Albert and Diane D. Edwards (Boston: Blackwell Science, 1996), 324.

69. Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 438.

70. Winzer, *History of Special Education*, 80.

71. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, *Printing Yesterday and Today*, accessed October 2, 2015, <http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/educator/modules/gutenberg/books/printing/>.

Newspapers, fiction, and textbooks could all be made more efficiently. From 1865 to 1880 the number of magazines printed in the United States increased from 700 to 2400.⁷² Literacy rates climbed.

Cultural and technical innovations also benefitted blind persons, and would be utilized by Foley. Haüy had created a form of raised type for his students based on traditional Roman characters. It was an unwieldy system overall (each book weighed approximately nine pounds), and students found it challenging to learn and use.⁷³ Haüy's student Braille adapted a system developed by a French army captain that utilized dashes and dots pressed into paper for the purposes of communicating at night in the dark. In 1829 he published *Procedure for Writing Words, Music, and Plainsong in Dots*. Braille's system was more efficient than the Roman character-based version and could be reproduced with a simple slate and stylus tool.

Braille was not the only form of writing designed for blind persons, however, and it took over a century for it to become the standard in the United States. The existence of multiple forms of embossed or raised type for those who could not see well enough to read played a major role in library services for blind persons and Foley's work as an adult. Moon type had been introduced in 1847, Boston line type in 1852, and New York Point in 1868. The movement to standardize raised printing in the United States occupied blind activists for decades, along with the drive to make more and varied raised print materials available. Additional developments that substantially impacted the lives

72. Mizruchi, *Rise of Multicultural America*, 144.

73. C. Michael Mellor, *Louis Braille: A Touch of Genius* (Boston: National Braille Press, 2006), 52.

of blind persons included the introduction of the “long cane” for walking at the Perkins School in 1860 and the inventions of the typewriter, the telephone, and the phonograph during the 1870s.⁷⁴

By the time Foley was born schools for blind students were well established in the United States. In the 1820s physician Fisher traveled to Paris and visited Haüy’s school. Upon his return to Massachusetts he commenced efforts to open a similar school in the United States. The New England Asylum for the Blind (which eventually became the Perkins School for the Blind) was founded in 1829 as a result of Fisher’s efforts. Howe was the director of the school when it opened in 1832, a post that he held for forty-four years. Howe’s legacy had lasting influence on the development of special education in the United States. He was a complex figure who embraced humanitarian educational philosophies but also (like many other educators of blind students) espoused stereotypical attitudes about disabled individuals. For example, Howe believed that the purpose of education for blind children was to raise them from the deficiencies of character and of intelligence that he believed was inherent to the experience of blindness: “[T]he tendency of their physical peculiarity, viewed in a large sense, is unfavorable to the highest mental and moral development, and the aim of the educator should ever be to lessen its effects.”⁷⁵

74. William R. Wiener and Eileen Siffermann, “The History and Progression of the Profession of Orientation and Mobility,” in *Foundations of Orientation and Mobility*, ed. William R. Wiener, Richard L. Welsh and Bruce B. Blasch, 570-79 (New York: AFB Press, 1997), Appendix 14.

75. Samuel Gridley Howe (letter read at the 2nd convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Indianapolis, IN, August 8-10, 1871), in

The pervasiveness of these stereotypes undoubtedly affected Foley. Due to factors that will be explored further in this thesis, she felt pressure to prove herself as not simply equal to, but better than, a sighted person. As an adult she shared the following memory from her childhood:

My first realization of the meaning of blindness came when, one day, after hearing some people call me ‘poor child,’ and expressing their sympathy to my mother, I asked if we were very poor, poorer than my playmates, and why I could not go to school. My mother explained that we were no poorer than the others, that the ladies did not mean it in that way, but were sorry that I could not see and did not think I could ever go to school. But my mother assured me that I was going to school, and that there I would learn to see with my fingers, better than the ladies did with their eyes.⁷⁶

Incidentally, Simon Pollak, founder of the Missouri School for the Blind in St. Louis, was one of the first educators in the United States to adopt braille for his students.⁷⁷ Perhaps Foley’s mother had heard of it. In 1850 there were schools for the blind in Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, Kentucky, Mississippi, Illinois, South Carolina, and Indiana. By the time Foley was born there were nearly thirty schools serving 3000 blind students throughout the United States.⁷⁸ In 1853 the American Association of Instructors of the Blind (AAIB) held its first convention at the New York Institute for the Blind, although the organization did not begin meeting regularly until 1871. At the 1871 convention, the topic of raised type dominated

Proceedings of the Second Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Printing and Publishing House, 1871), 15.

76. Foley, *Five Lectures*, 8.

77. Eunice Lovejoy, “History and Standards,” in *That All May Read: Library Service for Blind and Physically Handicapped People* (Washington, D.C.: National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Library of Congress, 1983), 1; Koestler, *Unseen Minority* 107.

78. Winzer, *History of Special Education*, 108-09.

discussions. The primarily sighted attendees debated whether Roman character-based or point-based communication systems were best. Arguments for Roman character-based systems relied largely on the desire for congruency between systems for blind and sighted persons, as well as the practical benefits of retaining the plates that had been already manufactured to print raised type books. The proponents of point systems based their argument on efficiency: point systems saved space. William Bell Wait of the New York Institute for the Education of the Blind used a blackboard to demonstrate New York Point, the system that he had personally developed. Wait explained the differences between his system and braille and described the advantages of the former, which included such improvements as having the most frequently used letters represented by fewer dots.⁷⁹ Despite the persuasiveness of his argument, the debates about which form of raised printing was the best dragged on for the next sixty years, to the detriment of blind persons.

The American Printing House for the Blind was founded in 1858 in Kentucky to increase the amount of raised print items available. Without adequate books, blind readers soon became bored by lack of options and were ultimately dissuaded from reading at all. The demand for more and varied reading material was a consistent theme through the early development of library services for blind readers and drove the development of these services. At first schools for the blind amassed their own collections of raised print materials. Educated blind adults were enthusiastic readers but

79. William Wait (report presented to the 2nd convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Indianapolis, IN, August 8-10, 1871), in *Proceedings of the Second Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Printing and Publishing House, 1871), 61.

books in raised print were too bulky and expensive to purchase for personal use. For example, the braille version of *David Copperfield* consisted of six volumes, each weighing over six pounds, and occupied thirty inches of shelf space.⁸⁰

In 1868 George Ticknor donated eight raised print volumes to the Boston Public Library. By 1869 there were ten volumes in the library's collection that had been checked out eighteen times by four different patrons.⁸¹ This was the nucleus of what later became a national library service for blind and disabled individuals. Schools and libraries were critical to the development of a group identity for blind persons in the United States. They allowed blind people to congregate together and share similar experiences, as well as articulate ideas about identity and civil rights.

Foley was seven years old when her family moved to California and she began to attend school shortly thereafter.⁸² In her extant letters and interviews, she never discussed East St. Louis. She firmly identified as a Californian, later telling a newspaper reporter that although she wasn't "exactly a native daughter," she believed that "California is my state and here is where I found my life's work."⁸³ Two of her mother's brothers, Felix and John Paul Dunn, had moved to California previously, and additional

80. Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 91.

81. Chamberlain, *Library Work*, 1; Lovejoy, "History and Standards," 2.

82. Irene Jones, "A Tribute to Kate M. Foley" (paper presented at the 19th biennial convention of the American Association of Workers for the Blind, Indianapolis, Indiana, July 7-11, 1941), in *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Biennial Convention of the American Association of Workers for the Blind* (n.p., n.d.), 122.

83. Clifton Frisbie, "Blind, Handicapped Children of County Given Education Aid," *Daily Democrat* (Woodland, CA), May 29, 1934, in Perkins School for the Blind Bound Clippings: California Adult Blind, 1934-1938, Perkins Archives, Watertown, MA, accessed October 2, 2015, <http://www.perkinsarchives.org/complete-scrapbooks.html>.

family members joined them later. Foley was close to her Dunn relatives throughout her life and relied on them for support.

Foley's uncles Felix and John Paul Dunn both became prominent in business, politics, and landholding in California. John Paul was well educated, having attended public school in Cohoes, New York, followed by Bryant, Stratton's Business College in Troy and Cornell University in Ithaca.⁸⁴ The Dunn brothers took advantage of educational, economic, and political opportunities available to Irish Americans. In general the children of first-generation immigrants tended to fare better than their parents.⁸⁵ Two factors that contributed to this were education, which was valued by Irish Americans and supported by the Catholic Church, and participation in politics, which was facilitated by the concentration of Irish Americans in urban centers, as well as their ability to speak English and familiarity with Anglo-Saxon political and legal customs.⁸⁶

Foley's mother may have attended school as well. The Catholic Church provided educational opportunities to women, and in Irish parishes in the United States more girls than boys received parochial educations.⁸⁷ In 1865 Bridget Dunn was a seventeen-year-old living at home in Watervliet, New York, in Albany County; by 1869 she had married James Foley and given birth to her first child, Alice, in East St. Louis.⁸⁸ In this Bridget

84. Steven P. Arena, *History, California State Board of Equalization: The First One Hundred Years, 1879-1979* (Sacramento, CA: State Board of Equalization, 1980), accessed October 2, 2015, http://www.boe.ca.gov/info/pub216/state_controller.html.

85. Dolan, *Irish Americans*, 92.

86. McCaffrey, *Irish Catholic Diaspora*, 175.

87. Hasia R. Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 133.

88. Despite extensive efforts, the author of this thesis found very little information on Foley's father James, such as a birth date or profession. There are

differed from the majority of her Irish-American female contemporaries who tended to marry late in life or not at all. Irish-American women took advantage of work opportunities in the United States and put off marriage, enjoying a degree of economic independence different from their counterparts in other ethnic groups.⁸⁹

Since no death record has been discovered for her father it is not known whether he accompanied the family to California, or if he died in the Midwest.⁹⁰ Being a widow with three young children in a city that by the 1880s was developing a reputation for lawlessness would have provided impetus for Bridget to join her brothers.⁹¹ Foley later wrote in a letter of condolence upon the death of Warring Wilkinson, her beloved principal at the California School for the Blind, that Wilkinson was the “only father” she had “ever known.”⁹² Clearly, whatever the circumstances, her biological father did not play a role in her life. This wasn’t unusual. Irish-American women like Bridget Dunn Foley experienced high rates of widowhood and desertion. “An Irish immigrant woman who chose in the 1860s or 1870s to marry a construction worker . . . or a factory hand . . . ran a very high risk of having someday to be sole support for a house full of children,” wrote Hasia Diner in *Erin’s Daughters in America*.⁹³ The reasons for this pattern were

numerous Irish immigrants named James Foley listed in census records, but unfortunately none of them can be linked definitively to Bridget Dunn or their children. In extant letters and interviews, Foley never mentioned her father.

89. Diner, *Erin’s Daughters*, 47-49.

90. The earliest confirmations of Bridget Foley’s widowhood are Los Angeles city directories from the 1890s.

91. Theising and Moore, *East St. Louis*, 77.

92. Kate Foley to Maud Wilkinson Richardson, 13 April 1918, carton 3, folder 25, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

93. Diner, *Erin’s Daughters*, 55.

complex but included the dangerous and transient aspects of unskilled labor, the late age of marriage, the economic independence of young Irish-American women, and the high degree of tension that characterized male-female relationships in the Irish community.⁹⁴

Although Foley did not have a relationship with her father, the support that she received from her mother, siblings, and extended family members in California was of great benefit to her and crucial to allowing her to achieve her career goals. Ultimately Foley's move to California proved to be prophetic. Her life became enmeshed with two of the state's notable institutions: the California School for the Blind and Deaf and the California State Library. The role that these two entities played in her life was fundamental, and, in return, the influence that she exerted on the state's relationship with its visually impaired residents was meaningful and lasting.

94. *Ibid.*, 58-60.

Chapter 2

“Have We A Future?” Kate Foley’s Education at the California School for the Blind, 1880-1895

Foley was seven years old when she moved to California with her family in 1880 and began attending the California School for the Blind.¹ Founded twenty years earlier, it was the first residential school for blind students established in the western United States. The education that Foley received and the relationships that she forged there were fundamental in her life. The principal of the school, Warring Wilkinson, dedicated himself to providing education and vocational training that would enable graduates to engage in useful work and become productive members of society. He sought to instill in students a set of values based on traditional Protestant principles of work, religion, and citizenship. Foley was greatly influenced by Wilkinson’s methods and philosophies and her experience at the school shaped her work as an adult.

In the nineteenth century, despite the existence of schools for blind students and innovations such as raised print, most blind people were not able to read. Foley’s education provided her with significant advantages, including literacy, typewriting skills, and public speaking expertise—all of which were critical to her eventual success as a home teacher. However, as Foley and other alumni of the Berkeley school discovered,

1. The California School for the Blind was separated from the California School for the Deaf in 1929. Both campuses were moved from Berkeley, California, to Fremont, California, in 1980. The original school site is now the Clark Kerr Campus, part of the University of California, Berkeley. None of the buildings from Foley’s time remain; they were replaced by Spanish Colonial Revival structures in the 1920s and 1930s. See David Gebhard and David Bricker, *The Architectural/Historical Aspects of the California School for the Blind and California School for the Deaf, Berkeley (1867-1979)* (Berkeley: Regents of the University of California, 1979).

the education, training, and mentorship they received did not necessarily guarantee employment in their selected fields once they graduated. The environment of optimism and idealism cultivated by Wilkinson, in which a quality education and a bit of gumption were all one needed to succeed in life, was different than the reality of the world outside the school. Discrimination against visually disabled persons, educated or not, was harsh and unyielding, as Foley learned.

Foley attended the California School for the Blind from 1880 until 1895. The history of the school is intertwined with the history of the San Francisco Bay Area. From the 1850s to the 1870s education developed as a “major social service” in San Francisco. By 1880, the city had 40,000 students enrolled in public school.² Voluntary associations proliferated in the Bay Area during this time period, as they did elsewhere in the United States.³ In 1860 a group of socially prominent women established a benevolent organization called the Society for the Instruction and Maintenance of the Indigent Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, which became the California School for the Blind.⁴ Frances Clark was credited as founder and served as the school’s first president and principal.⁵

2. R.A. Burchell, *The San Francisco Irish, 1848-1880* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 28.

3. William Issel and Robert W. Cherny, *San Francisco, 1865-1932: Politics, Power, and Urban Development* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 17.

4. Edward Allen Fay and the Volta Bureau, *Histories of American Schools for the Deaf, 1817-1893*, Vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Volta Bureau, 1893), 165.

5. There was later some dispute among family members about whether it was she, or her sister Olive De Voe, who was ultimately responsible for the idea. Clark and De Voe had a third sister, Libbie Taber, who was deaf, and the De Voes had started a school in New York for deaf students before moving to California. However, the De Voes remained in the state only briefly, and Clark was the sister who served as the school’s first president and principal. See Caroline Hyman Burnes and Catherine

Clark administered the school along with twenty “Lady Managers.” Her husband, Pomeroy B. Clark, was a trustee. The school was first housed in San Francisco in a residence on Tehama Street. The Lady Managers were able, through donations, to purchase a lot at Mission and Fifteenth Streets and applied to the legislature for funding for a school building.⁶

This organizational model was typical for early institutions for deaf and blind students. The schools began as private charities funded through donations and the charging of tuition but then shifted to a fully state-supported model.⁷ The nineteenth century witnessed the advent of compulsory taxpayer-funded education, and the administrators of residential schools insisted on the same for blind and deaf students. For reasons of economy, blind and deaf students—despite their unique educational requirements and the difficulties they experienced in communicating with each other—were often educated at the same residential school, as was the case in California. However, this situation was considered unfavorable from early on.⁸ Educators sought the separation of schools for blind and deaf students, but this did not happen for many years.

Marshall Ramger, *History of the California School for the Deaf, Berkeley 1860-1960* (Berkeley: California School for the Deaf, 1960), 73-74.

6. Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, “First Annual Report of the California Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, to the Legislature of the State of California for the Year 1860,” in *Reports (From One to Eleven Inclusive) of the Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind for the Fifteen Years Ending June 30, 1875* (Berkeley: California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, 1890), 5.

7. Winzer, *History of Special Education*, 95-96.

8. Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, “Sixth Annual Report of the Board of Trustees and Managers of the California Institution, for the Education and Care of the Indigent Deaf and Dumb,

The California School opened on May 1, 1860, with three deaf pupils. The admittance of blind students was “much delayed from the necessity of having to send to the Atlantic States for alphabets and books adapted to their peculiar necessities.” Two blind boys and two blind girls began attending the school in October. Within six months of opening, the school had grown to twenty-two students.⁹

It was common for schools for blind and deaf students to begin with very small numbers of students.¹⁰ The California School’s first annual report to the legislature pointed out that institutions in Connecticut and New York had also started with similarly modest student populations. The argument that California was “too young to have a sufficient number” of blind and deaf students was objected to by the authors of the report, who stated that they knew of at least thirty-six potential deaf students in the state and approximately the same number of blind students.¹¹ Locating disabled children and convincing their parents to send them away was an ongoing challenge for residential schools and they grew slowly. Parents were understandably reluctant to allow their children to leave them for a number of reasons, from concern about safety or lack of financial resources to unwillingness to admit to having a “defective” child.¹²

and the Blind, to the Governor of the State of California for the Year Ending December 31, 1865,” in *Reports (From One to Eleven Inclusive) of the Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind for the Fifteen Years Ending June 30, 1875* (Berkeley: California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, 1890), 10.

9. Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, “First Annual Report [1860],” 7-8.

10. Winzer, *History of Special Education*, 138.

11. Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, “First Annual Report [1860],” 8.

12. Winzer, *History of Special Education*, 139-41.

In 1864, after being investigated for accounting irregularities and poor management, Clark resigned as principal.¹³ John M. Francis succeeded her briefly in February 1865, but he too resigned by summer.¹⁴ The board then recruited Warring Wilkinson, a teacher of deaf students in New York, to serve as principal, a position that he held for forty-four years.

Wilkinson mentored Foley and other students. He was born in New York in 1834 to a Puritan family and attended Union College in Schenectady. When he graduated in 1858 he was unsure what profession to adopt, and became interested in sign language and teaching deaf students through a chance encounter with a cousin. He worked for eight years as a teacher at the New York Institution for Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb before accepting the principalship of the California School. Wilkinson arrived in San Francisco in late 1865 after a three-week journey via the isthmus of Panama.¹⁵ At the time the school had thirty-seven deaf students and nineteen blind students.

One of Wilkinson's first efforts as principal was to have the term "indigent" removed from the school's name. This action was indicative of his guiding philosophy,

13. California Legislature, "Report of the Joint Committee Appointed Under Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 14," in *Appendix to Journals of State and Assembly*, 15th sess., 1864 (Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1864).

14. Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, "Sixth Annual Report [1865]," 5.

15. Theophilus D'Estrella, "Life of Dr. Warring Wilkinson," *California News* 33, no. 9 (May 1918), 157-59, in carton 2, folder 3, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; Maud Wilkinson Richardson, "Biographical Sketch of Warring Wilkinson," carton 2, folder 4, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; W.A. Caldwell, "Warring Wilkinson," *The Educator* 5, no. 10 (March 1895), 302, in folder 2, carton 2, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

which was that the school in California was not a charitable institution, but an educational one, and that every child in the state was “entitled to school privileges,” including deaf and blind children.¹⁶ During the school’s early years, tuition was \$300 per student, or free for those who could not afford it. Under Wilkinson the school shifted to an entirely state-supported model; as he pointed out, schools for non-disabled children were funded by taxpayers, and blind and deaf children deserved the same educational opportunities. In his view, charging tuition was “undemocratic.”¹⁷ Students’ families would be responsible for travel expenses and clothing only. This point of view—that students with disabilities were entitled to the same rights and privileges, as well as subject to the same laws, as non-disabled public school students—would be adopted by Foley.

Wilkinson almost immediately began working to secure a new location for the school, which had outgrown the building at Mission and Fifteenth Streets.¹⁸ A 130-acre site, a former farm, was selected in Berkeley, California, for the campus, as it fulfilled the criteria of being in close proximity to an urban center but still semi-rural. Across the bay from San Francisco, near the city of Oakland, Berkeley had also been chosen as the site for the new state university. The California Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind would be just a few blocks away from the university, nestled against the hillside with expansive views of the San Francisco Bay. The climate was mild, sunnier than

16. Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, “Sixth Annual Report [1865],” 9.

17. Burnes and Ramger, *School for the Deaf*, 10.

18. Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, “Sixth Annual Report [1865],” 5.

foggy San Francisco. Architects John Wright and George H. Sanders were selected to design the school buildings. Their firm was responsible for many notable buildings in the Bay Area, including the lavish Nob Hill mansion of railroad baron Mark Hopkins. Construction began in 1867 and, after being interrupted by an earthquake, was completed in 1869. However, this first school building was completely destroyed by a fire six years later on January 17, 1875. Wright and Sanders headed the redesign of the school with significant input from Wilkinson, and construction commenced in 1876.¹⁹

Overall Wilkinson seems to have been a capable and respected administrator.²⁰ Among his students he had the reputation of a stern but kindly principal. Although reform-minded educators discouraged the use of corporal punishment, Wilkinson was known to have employed it on occasion. Letters written to him by former students upon his fortieth anniversary at the school are evidence of this. “At school I was full of mischief and you whipped me often—I was reckless not to care for your good rules,” wrote one, but he continued, “You were always kind to me.”²¹

19. Gebhard and Bricker, *Architectural/Historical Aspects*, 67-69.

20. Wilkinson’s tenure at the school was not without controversy or scandal. His younger brother, Charles Wilkinson, arrived in San Francisco in 1867 to start work at the school as Teacher of the Blind. Six years later, in 1873, both brothers were charged with a list of offenses, including poor management, discrimination against blind students, the use of vulgar language, and unprofessional outbursts of temper. Although ultimately nothing came of the accusations, contemporary newspaper articles indicated that there was a modicum of truth to at least some of the charges. See “Deaf, Dumb and Blind Asylum, Report of the Committee of Investigation,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, June 28, 1873; “Deaf, Dumb and Blind, Insulting Conduct of the Wilkinson Brothers,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 31, 1873.

21. Edwin P. Hartman to Warring Wilkinson, 29 November 1905, carton 3, folder 8, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

To Foley, the principal of the school was a father figure. She later claimed to have been one of his favorites, stating that he was “rarely pleasant” with other students besides her, and that she was not “in awe” of him.²² Despite her assertion, numerous former students seem to have possessed the same fondness that she did. One former pupil recalled how kindly Wilkinson treated her when she misbehaved: “[O]ne day I refused flatly to mind my old teacher Mr. O’Donnell, and he took away my slate and books, etc.,” she wrote. “But the course only made me rebel the more and my head was full of wicked thoughts. When you came in of course he told you of it and you gave me such a look that softened my heart and the next moment I was weeping. I think I was a better pupil for that kind look.”²³ This style of administration was standard for nineteenth-century institutions. “Moral management implied kindness, but it also implied obedience, compliance, and subordination to authority; its implicit ‘family metaphor,’ while humane, was at its heart a system of control,” explained the authors of *A History of Childhood and Disability*.²⁴

The environment at the California School was familial and paternalistic, both in terms of its physical arrangement as well as the nature of its administration. Wilkinson’s wife and daughter were involved in students’ lives. Wilkinson married Florence Watson, daughter of a wealthy San Francisco businessman, in 1867. Her mother had been one of

22. Kate Foley to Mabel Gillis, 20 September 1916, Home Teacher for the Blind Files 1916-1926 1930-1953, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA.

23. Frances Norton Runde to Warring Wilkinson, 18 November 1905, carton 3, folder 8, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

24. Philip Safford and Elizabeth Safford, *A History of Childhood and Disability* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996), 57.

the school's original twenty Lady Managers, and Florence Watson applied for a job as a teacher there but ended up marrying Wilkinson instead. They had one daughter, Maud, and the family lived together on the campus in the Principal's Cottage. "I think of you frequently—and of baby Maud I loved so well—and her sweet mother who trusted me to play with her precious darling so many happy afternoons," wrote former student Annie Bell Hall Huber.²⁵ Foley remained friendly with Maud Wilkinson Richardson as an adult. Additionally, the principal's brother Charles Wilkinson, who taught at the school from 1866 until his death in 1903 and who was also credited by Foley as an influence, married his colleague Annie Garrett, the school's teacher of articulation, in 1883.²⁶ It was a close-knit community, with Warring Wilkinson—father, older brother, and principal—firmly established at its head.

Foley's family lived in San Francisco when she became a student at Berkeley in 1880. Her uncles, Felix Dunn and John P. Dunn, had moved there from New York in 1875 to work in the produce business, which expanded rapidly after the opening of the transcontinental railroad in 1869.²⁷ The Dunns soon became part of the bureaucracy of the growing state. Felix Dunn worked as a clerk at the United States Land Office for many years, while John P. Dunn became San Francisco Auditor in 1879 and was then elected to the office of State Controller on the Workingman's Party of California (WPC)

25. Annie Bell Hall Huber to Warring Wilkinson, 27 November 1905, carton 3, folder 8, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

26. "The Wilkinson-Garrett Wedding at Berkeley," *Oakland Tribune*, July 28, 1883.

27. Blessing, "West Among Strangers," 271; Kevin Starr, *Inventing the Dream: California Through the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 133.

ticket. The WPC was founded in 1877 by Denis Kearney in response to the economic turmoil of the decade, which in San Francisco contributed both to increasing class consciousness and an oversupply of labor. Dunn was one of Kearney's two primary subordinates.²⁸ The party opposed the wealthy business interests that dominated the political system and flavored their speeches with odious anti-Chinese rhetoric that led occasionally to mob violence. The WPC was short-lived, but Dunn's political career continued to flourish. Commended for his role in eliminating corruption in state finances, he was known as the "Watchdog of the Treasury."²⁹ Foley's extended family was firmly established in the state of California by the time she moved there.

When Foley began attending school, construction of the new buildings had nearly reached completion. Wilkinson called for significant changes to be incorporated into the redesigned campus after the fire, most notably the separation of living quarters from classroom areas following the "cottage" or "segregated" system. This model was based on multiple buildings rather than a single building for residences and classrooms. The cottage system was implemented by Samuel Gridley Howe earlier in the century and was used in other institutions, such as insane asylums.³⁰ Wilkinson outlined its advantages in a report to the state legislature. He explained that the design prevented large-scale property loss, reduced the spread of contagious illnesses, facilitated discipline and order,

28. Burchell, *San Francisco Irish*, 150.

29. "John P. Dunn Dies Suddenly," *Los Angeles Herald*, May 30, 1906.

30. Carla Yanni, *Architecture of Madness: Insane Asylums in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), accessed October 28, 2015, ProQuest Ebrary.

and improved ventilation.³¹ It also served the important function of keeping boys and girls separated. The sexuality of disabled students residing in institutions created two perplexing problems for administrators. Firstly, collecting disabled students together at residential schools increased the possibility of sexual relationships forming between them. The hereditary nature of blindness and other disabilities became a concern in the nineteenth century and by the 1850s had begun to preoccupy Howe, who believed that disabled people should choose to abstain from sexual relationships to prevent the continuation of unfavorable traits. However, administrators also feared that keeping the sexes isolated from each other in dormitory arrangements would encourage same-sex relationships.³²

The plan of the new campus included the girls' and boys' dormitories, kitchen, dining room, workshops, gymnasium, refectory, boiler house and laundry, principal's cottage, and a milking barn, milk house, and farm storage shed. These were arranged around the focal point of the school, the main education building, which was an impressive three-story Romanesque Revival structure eventually topped by a 160-foot clock tower.³³ "Magnificent" institutional buildings were common in the nineteenth

31. Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, *Nineteenth Report of the Board of Directors and Officers of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, for the Twenty-Four Months Ending June 30, 1890* (Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1890), 12-13.

32. Mary Klages, *Woeful Afflictions: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 49-53.

33. Gebhard and Bricker, *Architectural/Historical Aspects*, 69-73; Burke and Ramger, *School for the Deaf*, 28.

century, their imposing facades intended to “uplift and elevate.”³⁴ Many of them, including the school in Berkeley, had beautifully landscaped grounds. Asylums were frequently visited by sightseers.³⁵

These impressive buildings were not without controversy, however. A newspaper editorial from 1878 balked at the expenditures associated with “palatial structures and costly grounds” and claimed that these benefits were essentially wasted on disabled individuals. “There is no reason why these people should cost the State as much as a laboring man can earn. There is no grand outcome for them. Nature has sent them into this world defective. They are in that public institution not to be polished up into doctors, lawyers, judges or congressmen,” the author wrote.³⁶ Wilkinson, who firmly believed that an investment in the education of blind and deaf children would pay off in terms of benefits to the state, spent his career countering public attitudes such as these and justifying the expenditures of residential schools. A quality education would minimize or negate the effects of blindness and enable adults to become self-supporting and contributing members of society, thus alleviating the burden of their dependency.³⁷

Only a small percentage of blind individuals were educated in residential schools in the nineteenth century. Blindness occurred in most people later in life, when they were

34. Winzer, *History of Special Education*, 96.

35. Janet Miron, *Prisons, Asylums, and the Public: Institutional Visiting in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

36. “Our Public Charities” newspaper editorial, [n.d.], oversize volume 1, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

37. Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, *Twentieth Report of the Board of Directors and Officers of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, for the Twenty-Four Months Ending June 30, 1892* (Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1892), 9.

too old to attend schools designed for youth. For blind children, there were numerous impediments to receiving a formal education. When Foley began attending the California School for the Blind, most of her fellow students were from families that lived in or near the San Francisco Bay Area.³⁸ Blind children in other parts of California, or in other western states (where there were no schools for blind students at all), were at a disadvantage. The majority of residential schools were located in large cities on the East Coast or in the Midwest. Poverty, race, and ethnicity created additional barriers. For example, schools for Black students with visual disabilities were segregated and received lesser quality materials and fewer resources.³⁹

A standard school day for blind students in institutions included study, music, and physical education, with time allotted for chores, vocational training, and recreation.⁴⁰ Students at Berkeley were divided by age into an “upper” and “lower” school. The curriculum for younger students primarily focused on reading, handwriting, and arithmetic, while older students learned algebra, geometry, government, geography, history, zoology, Latin, philosophy, and grammar and composition.⁴¹ In particular, musical education and physical exercise were considered to be extremely important for

38. Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, *Fifteenth Report of the Board of Directors and Officers of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, for the Twenty-Four Months Ending June 30, 1882* (Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1882), 30.

39. Charles E. Buell, “The Education of the Negro Blind in the United States,” (master’s thesis, University of Michigan, 1945), 45-46.

40. Winzer, *History of Special Education*, 187.

41. “Aid for the Afflicted,” *San Francisco Examiner*, April 23, 1882, oversized volume 1, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; “Deaf, Dumb and Blind,” *Oakland Tribune*, June 10, 1880.

blind students. Like other educators, Wilkinson believed that the restricted movement associated with blindness resulted in a lack of physical vigor and “tendencies to weak lungs” and mandated regular exercise for his students.⁴²

Teaching tools used in the classroom included grooved paper for learning handwriting and slates for math in which steel block figures would fit into square-shaped indentations. Instruction was heavily oral and involved a great deal of memorization. Geography was taught with globes and maps onto which string had been glued to represent borders.⁴³ Foley learned to read Boston line type first, the form of raised printing invented by Howe at the Perkins School.⁴⁴

In 1884 a library was established at the school with \$3,000 raised from a combination of bequests, accumulated interest, and the proceeds of exhibitions. One thousand volumes were purchased, including “cyclopedias, lexicons, standard histories, works of science and fiction, and general literature.”⁴⁵ (Unfortunately the report does not specify how many of the volumes purchased were raised print.) Several years later the

42. Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, *Fifteenth Report [1880-1882]*, 20.

43. “Aid for the Afflicted,” *San Francisco Examiner*, April 23, 1882; Winzer, *History of Special Education*, 207.

44. “Books for the Blind,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 1, no. 6 (October 1906): 299.

45. Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, *Sixteenth Report of the Board of Directors and Officers of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, for the Twenty-four Months Ending June 30, 1884* (Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1884), 10.

library was moved to a larger space in the newly completed assembly hall with room for five thousand books.⁴⁶

When Foley started school there were 128 students, of which 25 were blind. Two teachers of the blind were employed; a third was added by 1894. There were seven teachers of deaf students. Additional members of the faculty and staff included teachers of drawing, music, and articulation, as well as a physician, clerk, housekeeper, carpenter, and multiple house matrons. The school later hired a Teacher of Physical Culture, and, when steam heat and electricity were adopted, an engineer.⁴⁷

Wilkinson was highly interested and personally involved in the functional design of the school's facilities. In the nineteenth century physical health was strongly linked to both morality and intellectual achievement. "The first consideration in the management of an educational establishment is, and should be, the health of its inmates," wrote Wilkinson. "A well nourished and vigorous body is the proper basis for intellectual culture, and no discipline of mind or manners can compensate for a depreciated tone of the physical system." Some of the most notable features of the campus included the

46. Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, *Nineteenth Report [1888-1890]*, 9.

47. Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, *Fifteenth Report [1880-1882]*, 9; Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, *Twenty-first Report of the Board of Directors and Officers of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, for the Twenty-four Months Ending June 30, 1894*, (Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1894), 4; Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, *Twenty-second Report of the Board of Directors and Officers of the the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, for the Twenty-four Months Ending June 30, 1896*, (Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1894), 4; Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, *Nineteenth Report [1888-1890]*, 8.

heating, ventilation, and sewage systems. Wilkinson stated unequivocally that “any neglect of property sanitary measures would be criminal,” and he believed that classrooms and dormitories should be spacious, well lit, and allow for proper air circulation.⁴⁸ Despite his attentions, an 1882 report illustrated the limitations of nineteenth-century waste disposal for institutions. The president of the school’s Board of Directors reported to the legislature that “the sewage of this institution is a serious nuisance, and one which justly provokes the criticism of some of the neighboring inhabitants,” and requested assistance from the State Engineer in solving the problem.⁴⁹ In general, however, Wilkinson was justifiably proud of the school’s achievements in promoting healthful living. In his 1888 report to the legislature, he reprinted glowing remarks from Fred H. Wines, Secretary of the Illinois Board of Charities and editor of the *International Record of Charities and Corrections*, who had visited the school during the previous year and described it as “a gem, probably the most perfect in respect of its general arrangements and the admirable balance of all its parts, that I have ever seen.” Wines praised the school’s cottage plan; the roof design, which promoted ventilation; the stone tower fire escapes; the private sleeping alcoves for girls; the “rat proof” buildings; and the effective sewer design.⁵⁰

48. Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, *Sixth Report [1865]*, 12.

49. Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, *Fifteenth Report [1880-1882]*, 8.

50. Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, *Eighteenth Report of the Board of Directors and Officers of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, for the Twenty-Four Months Ending June 30, 1888*, (Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1888), 14.

Wilkinson enthusiastically adopted new technologies to increase the efficiency of the school. He wrote the following about his decision to implement electricity on campus: “It was with some hesitation that I asked the last legislature for \$1000 with which to test the experiment of electric lighting This machinery has been running since the first of the year, and with such regularity and satisfaction as to put the matter beyond the domain of experiment.”⁵¹ He continuously exhorted the legislature for special appropriations. The water supply was an ongoing problem and all of the board reports from the years that Foley attended the school mention the direness of the situation. The exasperation that the principal felt over having to plead for money occasionally becomes apparent in his tone. For example, after multiple requests for a special appropriation for gym equipment were repeatedly ignored, he wrote, “I desire again to bring to your notice the need of a gymnasium. The same reasons urged in my last report exist to-day. The room is ready; the physical welfare of the pupils, especially the blind, calls for it; and the expenditure required is not large.”⁵²

Wilkinson defended his requests for appropriations in the same report by presenting a comparison of per capita costs for thirteen other residential schools. The Berkeley school’s cost per student was reported at \$276.39, less than the average of \$318 per student for East Coast schools. Only Connecticut, Maryland, and two New York schools had lower per capita costs. “These figures are presented merely to convince those who are unacquainted with this work, and who compare the cost of this institution

51. Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, *Nineteenth Report [1888-1890]*, 10.

52. Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, *Sixteenth Report [1882-1884]*, 12.

with that of insane asylums, that there must be conditions pertaining to the education of the deaf and blind which do not enter into the care and support of the insane,” Wilkinson explained.⁵³ He was very careful to distinguish between charitable institutions, such as almshouses and insane asylums, and his institution, which was a school, and therefore part of the educational system. He believed that his endeavor—to educate disabled people and ensure their transformation from dependent to productive—was a loftier enterprise than simply providing for the basic needs of those who were not capable of making a contribution and repaying the state for their care.

One way to demonstrate the success of educating blind and deaf students and silence critics of residential schools was through the public exhibition of students’ achievements. This practice began with Howe, who regularly paraded his students in front of the legislature. He also, for a time, allowed members of the public to visit the Perkins Institute on Saturday afternoons to observe students.⁵⁴ At the California School, the annual commencement exercises were an important event for Wilkinson as they provided him with an opportunity to demonstrate the success of his methods and administration. The commencement exercises were attended every June by the local community as well as families of students and dutifully reported in newspapers. Proceeds gathered from these exhibitions helped to support the school.

In an 1881 article from the *Oakland Tribune* describing the exercises, eight-year-old Foley, who was called “Katie” at school, demonstrated her facility with reading raised type, despite having only been at the school for nine months. Wilkinson had an

53. Ibid., 13.

54. Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*, 112.

audience member call out a page number randomly. Foley then turned to the page and read out loud the passage, “her modulation, accent and inflection being excellent, and showing . . . a natural aptitude for vocalization.”⁵⁵ Foley continued to perform publicly in these annual commencement exercises until she graduated. They were first held in the dining hall and, later, in the newly completed assembly hall, which had been designed in large part for the purpose of hosting the annual event. “Flags, wreaths and streamers, designs in floral characters, ivy drapings, and sculptured pieces adorned and embellished” the room and added to the festive atmosphere.⁵⁶

During Foley’s time at the school the exercises followed the same general routine with few changes over time. Deaf students transcribed sign language into words on a blackboard or wrote short essays on topics assigned by audience members. Blind students sang and played piano, read raised type books aloud, and showed off their typewriting skills. At the 1881 event an audience member, Judge Nye, volunteered to compete against blind student Annie Fennel in a typewriting contest. As the reporter noted, “In an incredibly short space of time Miss Fennel finished her portion of the task, and Mr. Wilkinson, turning to Judge Nye, remarked, ‘She is done; are you?’ ‘Not quite,’ answered the Judge, and the witty rejoinder gained a laugh from the audience, which was undoubtedly some compensation to him for his defeat.”⁵⁷ Wilkinson clearly enjoyed it when his blind students had the opportunity to best a member of the sighted community. Foley usually demonstrated her finger reading skills at the commencement exercises, or,

55. “The Poetry of Motion,” *Oakland Tribune*, June 9, 1881.

56. “Deaf, Dumb and Blind,” *Oakland Tribune*, June 10, 1885.

57. “The Poetry of Motion,” *Oakland Tribune*, June 9, 1881.

when she was older, typewriting. Occasionally she performed music, such as when she sang “Sweet Adieu” in a “fine soprano.”⁵⁸

In 1884, when she was eleven years old, Foley’s mother and siblings relocated to southern California, settling in the small citrus growing community of Duarte where her uncle John P. Dunn had purchased an orange grove. Her maternal grandfather, Owen Dunn, and her mother’s younger sister Catherine moved from Cohoes, New York, to join them there. Citrus growing was a new industry that would have a significant impact on the development of the state. The navel orange was introduced from Brazil to the United States by a missionary and was first planted in Riverside, California, in 1873. Southern California citrus farming was considered a gentlemanly pursuit conducted in a healthful climate, and the Southern Pacific Railroad promoted the area heavily with publications such as *Sunset* magazine that touted the benefits of western living.⁵⁹ Foley traveled between the Bay Area and southern California during school breaks and holidays.

Unfortunately it is not known how Foley felt as a girl going back and forth between her family and the school where she spent the greater part of fifteen years, but presumably she missed her mother and siblings. In an article describing the 1888 commencement exercises, the reporter asked a deaf student, “How do you like your school?” The girl replied that “she did not like it, because she wanted to be with her mother.”⁶⁰ Later in life Foley expressed ambivalent feelings about her time in Berkeley.

58. “The Mutes Speak,” *San Francisco Call*, June 14, 1893.

59. Starr, *Inventing the Dream*, 141-43.

60. “The Silent Ones,” *Oakland Tribune*, June 13, 1888.

Although she referred to it as the “dear old place,” she also wrote that as a child, more than anything, she had wanted to attend school with “normal children.”⁶¹

It was understood by nineteenth-century educators of blind students that parents negatively impacted the development of blind children by coddling them, preventing them from exploring and learning, and inhibiting their physical and mental development. Residential schools served the purpose of removing children from these well-meaning but allegedly unhealthy family influences. Wilkinson described the typical restrictions placed upon the blind child: “He must not put on his own clothes because, when he once tried it, he got on his trousers wrong side before. He cannot wash himself because he makes ‘a mess of it.’ He is not allowed to move for fear he may run his nose against the door or bark his shins on the horse block.”⁶² Wilkinson firmly believed that these injunctions encouraged blind children to grow into helpless adults with tendencies toward laziness and pauperism. “To trade on his affliction, to stand with placard on breast and cup in hand . . . is so much easier than to ‘rustle’ and to work.” It was the responsibility of educators such as Wilkinson to instill in his students “a manly determination to do his

61. Kate Foley to Warring Wilkinson, 5 August 1909, carton 1, folder 39, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; Kate Foley to Mabel Gillis, circa 1916, Home Teacher for the Blind Files 1916-1926 1930-1953, State Library Records, F316: 798, CSA.

62. Warring Wilkinson, “In What Respects Should the Education and Training of the Blind Differ From the Education and Training of Normal Pupils?,” [n.d.], carton 2, folder 20, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 6.

part in the battle of life.”⁶³ Foley would employ similar language in her public speaking as an adult.

Educators and administrators of schools for blind students continually had to combat public stereotypes of blind persons as helpless and pitiable; yet, paradoxically, at the same time this stereotype encouraged the public to support schools for blind students. The sentimental and maudlin Victorian image of the blind person was used as a symbol to arouse feelings of sympathy in the non-disabled despite the strenuous objections of educators such as Howe and Wilkinson. A newspaper article about the school captured these stereotypical and condescending ideas: “As far as such a condition is possible under the circumstances, the inmates . . . are happy: and it is a consoling thought that they have been made so by the unstinted generosity of the people,” the reporter wrote.⁶⁴ Despite Wilkinson’s efforts to emphasize that the institution was, in fact, a school, it was still viewed by the public as an asylum, its students referred to as “inmates.”

Contrary to these stereotypes, Foley’s school experiences were in some ways very much similar to those of any sighted student. Foley made friends among the classmates that she lived with. In letters to Wilkinson, one student expressed concern about Foley’s health, and another said she had to sign off in order to write to Foley.⁶⁵ She maintained relationships with other alumni as an adult, such as Christine LaBarraque, who graduated

63. *Ibid.*, 8.

64. “Home of the Silent,” *Oakland Tribune*, June 11, 1884.

65. Sorine Fromm to Warring Wilkinson, 7 June 1888, carton 3, folder 19, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; Nellie A. Dalton to Warring Wilkinson, 11 June 1888, carton 3, folder 19, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

the same year that she did. Newel Perry also played a significant role in her life. Foley wrote about their school years, “I taught him his letters, and we worked and played together.”⁶⁶ Mary Eastman, a classmate who was slightly older than she was, later became a professional rival.

Recreational activities for blind girls at residential schools included crocheting, beadwork, and playing the piano. Older blind girls in the dormitory had semi-private sleeping alcoves, which they kept “scrupulously neat,” with “various fancy articles grouped in their bureaus.”⁶⁷ Occasionally they incorporated aspects of visual culture into their lives. Foley later described her interest as a child in understanding color: “I resolved to learn all I could about color, and so I memorized the list of colors, which ones harmonized, which were most pleasing to the eye, which were bright, which produced a sombre impression.”⁶⁸ Foley was curious about this sense that others possessed but that she did not—especially since it caused people to treat her as though she were lacking in something, which she herself did not feel. “My ears and fingers continued to flood my mind with knowledge, and the want of eyesight did not distress me. When I touched an object, or listened to a lesson, my mind stored it away for future reference,” she said.⁶⁹

Wilkinson’s archived papers include a composition typewritten by Foley when she was twelve years old, the pages tied together with a blue ribbon. The topic was blindness and its relative advantages and disadvantages. Foley wrote, “What we lose by sight, we gain in other ways; as for instance, our touch is much more accurate, our

66. Foley to M. Gillis, 20 September 1916, CSA.

67. “Aid for the Afflicted,” *San Francisco Examiner*, April 23, 1882.

68. Foley, *Five Lectures*, 9.

69. *Ibid.*, 9.

memory stronger, than a seeing person's, because the most of [*sic*] our education depends on it." She added saucily, "I was going to say, that we could not commit as much sin, as other people, but I am afraid we commit quite as many with our tongues, as you do with your eyes."⁷⁰

Foley's experiences at the school and her own beliefs about blindness led to the normalization of disability becoming a consistent theme in her work. As an adult, in interviews and lectures, she continuously demanded the rejection of blindness as a tragic and miserable condition and insisted upon the equality of blind individuals with their sighted counterparts. The composition from her girlhood provides an early indication of this attitude. "There is a wrong impression as regards blindness. The impression is, that melancholy should attend the affliction. It is not so. Let any of you my friends stand behind the door when we do not know you are there, you will hear mirth [?] and laughter with such hearty good will, that it will change your opinion immediately."⁷¹ Foley's defiance, strong will, and sense of humor were assets in her later life.

Vocational training was in place in the earliest residential schools, with chair-caning and broom-making being the classic handicrafts performed by blind students.⁷² However, options for artisanal work were limited as a result of the advent of mechanization. Musical training was emphasized, although educators such as Howe

70. Kate Foley, "Advantages, and Disadvantages of Blindness," circa 1885, carton 3, folder 18, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

71. *Ibid.*

72. Carol Linsenmeier and Jeff Moyer, "Reaching Across the Divide: Visual Disability, Childhood, and American History," in *Children With Disabilities in America*, ed. Philip L. Safford and Elizabeth J. Safford (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 36.

quickly determined only a small percentage of blind students were talented enough for a career in music.⁷³ Wilkinson continually sought to identify careers that would be appropriate for blind and deaf adults and attempted to prepare his students to enter them.

One of the most salient features of residential schools for disabled students was the emphasis on manual training. At the American Association of Instructors of the Blind (AAIB) conference in 1871, one attendee asserted that it was a “mistake” to emphasize “the literary branches” to blind students without “giving them the knowledge of any industrial branch.” Ultimately, if they could not support themselves after attending school, he considered it “far better for them never to have learned a particle of literature, for should they come to the almshouse the degradation would not be so keenly felt.”⁷⁴ In other words, he worried there was risk that an educated disabled person might feel that certain forms of employment were beneath them.

At the same meeting, the importance of teaching household tasks such as sewing to girl students was discussed: “If we can teach them to work methodically while they are in the institution, they will be of more use to their parents when they go home; and more than that, they will not go home with the feeling that . . . they are degraded by going down to manual labor. That feeling is now too prevalent, I fear.”⁷⁵ This was a sharp contrast from public schools, which did not place such importance on manual training.⁷⁶

73. Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*, 36-37, 42.

74. N.B. Kneass, Sr. (remarks given at the 2nd convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Indianapolis, IN, August 8-10, 1871), in *Proceedings of the Second Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Printing and Publishing House, 1871), 54.

75. *Ibid.*, 53.

76. Winzer, *History of Special Education*, 173.

Wilkinson's foremost objective in the education of the students at the Berkeley school was to ensure self-reliance after graduating. However, residential schools met with limited success in implementing vocational training programs that were actually effective in ensuring that students would achieve financial self-sufficiency as adults.

The school's 1882 report to the state legislature described Wilkinson's tour of thirty-one institutions to investigate their vocational training programs. His conclusion was that cooking was particularly suitable for female students. The bakery facility at the Berkeley campus could serve as a cooking school, "solv[ing] the problem of 'what to do with our girls?'" as Wilkinson noted in the report. Although the cooking program was designed with deaf students in mind, the question of "what to do with" graduates of the school preoccupied Wilkinson. He followed the adult lives of his former students with interest and expressed a desire to develop continuing education programs such as extension or correspondence courses.⁷⁷

New professional opportunities for women arose in the nineteenth century, such as teaching, nursing, library work, and clerical work. Demand for office workers increased after the Civil War, and the invention of the typewriter in 1867 provided a mechanism by which women gained access to this previously male-dominated space. The typewriter "seemed to employers eager to save money to be especially well suited to the nimble fingers of women—who could be paid less than men."⁷⁸ Wilkinson quickly identified the typewriter (and, later, the phonograph) as a potential tool for blind women

77. W.A. Caldwell, "Death of Dr. Warring Wilkinson," *California News* 33, no. 8 (April 1918), carton 2, folder 3, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 128.

78. Matthews, *Rise of Public Woman*, 148.

to advance into clerical work alongside their sighted counterparts and requested a \$500 appropriation for typewriters from the legislature.⁷⁹ He bragged about the typing abilities of his female students. “Mr. Wilkinson . . . said he never had to write a letter himself for the blind girls always did them for him.”⁸⁰ At the 1887 commencement exercises, Foley used a typewriter to write a letter to the audience stating that she hoped to “earn her living by this work.”⁸¹ She was fourteen years old, “a pretty, ruddy-faced girl.”⁸² Foley later claimed that she was the fastest reader at school.⁸³ She was an adept, confident student, well liked by her principal and teachers. However, she would soon undergo a difficult trial that tested her resilience greatly.

After experiencing unspecified problems with one or both of her feet, she left school around 1890 and endured a year of unsuccessful treatment before undergoing an amputation. Undoubtedly this was a traumatic and painful event for a young woman of seventeen. A letter sent to her “dear old Princie” and published in the school newsletter in 1891 is written in a cheerful and stoic tone, but she refers to “hopes [that] were shattered” and “the fresh pain that each added disappointment brought.” She continued, “With the troublesome foot safely locked in the Doctor’s cabinet, I feel that I can defy the fates, and that I am about to be rewarded for my three years of waiting, by being able to walk without the assistance of those horrible crutches.” For someone so reliant on her sense of touch, navigating with crutches posed unique difficulties and her relief at being

79. Board of Directors of the California Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind, *Eighteenth Report [1886-1888]*, 10.

80. “Deaf and Blind,” *San Francisco Call*, June 13, 1894.

81. “They Are Silent,” *Oakland Tribune*, June 8, 1887.

82. *Ibid.*

83. Foley to M. Gillis, circa 1916, State Library Records, CSA.

rid of them is apparent in her letter. “You can’t know how deliciously free I feel, to be able to go anywhere I like, without crutch or cane, though I sometimes carry the latter for safety.”⁸⁴

By 1892 Foley recovered and returned to the Berkeley campus. She was nineteen years old and would stay at the school for three more years. At this time it was common for students at residential schools to remain for ten to twelve years.⁸⁵ According to a newspaper account of the 1892 commencement exercises, Foley and her classmate Augusta “Gussie” Mast participated in a typewriting contest that Foley won, 92 words to 74 words (although it was noted that Mast was handicapped by an injured finger). Foley also demonstrated finger reading through “16 thicknesses of folded silk,” to show how sensitive her touch was.⁸⁶ Foley’s future rival Eastman graduated that year, as did Perry, who would go on to attend the university at Berkeley. Foley later expressed regret that she was not able to attend the university; she had wanted to be the first blind woman to

84. Kate Foley to Warring Wilkinson, 29 May 1891, reprinted in *Weekly News* 5, no. 40 (June 6, 1891), carton 3, folder 22, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. The source of Foley’s “troublesome” foot—whether injury or illness—remains unknown, but it is worth noting that exposure to gonococcal bacteria at birth can cause infections other than ophthalmia. The most common complication of disseminated gonococcal infections in newborns is arthritis. A long-term bacterial infection could lead to osteomyelitis, which in 1890 had extremely limited treatment options beyond amputation. See “Gonococcal Infections,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, June 4, 2015, accessed October 29, 2015, <http://www.cdc.gov/std/tg2015/gonorrhea.htm>; Katherine M. Knapp, “*Listeria monocytogenes*, *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*, and Other Bacteria,” in *Congenital and Perinatal Infections: A Concise Guide to Diagnosis*, ed. Cecelia Hutto and Gwendolyn B. Scott (Totowa, NJ: Humana Press, 2006), 203.

85. Winzer, *History of Special Education*, 141.

86. “Deaf and Dumb and Blind,” *San Francisco Call*, June 8, 1892.

graduate from there, but the illness and physical problems she experienced kept her from doing so.⁸⁷

At the 1893 commencement, Foley again exhibited her typewriting skill. This time she also incorporated use of the phonograph, which had been invented in 1877 and had “made the knowledge of stenography unnecessary,” according to the reporter covering the event. Wilkinson dictated two letters into the phonograph and then Foley came into the room and transcribed the recording with perfect “alignment, capitalization, and punctuation.”⁸⁸ Gussie Mast, who graduated that year, presented her essay called “Have We a Future?” It was certainly a relevant question for a young blind woman on the verge of a new century to pose, and would become particularly meaningful to Foley in the coming years. During her last term at the California School for the Blind, she taught a class of blind adults how to read braille. She said later that she was motivated to do so upon the realization that blind adults had even fewer educational opportunities than children.⁸⁹

Foley graduated from the Berkeley school in 1895. She was twenty-two years old. At the commencement exercises that year she, along with her female classmates, wore a white dress and carried fresh flowers.⁹⁰ There were eleven other graduates, including her friend LaBarraque. Both women were poised to take advantage of new possibilities available to their sex. It was an important year for women’s suffrage in

87. Foley to M. Gillis, 20 September 1916, CSA.

88. “The Mutes Speak,” *San Francisco Call*, June 14, 1893.

89. Carol I. Alderson, “Work with the Blind Round Table,” *ALA Bulletin* 33, no. 11 (1939): 222, accessed July 11, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25690297>.

90. “Sightless and Dumb,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 12, 1895.

California. The state's suffrage movement, which had retreated in the early 1880s, resurged at the end of the decade. In 1895, when Foley graduated, a constitutional amendment enfranchising California women had been proposed for the ballot the following year.⁹¹ Despite this, at the commencement exercises Foley read an essay she had written called, "The Coming Woman," in which she argued against suffrage and validated traditional roles for women. "Miss Foley believes that the coming woman will have good things, but not the suffrage," the newspaper reporter stated. Foley held that suffrage would denigrate rather than "elevate the standard of womanhood in the minds of all right-thinking men," and that "women's highest earthly duty is to her husband, her children, her home and her friends."⁹² Ironically, Foley herself would lead a life that was very much in the public sphere. She would neither marry nor have children, despite her idealization of these roles. Blind and disabled women were strongly discouraged from doing so.

In his commencement address that year, Wilkinson prefaced his remarks to students with a reminder of their debt: "And now a word to you, the graduates of 95 who are the present year's fruitage of this vast expenditure of money on the part of the State." He stressed the importance of "noble living and faithfulness to duty."⁹³ When Foley left school and went to live with her family in southern California, she was eager to find work and fulfill the obligations laid out for her by Wilkinson, "who, in parting from me, said:

91. Gayle Gullet, *Becoming Citizens: The Emergence and Development of the California Women's Movement, 1880-1911* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

92. "Sightless and Dumb," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 12, 1895.

93. Warring Wilkinson, commencement address, June 1895, carton 2, folder 29, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

‘I am sure you will find your place in the sun.’”⁹⁴ She would, eventually, find that place, but it was a journey longer and more difficult than she expected. The education that she received and the skills that she learned at the California School for the Blind were essential to Foley’s ability to cope with the extent of the discrimination that she faced upon graduating.

94. Alderson, “Work with the Blind,” 222.

Chapter 3

“No Time for Blues or Morbid Thoughts”: Kate Foley and Volunteer Teaching in Progressive Era Los Angeles, 1895-1913

When Kate Foley moved to Los Angeles in 1895 as a twenty-two-year-old graduate of the California School for the Blind, she hoped to find work in the clerical field. Intelligent and determined, she possessed the advantages of an education and the appropriate training. The City of Los Angeles was undergoing a significant period of growth and transformation. Women increasingly participated in public life and took advantage of new professional opportunities. The Progressive Era was incipient, and California—Los Angeles in particular—readied to implement far-reaching political and social reform. However, societal discrimination against blindness prevented Foley from finding a position in her selected field. She turned to volunteer teaching work to escape the “enforced idleness” that she and other blind individuals experienced without equitable access to employment opportunities, romantic relationships, mobility and independence, and literacy.¹

Voluntarism provided a socially acceptable outlet for an educated woman such as Foley to actively participate outside the domestic space. Foley, supported by a middle-class and well-connected family, was able to establish herself successfully as a volunteer after discovering that the clerical field was closed to her. Volunteer home teaching was a suitable activity for a blind woman, drawing upon nineteenth-century traditions of charitable “Friendly Visiting” and adapting them to the growing role of the state in

1. Foley named “enforced idleness” as “the greatest burden of the blind.” See “Report of Home Teacher of the Blind, July 1, 1916 to June 30, 1917,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 12, no. 4 (October 1917): 879.

supervising and controlling disability. The influence of religion and education in Progressive Era Los Angeles created a fertile environment for Foley's volunteer work to flourish.

The population of Los Angeles surged over the 1890s, increasing by 103 percent between 1890 and 1900, second only to New York City. Boosters extolled the agricultural and commercial opportunities of the area.² Foley's mother and siblings lived in Duarte, where John Paul Dunn owned an orange grove, before moving into Los Angeles. Dunn retired to southern California in 1900, leaving his "brilliant political career" for health reasons and abandoning the possibility of becoming governor of California, a position for which "he had been mentioned prominently."³ Six years later he died at the home where Foley lived. Foley resided with her immediate family, first on East Pico Boulevard in downtown Los Angeles, and later on East Adams Boulevard and Maple Avenue in the south central area. These were predominantly white, middle-class neighborhoods that became increasingly diverse in the early decades of the twentieth century.⁴ Her brother John was an attorney, while her sister Alice and mother Bridget were both nurses.⁵

2. Greg Hise and William Deverell, "Los Angeles, 1900," *Victorian Review* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 50-51, accessed December 20, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41039107>.

3. "John P. Dunn Dies Suddenly," *Los Angeles Herald*, May 30, 1906.

4. U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995, *Los Angeles, California, City Directory 1896*, accessed December 20, 2015, ancestry.com; U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995, *Los Angeles, California, City Directory 1904*, accessed December 20, 2015, ancestry.com; U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995, *Los Angeles, California, City Directory 1913*, accessed December 20, 2015, ancestry.com; "Mapping L.A.: Central L.A.: Downtown," *Los Angeles Times*, accessed January 8, 2016, <http://maps.latimes.com/neighborhoods/neighborhood/downtown/>; "Mapping L.A.:

Nursing (alongside teaching and clerical work) was a primary career option for educated women—Irish-American women in particular, who dominated the ranks of the field after the Civil War. By the turn of the century the proportion of women in the workforce had climbed to 20 percent. This resulted from a variety of factors. The number of women attending colleges and universities increased to 40 percent of all undergraduates over the latter half of the century. Participation in charitable endeavors and social causes contributed to women's involvement in the new fields of settlement work and home economics, as well as traditionally male-dominated occupations such as medicine, law, and journalism, while library work became increasingly feminized.⁶ The growth of industrialization and commercialization created jobs for women in factories and in the clerical and retail fields. Women comprised 4 percent of office workers in 1880 and 21 percent in 1890.⁷ This was the position that Foley herself hoped to obtain. Although women struggled with workplace discrimination and were paid significantly

Central L.A.: Historic South-Central," *Los Angeles Times*, accessed January 8, 2016, <http://maps.latimes.com/neighborhoods/neighborhood/historic-south-central/>; Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), accessed January 4, 2016, ProQuest Ebrary.

5. U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995, *Los Angeles, California, City Directory 1895*, accessed December 20, 2015, ancestry.com.

6. Diner, *Erin's Daughters*, 95; Steven L. Piott, *Daily Life in the Progressive Era* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 59, 62; Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920* (New York: Free Press, 1979), 175; Joyce Antler, *The Educated Woman and Professionalization: The Struggle for a New Feminine Identity, 1890-1920* (New York: Garland, 1987), 67.

7. Margery Davies, "Woman's Place is at the Typewriter: The Feminization of the Clerical Labor Force," in *History of Women in the United States: Historical Articles on Women's Lives and Activities*, vol. 8, *Professional and White Collar Employment*, pt. 1, ed. Nancy F. Cott (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1993), 234.

less than their male counterparts, these new professional opportunities helped them form a new public identity and contributed to the growth of the women's suffrage movement.

Despite Foley's eagerness to take advantage of the professions available to women in the burgeoning city of Los Angeles, her efforts to obtain employment met without success. As a result of the discrimination she encountered as a disabled woman, she could not find a clerical position after graduating from school. "I found . . . that, although I knew many things, and was well equipped to earn my own living, my lack of eyesight was responsible for a corresponding lack of confidence upon the part of the public," she said later.⁸ This was a historical problem faced by nearly all blind adults. Census data from 1910 shows that only 25 percent of blind men, and 6 percent of blind women, were employed (versus 81 percent and 23 percent, respectively, of their sighted counterparts).⁹

Typical vocations for those who were employed were known as the "blind trades." These occupations "included musicianship, piano tuning, shopkeeping, house-to-house peddling, and a few small entrepreneurial ventures, one of which was street beggary," as well as "semi-skilled manual operations: chair-caning, broom-making, hand weaving, basketry."¹⁰ Most fields were simply closed off to a person with a visual disability. Other positions that were attainable—such as clerical work, teaching, or legal professions—were difficult to obtain due to strongly prejudicial attitudes. Disabled

8. Foley, *Five Lectures*, 10.

9. United States Department of Commerce, *The Blind*, 61-62.

10. Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 212.

women such as Foley were lumped alongside those whose race, ethnic identification, or religion put them into the category of “undesirable” to employ.

Professionals in medicine, education, and the social sciences as well as the popular media reinforced negative stereotypes about blindness. A 1895 report from the State Normal School in Los Angeles provides a salient example: “The Normal School is no place for the halt and the lame and the blind. It is not only necessary that those who are to become teachers should be physically strong, if they are to do their duty to the State, but it is desirable that the best specimens of manhood and womanhood should ever stand before our children.”¹¹ During this period, a preoccupation with physical fitness emerged that was linked to nationalism and moral character.¹² Attitudes toward disability began to shift from Christian charity and pity to a social Darwinist emphasis on the elimination of undesirable traits. Despite the determination to succeed drilled into them and the pains that school administrators took to demonstrate the capabilities of their blind students to the general public, the reality was that vocational discrimination persisted.

The experiences of her fellow graduates of the California School for the Blind were, like Foley’s, circumscribed by the discrimination they faced as blind adults. After studying at the University of California and in Europe, the brilliant mathematician Newel Perry, one of Wilkinson’s prize students, spent ten years in New York looking for a university position. He was turned down repeatedly and returned to Berkeley in 1912 to

11. “Report of the State Normal School at Los Angeles, Forty-Fourth Fiscal Year,” *Appendix to the Journal of the Senate and Assembly of the Thirty-First Session of the Legislature of the State of California* 6 (Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1895), 26.

12. Piott, *Daily Life*, 89-96.

teach at the California School for the Blind.¹³ Foley's classmate Christine LaBarraque put herself through law school in San Francisco by teaching foreign languages and, notably, was the first blind woman to pass the bar exam. However, she was unable to practice law and instead turned to a career in music. Fellow alumni Gussie Mast and Dennis Foley (no relation) were also musicians. Gust became teacher of music at the California School for the Blind.¹⁴ Mary Eastman also joined the faculty of the Berkeley school as teacher of blind students not long after graduating, and would later vie with Foley for the position of home teacher in the Bay Area. John Dondero, who was reported to be independently wealthy, became a lawyer and spent most of his time on litigation related to the California School for the Blind and the Oakland Industrial Home for the Adult Blind.¹⁵ These graduates of the California School for the Blind found it nearly impossible to enter the workforce without selecting one of the very few professional careers that were considered suitable for a blind person.

In a 1902 letter to her former principal, she described her life after graduating from school as seeming "somewhat empty and purposeless."¹⁶ In this Foley was not unlike college-educated women her age that experienced disillusionment upon returning

13. Floyd W. Matson, *Blind Justice: Jacobus tenBroek and the Vision of Equality* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2005), 55-58.

14. Christine LaBarraque, "Work for the Blind in Italy," *Outlook for the Blind* 1, no. 2 (July 1907): 64; "Books for the Blind," *News Notes of California Libraries* 1, no. 6 (October 1906): 299; "The Blind and the Halt Do Their Bit for the Red Cross," *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, January 7, 1942.

15. "Bride Swoons as License Issues," *San Francisco Call*, July 20, 1913.

16. Kate Foley to Warring Wilkinson, 27 August 1902, carton 1, folder 39, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

home after the stimulation and conviviality of life at a residential school.¹⁷ The readjustment to living at home, her days no longer occupied by the familiar routine of classes, recreational activities, chores, and social interactions, was likely difficult in and of itself. However, the “enforced idleness” suddenly thrust upon her was due primarily to the restrictions she encountered as a disabled woman. Barriers to job opportunities, mobility, reading material, and romantic relationships presented unique challenges for blind persons.

Sexual discrimination may have impacted Foley’s life, although it was not a topic she addressed. Foley did not marry nor have children. Whether she ever fell in love is unfortunately unknown. “Spinsterhood” was prevalent among sighted women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for reasons that were complex and varied.¹⁸ The extreme idealization of romantic love during this time, engendered by a mix of Victorian sentimentality and Christian spirituality, was highly influential. Some heterosexual women may have chosen to be single because they were unwilling to compromise these ideals, or because they experienced anxiety over sexual matters. Additionally, family obligations and their identities as daughters were important, even to women who were employed and educated.¹⁹ Foley’s sister Alice never married, and their mother did not remarry after the death of their father. (This was not unusual for the Irish-American community, which, as noted previously, was characterized by a comparatively high

17. Antler, *Educated Woman*, 136-45.

18. Zsuzsa Berend, “The Best or None! Spinsterhood in Nineteenth-Century New England,” *Journal of Social History* 33, no. 4 (Summer 2000): 935.

19. *Ibid.*, 936; Antler, *Educated Woman*, 176-78.

proportion of unmarried women.)²⁰ Moreover, Alice may have felt compelled to help care for and support her disabled sister rather than pursue marriage and family life.

It is likely, however, that Foley's identity as a blind woman and an amputee had the greatest impact on her feelings about marriage and sexuality. The educators at residential schools for disabled students, starting with Howe, frequently mentioned the sexuality of their students as a source of concern. Along with experts in medicine and the developing social sciences, educators advised against marriage between disabled adults. Census data from 1910 indicates that 76 percent of adult men and 79 percent of adult women that became blind before the age of twenty were single.²¹ Disabled adults were disparaged as unfit to have romantic relationships or raise children, and the perceived helplessness and dependence of blind women denied their sexual agency.²² Marriage to a sighted woman was deemed slightly more acceptable for a blind man, as she could provide him with needed assistance; however, blind women were not considered to be suitable spouses for either blind or sighted men, as it was believed that their visual disability made them unsatisfactory mothers and housekeepers.²³

Devotion to a cause was an appropriate path for women who did not marry. It was believed important for all women, married or not, to provide dutiful service.²⁴ This could be achieved through employment or volunteer work. Foley, prevented from accessing the former, opted for the latter. "[I] was disappointed at my failure to obtain

20. Diner, *Erin's Daughters*, 61.

21. United States Department of Commerce, *The Blind*, 56-61, 95.

22. Kudlick, "Modernity's Miss-Fits," 206; Allen, "Desire Denied."

23. Kudlick, "Modernity's Miss-Fits," 205-06.

24. Berend, "The Best or None!," 943.

employment, but I had been blessed with a strongly hoping heart, and did not want to distress my family by becoming discouraged,” she later stated.²⁵

Foley joined the many women that actively embraced social and political causes. Women’s organizations, both religious and secular, increased significantly over the latter half of the century.²⁶ The work of these volunteers, which started with their involvement in the abolitionist and temperance movements in 1820s and 1830s, addressed a broad spectrum of issues by 1900. As a result of her voluntarism Foley ended up leading a life that was very much in the public sphere. The increasing presence of women in public spaces in the United States was a feature of life during the late nineteenth century. Women were visible on city streets and traveling on railroads. They appeared onstage as actresses or as public speakers and became preachers. The concept of the “New Woman”—caricatured in the press as a bicycle-riding, bloomers-wearing threat to masculinity—began to appear in the 1880s in Britain and the United States.²⁷

Foley’s life spanned a transformative period for the United States. According to historians, the social and political upheavals that occurred during the Progressive Era were induced by industrialization, urbanization, and immigration.²⁸ The destabilization caused by this trio of forces, exacerbated by mounting concern over the political dominance of the wealthy during the Gilded Age, prompted calls for political and social

25. Alderson, “Work with the Blind,” 222.

26. Scott, “Women’s Voluntary Associations,” 37-42.

27. Matthews, *Rise of Public Woman*, 93-112; Lorelee MacPike, “The New Woman, Childbearing, and the Reconstruction of Gender, 1880-1900,” *NWSA Journal* 1, no. 3 (Spring 1989): 371.

28. John Ehrenreich, *The Altruistic Imagination: A History of Social Work and Social Policy in the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 27; Piott, *Daily Life*, 83.

reform nationwide. In California determination to curb the power of the Southern Pacific Railroad grew over the last few decades of the nineteenth century.²⁹ Foley's uncle John P. Dunn's political career had represented an early manifestation of the reform element that would characterize progressivism. He became known as the "Watchdog of the Treasury" for his investigations into the Southern Pacific's delinquent taxes.³⁰

Economic turmoil and labor unrest intensified in the 1890s. The Panic of 1893 caused a financial crisis. Wages were depressed, with 20 to 40 percent of the population living in poverty.³¹ The pivotal 1896 national election pitted populists against prosperous business interests; Republican William McKinley, representing the latter, won the presidency.³² In California, despite the efforts of the state's women's movement, the suffrage amendment was defeated at the polls. This proved to be only a temporary setback. Women's suffrage, along with many other social and political reforms associated with the Progressive Era, were imminent. California was a leader in Progressive Era reform efforts, which were concentrated in Los Angeles. Its residents enacted widespread social and political reform both locally and on a statewide level.³³ The modern, growing city embodied the traits of progressivism and provided unique opportunities to residents. Foley's voluntarism was encouraged and shaped by the

29. Rawls and Bean, *California*, 217-26.

30. "John P. Dunn Dies Suddenly," *Los Angeles Herald*, May 30, 1906; Oscar T. Shuck, *Bench and Bar of California: History, Anecdotes, Reminiscences* (San Francisco: Occident Printing House, 1888), 219.

31. Piott, *Daily Life*, 58, 64.

32. Gullett, *Becoming Citizens*, 66, 92.

33. Starr, *Inventing the Dream*, 236, 249; Rawls and Bean, *California*, 245-46.

singular atmosphere of Los Angeles. Intersecting social and cultural forces that were significant in influencing her voluntarism included religion and education.

Religion—Protestantism in particular—was foundational to Progressive Era social reform. Protestant churches, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, and the Young Women’s Christian Association were the most influential associations of women in the late nineteenth century.³⁴ Although Foley and her family were Catholics, her work and milieu were clearly influenced by Protestant traditions, first during her education under Wilkinson at the Berkeley school, and subsequently in the heavily Protestant city of Los Angeles. Fifty-six percent of the population of Los Angeles was Protestant (compared to 15 percent of San Francisco’s) and historians have emphasized the role of these residents as leaders of the city’s progressive reform movement.³⁵ However, Catholicism was not inconsequential in Los Angeles. Catholicism influenced the provision of social welfare in the city, particularly in the outreach provided to the Mexican and Japanese immigrants that arrived in increasing numbers during the early 1900s. Charitable practices reflected differing religious beliefs about poverty. Catholics traditionally accepted poverty as a fact of life, whereas Protestants tended to focus on its eradication—sometimes through the identification of the outside forces responsible for poverty, but more often than not by assigning blame to the poor themselves.³⁶

34. Scott, “Women’s Voluntary Associations,” 42.

35. Starr, *Inventing the Dream*, 238.

36. Kristine Ashton Gunnell, “The Daughters of Charity as Cultural Intermediaries: Women, Religion, and Race in Early Twentieth Century Los Angeles,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 31, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 51-74; Elizabeth N. Agnew, *From Charity to Social Work: Mary E. Richmond and the Creation of an American Profession* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 75.

Foley wrote to Wilkinson in 1910, fifteen years after leaving school, “You will be pleased to hear that the Bible Class did me the honor to make me its president.” She did not specify the denomination or church with which the class was associated. She was proud of her achievement: “It is very gratifying to me, of course, since it proves that my effort to do good work in spite of my blindness has been successful.”³⁷ Like many volunteers, Foley’s work was rooted in the kind of active spirituality that contributed to the Social Gospel movement of the early twentieth century. This religious movement, which sought to address social problems such as poverty and inequality, had a significant impact on Progressive Era reform and the development of social work.³⁸

Foley was also motivated by the Progressive Era emphasis on education and literacy. The expansion of literacy, which included public libraries and education reform, was an important function of organizations of educated middle-class women. For example, clubwomen initiated the “traveling libraries” that would evolve into library extension services, broadening access to reading materials and generating community interest in establishing public libraries.³⁹ Reading was considered a means to self-improvement. Literacy had the power to Americanize immigrants, reduce the pernicious influence of the saloon, and help eliminate crime and poverty. The home library movement, instituted in 1905, was intended to bring literacy, and American values, to the

37. Foley to Wilkinson, 5 August 1909, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

38. Agnew, *Charity to Social Work*, 48-50; Barbara Levy Simon, *The Empowerment Tradition in American Social Work* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 54-55.

39. Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women’s Clubs* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 26.

homes of poor children. Additionally, Progressive Era libraries provided services to foreign-born patrons: they advertised in foreign languages, built up foreign language collections, and sponsored lectures on topics of interest to immigrants.⁴⁰

In addition to promoting public library services, Progressive Era women devoted much attention to schools. Los Angeles in particular became a locus of education reform during the Progressive Era. This can be at least partly explained by the pattern of settlement experienced by Los Angeles. The salubrious climate of southern California was its main attractant, and those who moved there tended to do so not because they were looking for work but because they could afford to, which differentiated it from other urban areas. The middle- and upper-middle class families of Los Angeles had a high number of school-age children compared to Portland and San Francisco.⁴¹ The first kindergarten in the state was established in Los Angeles when reformer and clubwoman Caroline Severance brought noted early childhood educator Emma Marwedel to the city in 1876. Los Angeles women later endeavored to elect a non-partisan school board and for the right to serve as school board members themselves.⁴²

In June of 1901 Foley attended an “elegant banquet” and dance with her brother that was given by the Los Angeles City Teachers’ Association. Described by the *Los*

40. Joanne Ellen Passet, *Cultural Crusaders: Women Librarians in the American West, 1900-1917* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 85-87; Agnew, *Charity to Social Work*, 105; Garrison, *Apostles of Culture*, 36, 208-09, 217.

41. Mary Lou Locke, “Out of the Shadows And Into the Western Sun: Working Women of the Late Nineteenth-Century Urban Far West,” *Journal of Urban History* 16, no. 2 (February 1990): 187-90.

42. Starr, *Inventing the Dream*, 221; Dorothea Moore, “The Work of the Women’s Clubs in California,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 28 (September 1906): 61.

Angeles Herald as “the largest and most successful social function of the educational world ever given in Southern California,” the event was held at the Hotel Arcadia in Santa Monica.⁴³ Four years later, in August of 1905, John H. Foley married former teacher Edith Joy. Undoubtedly Foley attended the wedding, which was held nearby at the home of the bride’s sister. Her cousin Tessie Dunn played the music for the ceremony. According to the article announcing the nuptials, the bride and groom met through their work in education.⁴⁴ With a family that valued literacy, living in a community that embraced education reform, and highly educated herself, Foley was well positioned to take on a role that involved teaching others.

A chief obstacle faced by blind individuals during this time was illiteracy. The ability to read raised type provided manifold benefits: intellectual stimulation, relief from boredom, spiritual nourishment, practical information, and connections to other blind adults. However, many blind people could not read raised type. Blindness occurred most commonly later in life and there were few opportunities for newly blind adults to obtain instruction in how to read. Furthermore, materials for blind readers were scarce. Most blind persons, educated or not, could not afford to purchase raised type books. The American Printing House for the Blind (APH) was the chief printer of raised type materials in the United States and relied on a small federal subsidy. Compounding the difficulties in learning to read and the scarcity of materials was the fact that there were four competing forms of raised type in use: Moon, Boston line type, New York Point,

43. “School Ma’ams and Masters’ Annual Frolic by the Sad Sea Waves,” *Los Angeles Herald*, June 16, 1901.

44. “Attorney Victim of Wily Cupid,” *Los Angeles Herald*, August 10, 1905.

and braille. Blind adults had to learn to read more than one form of raised type in order to access more than a subset of an already limited pool of available books. The standardization of raised type was one of the earliest concerns of the organized blind movement but would take decades to achieve.⁴⁵

There were no library services for blind readers in Los Angeles when Foley moved there in 1895. Her family engaged a reader to come to the house twice a week to read aloud to her.⁴⁶ The first library for blind readers in California, the San Francisco Reading Room for the Blind, was established at the San Francisco Public Library in 1902 by a ladies' auxiliary. Lessons in reading raised type were provided there.⁴⁷ In Foley's letter to Wilkinson that year, she inquired if he knew anything about the reading room and expressed that starting something similar in Los Angeles was a "pet plan" of hers.⁴⁸ In 1905, the new public library in Santa Monica, approximately fifteen miles west of Los Angeles, opened with a room that was "devoted exclusively to the purpose of reading aloud to the blind."⁴⁹

Libraries were beginning to form collections of raised print books and reading rooms for blind adults, but there were only a handful of them, primarily located in large cities on the East Coast and in the Midwest. Unless a resident of one of these cities, or very wealthy, the average blind adult had very limited access to reading materials in the

45. Lovejoy, "History and Standards," 5.

46. Carroll Van Court, "A Patient Worker," *Congregationalist and Christian World*, August 20, 1914, 244.

47. Lovejoy, "History and Standards," 3.

48. Foley to Wilkinson, 27 August 1902, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

49. Arthur Macdonald Dole, "Public Libraries of Southern California," *Out West* 22, no. 2 (February 1905), 92.

late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By 1905 there were approximately forty collections for blind readers at libraries in the United States.⁵⁰ The small number of literate blind adults who lived near enough to a library with a raised print collection quickly went through everything available, and it soon became apparent to library professionals that a more efficient system of circulating materials was needed as well as a way to reach out to the many blind adults that were not accessing materials at all.⁵¹

It is not known precisely when Foley decided to begin teaching other blind adults how to read. Foley said later that she recognized the need for it while she was attending school and that she volunteered for twenty years before she was hired by the California State Library.⁵² Although this is likely an approximate amount, it seems that she did start teaching not long after moving to Los Angeles. Seven years after graduating, in 1902, she wrote to her former principal that she had found her “own especial niche,” indicating that her teaching efforts were underway. She wrote that the work was “growing steadily,” leaving “no time for blues or morbid thoughts, even if I cared to indulge in them.”⁵³

Foley may have felt motivated to volunteer because she could not find a clerical position, but her teaching work expanded and provided her with a sense of validation.

50. Lovejoy, “History and Standards,” 2-3; Edward E. Allen, “Library Work for the Blind,” *Library Journal* 31, no. 1 (January 1906): 8.

51. Robert Irwin, *As I Saw It* (New York: American Foundation for the Blind, 1955), 69-70; Henry Munson Utley, “Books for the Blind,” in *The Library Without the Walls: Reprints of Papers and Addresses*, ed. Laura Janzow (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1927), 425-26.

52. Foley, *Five Lectures*, 23, 10.

53. Foley to Wilkinson, 27 August 1902, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

She opened her letter to Wilkinson with a request for the name of the company that manufactured Braille Writers on behalf a pupil of hers that was interested in trying one. Clearly, she was proud of her work and wanted her principal to know that she was keeping busy. She wrote that her copying was “assuming such proportions” that she was having difficulty keeping up. The dearth of books available to blind readers and her desire to provide her students with materials to read prompted Foley to create materials on her own. As she told her former principal, “I find so many who need books, I am tempted to say with Helen [Hunt Jackson],

‘Too heavy burdens in the load,
And too few helpers on the road.’”⁵⁴

A later biography written about one of Foley’s students, J. Robert Atkinson, founder of a braille printing press in Los Angeles, told of how he first became aware of her volunteer teaching work. Depressed after being blinded in a gun accident, Atkinson was initially reluctant to learn to read raised type. He became acquainted with a blind vegetable seller in his neighborhood who “urged [him] to go and have a talk with her.” In September 1912, he “visited Miss Foley in her home” along with his mother. “Miss Foley . . . gave Bob a great deal of encouragement, handed him a card containing the

54. Ibid. This quote is from Helen Hunt Jackson’s poem, “Not As I Will.” Jackson, a writer and activist for Native Americans rights, lived for a time in southern California. Her famous book *Ramona* was published in 1884. For the full poem, see George Willis Cooke, ed., *The Poets of Transcendentalism: An Anthology* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1903), accessed January 4, 2016, <http://www.bartleby.com/339/139.html>.

Braille alphabet and urged him to study it.”⁵⁵ Atkinson credited learning to read braille with inspiring him to become more independent and self-reliant. From the beginning Foley viewed reading as a “means to an end.”⁵⁶

Voluntarism in the United States reached its peak during the period 1850 to 1900 and began to recede around 1910.⁵⁷ Both women and men joined clubs and other associations enthusiastically, through which they engaged in volunteer work and activities such as fundraising, petitioning legislators, and educating themselves and the public about issues.⁵⁸ Foley’s two siblings were involved in various organizations and causes. Her brother John served as Head Consul of Woodmen of the World and Grand Chief Ranger of Foresters of America, both fraternal benefit associations, and was a member of the Los Angeles Board of Education in 1904-05. Alice Foley engaged in volunteer work on behalf of blind persons alongside her sister.⁵⁹ Foley’s role as an unmarried volunteer home teacher was in part successful because it did not challenge

55. Edwin J. Westrate, *Beacon in the Night* (New York: Vantage Press, 1964), 141-42.

56. “Report of Home Teacher of the Blind, July 1, 1916 to June 30, 1917,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 12, no. 4 (October 1917): 879.

57. Gerald Gamm and Robert D. Putnam, “The Growth of Voluntary Associations in America, 1840-1940,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 29, no. 4 (Spring 1999): 514.

58. Judith Raftery, “Los Angeles Clubwomen and Progressive Reform,” in *California Progressivism Revisited*, ed. William Deverell and Tom Sitton (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 145.

59. “Bench and Bar of Los Angeles County,” *Los Angeles Daily Journal*, August 1922, 15; Edith Bristol, “Worker Among Blind Mourned by Associates,” *San Francisco Call-Bulletin*, December 27, 1934, in Perkins School for the Blind Bound Clippings: California Adult Blind, 1934-1938, Perkins Archives, Watertown, MA, accessed January 8, 2016, <http://www.perkinsarchives.org/complete-scrapbooks.html>.

societal expectations for a blind woman. Additionally, Foley benefitted from being able to pursue unpaid work while still living in relative comfort with her mother and siblings.

Women's participation in reform during the Progressive Era was ultimately supported because it was deemed appropriate for their naturally virtuous natures and domestic expertise. The idea of republican motherhood was revitalized during this period. Women—most particularly white, middle-class Protestant women—were believed to have the power to “Americanize” a polyglot immigrant population. Women's clubs in California were involved in kindergartens and public playgrounds, natural resource conservation efforts, mental health services, juvenile courts, city beautification projects, and the formation of traveling libraries. The argument underpinning the Progressive Era suffrage movement was that women's enfranchisement would exert a civilizing influence on society.⁶⁰ However, despite the historical focus on white middle class women, members of many groups formed associations, including working class, African American, and Jewish women.⁶¹

Blind individuals—primarily graduates of residential schools—also began to organize themselves, which led to the formation of a group identity. Advocacy groups that would become prominent in the twentieth century, such as the American Federation of the Blind (AFB) and the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), originated from these associations. For example, the American Blind People's Higher Education and General

60. Raftery, “Los Angeles Clubwomen,” 144-46; Gullett, *Becoming Citizens*, 77-78.

61. Gere, *Intimate Practices*, 3; Scott, “Women's Voluntary Associations,” 43. African American women formed their own clubs when they were banned from participating in organizations with white women, as was the case with the California Federation of Women's Clubs; see Raftery, “Los Angeles Clubwomen,” 145.

Improvement Association (ABPHEGIA), which became the American Association of Workers of the Blind (AAWB), was established in the 1890s by graduates of the Missouri School for the Blind. Other alumni-based organizations included the Friedland Union of Philadelphia and the New York Blind Aid Association. Foley's former classmate Perry organized the California Alumni Organization of Self-Supporting Blind in 1898. Eventually, this organization became the California Council of the Blind, and, later, the NFB.⁶²

Throughout the nineteenth century, medical and educational professionals had spoken for blind persons. During the Progressive Era, blind adults began to articulate their own ideas of what blindness meant. They lobbied for legislation and appealed to the general public. Outreach to both blind and sighted audiences was conducted through publications such as the *Christian Record* and the *Matilda Ziegler Magazine for the Blind*, both published in raised type, and *The Problem* and *Outlook for the Blind*, which were printed in ink and designed for reading aloud.

In an article analyzing the differences between the latter two publications, historian Catherine J. Kudlick discussed contrasting approaches to blindness that contributed to identity formation for blind people during the Progressive Era. Whereas *The Problem* tended to present blindness in a more positive manner, *Outlook for the Blind*—a “glitzy” publication targeting sighted readers with Helen Keller as its spokesperson—emphasized the misfortunes of blindness as a way to appeal to members of the non-visually disabled public. *Outlook for the Blind* put blindness “on display” by

62. Kudlick, “Outlook of *The Problem*,” 187; Matson, *Blind Justice*, 69-70.

highlighting educational institutions and workshops, echoing the public performances of students at residential schools.⁶³ It is likely that Foley was a subscriber to any or all of these publications, by which she would have stayed current with the ideas and attitudes expressed by the blind community. Topics that were addressed frequently included library services for blind persons, home teaching, the standardization of raised type, and blindness prevention.

At the same time, the state took on an increasingly authoritative role in the lives of disabled persons. California in particular developed an extensive welfare system.⁶⁴ The large numbers of unattached males employed in mining and agriculture that did not have families to care for them if they became sick or injured contributed to its emergence in the nineteenth century.⁶⁵ The Oakland Industrial Home for the Adult Blind was founded in California in 1885 as the first state-supported institution of its kind.⁶⁶ Industrial workshops were established initially at residential schools to provide vocational training and opportunities to young blind adults who for reasons of safety or transportation could not work in regular factories.⁶⁷ However, the costs of maintaining these workshops, as well as the problems associated with housing adults and children together, resulted in their removal from the schools. Industrial workshops eventually

63. Kudlick, "Outlook of *The Problem*," 196.

64. Starr, *Inventing the Dream*, 255.

65. Frances T. Cahn and Helen Valeska Bary, *Welfare Activities of Federal, State, and Local Governments in California, 1850-1934* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1936), 144-45.

66. Harry Best, *Blindness and the Blind in the United States* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1934), 501.

67. Berthold Lowenfeld, *The Changing Status of the Blind: From Separation to Integration* (Springfield, IL: Thomas, 1975), 129.

assumed more of a “custodial” role for an older population. County hospitals were another place where blind adults without families to care for them resided.⁶⁸

Social work and home teaching of the blind developed in parallel, and with many of the same antecedents. Both careers were modeled upon the nineteenth-century concept of the Friendly Visitor. Home teaching of blind adults had an early association with libraries. In 1882 John P. Rhoads, along with William Moon’s son Robert, an ophthalmologist, established what became the Philadelphia Home Teaching Society and Free Circulating Library for the Blind. That same year the Home Teaching Society for the Blind of Chicago was formed by William Moon and his daughter Adelaide; its collection became part of the Chicago Public Library in 1894. The New York Free Circulating Library, which also pioneered home teaching, was founded in 1896.⁶⁹ The instruction of blind adults in reading raised type fit perfectly with the other extension services that public libraries offered.

A distinctive aspect of the development of home teaching for the blind was that the benefits of employing blind teachers, rather than sighted, were immediately recognized. Home teaching became paid work in Philadelphia with salaries covered by the Pennsylvania Home Teaching Society for the Blind. States began to provide appropriations for home teaching, or field work, which was conducted primarily via libraries. The first to do so were Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Delaware,

68. Cahn and Bary, *Welfare Activities*, 153-54.

69. Lovejoy, “History and Standards,” 2-3.

New York, Ohio, New Jersey, Illinois, and Utah.⁷⁰ Librarians writing about home teaching in the early years of the nineteenth century appealed to the public's generosity and sense of justice to defend the cost of services to blind readers as well as the overall benefits to the public.

The first report of its Committee on Library Work with the Blind was delivered to the American Library Association (ALA) in 1907. "We should always 'bear in mind that we are libraries and that our business is to disseminate literature,' but may we not also bear in mind that we are intellectual centers from which naturally enough may start movements which shall mold the unformed protoplasm of public opinion, that our environment may be the healthier and happier," stated Nathaniel Dana Carlile Hodges, chairman of the committee.⁷¹ This imperative to contribute to a "healthier and happier" environment through activism, rather than the passive distribution of books, was at the root of library extension services. Although the shift toward conservatism that occurred by the 1920s put an end to the freewheeling development of Progressive Era libraries, during the early years of the century the expansion of services to accommodate blind readers fit naturally with progressive objectives. As Mabel Gillis of the California State Library commented, "It seems as if every public library should do something for the

70. Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 321; Robert C. Moon, "Books and Libraries for the Blind," in *The Library Without the Walls: Reprints of Papers and Addresses*, ed. Laura Janzow (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1927), 431; "Home Teaching," *New Outlook for the Blind* 7 (Spring 1913): 3.

71. Nathaniel Dana Carlile Hodges, "Report of the Committee on Library Work With the Blind," in *The Library Without the Walls: Reprints of Papers and Addresses*, ed. Laura M. Janzow (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1927), 440.

blind of the city in which it exists, not as a charity or as a work of pity, but as simple justice, because it is the right of everyone to have library privileges.”⁷²

In January of 1905, Foley contacted the California State Library, which had recently started to provide library services to blind residents of the state, to let them know of her volunteer teaching services. In the special “Books for the Blind” issue published in *News Notes of California Libraries* the following year, a note next to Foley’s entry stated: “Miss Foley has long been interested in teaching and helping the blind, and in a letter received from her in January of last year says that she will be glad to teach free of charge any blind person in that part of the State who may wish instruction.”⁷³ According to Laura Steffens Suggett, a California State Library employee who would later work closely with Foley, the library’s Books for the Blind division began to consult both Foley and another blind woman, Laura Russell in Sacramento, in order to ensure that the services they provided were relevant.⁷⁴

An obituary published upon Foley’s death in the *Fresno Bee* stated that Progressive Party leader Hiram Johnson was aware of Foley’s volunteer work while governor and recommended her employment, but no corroboration of this has been found.⁷⁵ It is also possible that State Librarian James Gillis was acquainted with one or

72. Mabel Gillis, “The California State Library for the Blind,” in *The Library Without the Walls: Reprints of Papers and Addresses*, ed. Laura M. Janzow (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1927), 460.

73. “Books for the Blind,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 1, no. 6 (October 1906): 299.

74. Laura Steffens Suggett, *The Beginning and the End of the Best Library Service in the World* (San Francisco, CA: Francisco Publishing Company, 1924), 18-19.

75. “Miss Kate M. Foley, 67, Famed Teacher of Blind, Dies in South,” October 8, 1940, *Fresno Bee*.

both of Foley's uncles—Felix Dunn worked in the United States Land Office in Sacramento, and John P. Dunn lived there as well while he was State Controller—but this is purely speculative. Foley would cultivate relationships with prominent persons throughout the state, and nationally, as a strategy to aid her career objectives. This, alongside her public speaking work, factored significantly into the success of her work.

Foley engaged in public speaking throughout her life. In July 1907 Foley was asked to speak at an event at the First Methodist Church in Pasadena during which Frances Fearne, who was traveling the world as an emissary of Carmen Sylva, Queen of Romania, had been invited to discuss her work on behalf of blind persons. Fearne “presented Miss Foley, teacher of a private school for the Blind at Los Angeles, and had the blind girl tell of her helpful work.” (Foley was thirty-four years old at this time.) One of the subjects of the evening was a new printing press that had been invented. The *Los Angeles Herald* claimed that Foley, along with writer and lecturer George Wharton James, a former minister, were “actively interested” in the idea of starting a weekly newspaper for blind persons.⁷⁶ Although whether the project ever came to fruition is unknown, the brief glimpse provided into Foley's life by the newspaper accounts indicate that she was developing a local reputation.

In 1909, Foley's mentor Wilkinson resigned as principal of the California School for the Blind. He later testified during an investigation into the school's affairs that political pressures and persistent troublemaking from the board of directors had caused

76. “May Soon Print Paper Here for the Blind,” *Los Angeles Herald*, July 29, 1907; “Brings Cheer to Sightless,” *Los Angeles Herald*, July 29, 1907.

him to angrily offer his resignation, due to being “tired of the whole business.”⁷⁷ William Caldwell served temporarily as interim principal until a permanent replacement could be found. Assistant superintendent Douglas Keith and teacher Frank O’Donnell vied for the position, and the alumni of the school were divided between those that supported the former and those in favor of the latter.⁷⁸ Foley was a Keith supporter, as she wrote to Wilkinson upon hearing the news of his retirement. “I am glad Mr. Keith is to carry on the work, for I feel that [it] will be easier for you to relinquish it to him than to any other man. I shall write him in a few days, expressing my pleasure that he, and not Mr. O’Donnell is to take charge of my well-loved ‘Berkeley.’”⁷⁹

Within two years, eighteen former students of Foley’s “well-loved ‘Berkeley’” petitioned the governor with a list of complaints about Keith’s administration. Governor Johnson launched an investigation into the charges in July of 1911. Keith, who had served as Wilkinson’s assistant for over twenty years in a primarily administrative capacity and had little experience as a teacher, was accused of incompetence. He was dismissed upon the conclusion of the investigation and Lawrence Milligan, head of the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind, was selected to replace him.⁸⁰ California School for the Blind alumni would continue to work together to appeal to the state on behalf of

77. “Politics Taint in Deaf School, Wilkinson Says,” *San Francisco Call*, August 5, 1911.

78. Newel Perry, interview by Willa Baum, California Council for the Blind and Other Activities of the Blind, 1881-1956, 1955-56, transcript, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

79. Foley to Wilkinson, 5 August 1909, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

80. “Keith to Lose Deaf and Blind School Salary,” December 28, 1911, *San Francisco Call*.

other blind persons. Often, as was the case with the Keith controversy, they disagreed with each other.

Foley was preoccupied with her volunteer teaching efforts in Los Angeles and her health when the contention over Wilkinson's succession ensued. In May 1910 she sent a birthday greeting to her former principal. "I have had to give up some of my work of late on account of a trouble which developed in my left eye—an increased tension in the eyeball, caused from nervousness," she wrote. "The oculist feared he would have to remove the eye, but the trouble is subduing now, and I hope the operation may not be necessary."⁸¹ As she noted wryly to Wilkinson, "'A burned child dreads the fire,' you know."⁸² Perhaps the strain of her work affected her health. As Suggett later said about her, "Every problem of the blind was her problem."⁸³ During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, "nervousness," or neurasthenia, served as a catchall term for anxiety and depressive disorders. Neurasthenia was blamed on the hectic pace of urban life and strongly linked to overwork.⁸⁴ The condition manifested in a wide variety of physical symptoms, including eye problems. Foley was consumed by her work, which allowed her to keep the "blues" and "morbid thoughts" at bay. It was gratifying, but taxed her. The pressure to prove that she was as capable as—or even more capable than—a sighted person burdened her throughout her life. "How often you used to tell me

81. Kate Foley to Warring Wilkinson, 23 May 1910, carton 1, folder 39, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

82. Ibid.

83. Suggett, *Beginning and the End*, 19.

84. David G. Schuster, *Neurasthenic Nation: America's Search for Health, Happiness, and Comfort, 1869-1920* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 20, 88, accessed December 20, 2015, ProQuest Ebrary.

that, if I would succeed at anything, I must work harder than the seeing person, and ask ‘no quarter’ because of my blindness,” she wrote to Wilkinson.⁸⁵

The early decades of the nineteenth century were a tumultuous time for Californians. Labor strife came to a head in October 1910 when the *Los Angeles Times* building was bombed, resulting in the deaths of twenty people. The following year, in 1911, California women gained the right to vote. At some point around this time Foley traveled across the country to visit libraries for the blind on the East Coast.

Unfortunately the only record of her trip is a brief mention by State Librarian Gillis, who referred to it in a letter promoting the library’s Books for the Blind program that he sent to newspaper editors. He noted that Foley compared California’s State Library favorably with the libraries providing services to the blind on the East Coast. He quoted Foley as stating that “[T]he Home Teachers in New York reach more people than we do, but I think we make up for that in encouragement and personal attention.”⁸⁶ Whatever the reason for her trip, her relationship with the State Library was firmly established by this time and would soon be formalized. Despite the challenges associated with mobility for someone who was visually disabled, Foley traveled extensively throughout the state and nationally, as will be explored in later chapters.

A 1912 article in the *Los Angeles Herald* mentioned that Foley was working with Everett Perry, head of the Los Angeles Public Library, to institute a reading room for

85. Foley to Wilkinson, 23 May 1910, Warring Wilkinson Papers, BANC MSS C-B 815, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

86. James Gillis to the Editor, 6 October 1911, Department of Education – State Library, Monthly Reports, 1911-1912, State Library Records, F3616: 453, CSA.

blind patrons.⁸⁷ Everett Perry, a close associate of State Librarian Gillis, was the director of the Los Angeles Public Library for twenty-two years and one of California's progressive library leaders. Foley's "pet plan," referred to ten years earlier in her letter to Wilkinson, was coming to fruition. Moreover, she—a "prominent philanthropist," according to the article—was about to embark on a professional career following nearly twenty years of volunteer work. In 1914, "after long continued effort" on Gillis's part, Foley was offered the position of Home Teacher with the California State Library.⁸⁸ She was forty-one years old.

Engaging in volunteer work had provided Foley with a socially acceptable way to escape the bounds of "enforced idleness" that she encountered as a blind woman. The influence of religion and education in Progressive Era Los Angeles shaped Foley's role as home teacher. The Progressive Party effectively came to an end after Theodore Roosevelt (with Johnson as his running mate) lost the 1912 presidential election to Woodrow Wilson and the country grew more conservative as World War I approached.⁸⁹ Voluntarism began to wane around 1910, and women participated less in clubs after earning the right to vote in California in 1911.⁹⁰ However, the impact of progressivism on California was arguably more "profound and extensive" than on any other state, and

87. "Reading Room for Blind Planned for Library," *Los Angeles Herald*, July 11, 1912.

88. Suggett, *Beginning and the End*, 52.

89. Starr, *Inventing the Dream*, 267-270.

90. Gamm and Putnam, "Voluntary Associations," 514; Raftery, "Los Angeles Clubwomen," 164-65.

its effects were long lasting.⁹¹ It was to have a similar impact on Foley's life and career as well.

91. Starr, *Inventing the Dream*, 199.

Chapter 4

“Thoroughly Informed on All Problems of the Blind”: Kate Foley’s First Years as State Home Teacher, 1914-1917

In June 1915 a joint conference of the American Association of Workers of the Blind (AAWB) and the American Association of Instructors of the Blind (AAIB) was held in Berkeley, California. The AAIB’s biennial meeting had been postponed from the previous year so that attendees could visit the Pan-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco.¹ The Expo offered “eleven exhibition palaces, twenty-one foreign pavilions, forty-eight state buildings, and a 65-acre amusement zone.”² According to historian Sarah J. Moore, it presented a social Darwinist version of history and served as a tribute to the triumph of American imperialism and fulfillment of Manifest Destiny. The enormous spectacle included “gigantic miniatures” of the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, and the Panama Canal, symbolizing humankind’s subjugation of the forces of nature and the conquering of the American frontier.³

Foley attended the convention as a delegate from the California State Library, where she had been employed for almost one year. She presented a paper on her home teaching work and was elected second vice president of the AAWB.⁴ During her talk on

1. Irwin, *As I Saw It*, 37.

2. Shelly Kale, “Overview: What Was the PPIE?,” California Historical Society, 100 Years Panama-Pacific International Exposition, accessed February 13, 2016, <http://www.ppie100.org/history/#article-2>.

3. Sarah J. Moore, *Empire On Display: San Francisco’s Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 3-6, 14.

4. Kate M. Foley, “Work of the California State Library, Home Teacher of the Blind” (paper presented at the 22nd convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Berkeley, CA, June 28-30, 1915), in *Proceedings of the Twenty-second Convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind* (n.p., n.d.),

home teaching work, she quoted John Newton, the slave trader-turned-preacher who wrote the famous hymn “Amazing Grace”: “[N]ewton says, ‘You cannot shove the darkness out of a room, but you CAN shine it out.’”⁵ It would not be the only time she would use this reference in relation to her work as home teacher.

Foley’s career provided her with a degree of autonomy and recognition that was not typical for a disabled woman. She occupied the position of state home teacher for twenty-six years, from 1914 until 1940. Although she was not the first to be paid for the work, she became the leading national expert on home teaching for the blind and contributed significantly to the development of modern vision rehabilitation services.⁶ Foley led efforts to professionalize what had previously been a function of charity, documenting and reporting the details of the occupation and the effectiveness of the methods she developed. She was a tireless public speaker who cultivated relationships with prominent persons in the state. Her reputation extended beyond California due to her participation in the AAWB. Foley taught children, adults, and elderly blind persons and contributed to the acceleration of state involvement in the lives of each of these groups. She endeavored to change public attitudes about blindness and was not afraid to speak her mind, but her work was accepted largely because it did not challenge predominant social norms and values.

19-24; “Officers of the A.A.W.B. and A.A.I.B.,” *Outlook for the Blind* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1915), 10.

5. Foley, “California State Library,” in *Proceedings* [22nd AAIB convention, 1915], 21.

6. Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 18; Paul E. Ponchillia and Susan V. Ponchillia, *Foundations of Rehabilitation Teaching with Persons Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired* (New York: AFB Press, 1996), 15.

Foley drew on the relationships that she established with colleagues in order to overcome hurdles throughout her career. Two of her most important professional relationships were with James and Mabel Gillis. James Gillis was California State Librarian from 1899 until 1917. He was a longtime employee of the Southern Pacific Railroad without any prior library experience; the position of state librarian was a political appointment.⁷ Despite this, he proved to be an excellent administrator who remade the California State Library from an insignificant entity into one of the country's preeminent state library systems. He was greatly respected by staff (including Foley).⁸ James Gillis was one of the first state officials to join the Progressive Party and instituted such reforms as merit-based hiring and salary grades at the state library. However, he did continue at first to appoint staff based on personal connections—such as his daughter, Mabel Gillis.⁹

Mabel Gillis supervised the state library's Books for the Blind division. Like her father, she was not trained in library work. She studied English and Latin at the University of California and was briefly a substitute teacher in Sacramento. Eventually she would serve as Assistant State Librarian, and then State Librarian herself from 1930 to 1951. She was initially hired in 1904 as an assistant in the Extension Department

7. Debra Gold Hansen, "Depoliticizing the California State Library: The Political and Professional Transformation of James Gillis, 1899–1917," *Information & Culture: A Journal of History* 48, no. 1 (2013): 68; Kunkle, "Extension Activities," 54.

8. Harriet G. Eddy, *County Free Library Organizing in California, 1909-1918: Personal Recollections of Harriet G. Eddy, County Library Organizer, California State Library, 1909-1918* (Berkeley: Committee on California Library History, Bibliography, and Archives of the California Library Association, 1955), 6.

9. Hansen, "Depoliticizing," 82, 85; Kunkle, "Extension Activities," 65-66.

under Laura Steffens.¹⁰ Steffens, who was described as idealistic and forward thinking, worked closely with James Gillis on implementing the library's extension services.¹¹ Steffens would also form an important relationship with Foley. James Gillis employed women library organizers to pioneer library development in the West, "[traveling] about the state by horseback, stage, team, train, and foot, carrying the gospel of books to remote communities."¹² Foley also participated in the state library's mission of expanding access to literacy to all residents of the state through travel and outreach.

At its June 1914 meeting the Board of State Library Trustees formally appointed Foley home teacher of the blind of Los Angeles County. "There is a very large number of blind people in this locality who are not receiving service and who are unable to do so until they are taught how to make use of the books that are sent out from the State Library," the report stated. The state librarian hailed Foley's hiring as the "greatest advance made by the [Books for the Blind] department in the last two years."¹³ California joined the other states that had home teachers employed by various state agencies, private organizations, libraries and reading rooms, or residential schools,

10. Peter T. Conmy, "Mabel Ray Gillis, California State Librarian: The Fulfillment of the Destiny of Inheritance," *News Notes of California Libraries* 63, no. 2 (Spring 1968), 286, 288. Note that Laura Steffens married Dr. Allen Suggett in 1918 and is thereafter referred to by her married name.

11. Eddy, *County Free Library Organizing*, 28. Laura Steffens was the sister of journalist Lincoln Steffens.

12. Passet, *Cultural Crusaders*, 90.

13. California State Library, *Biennial Report* [1914], 11.

including Delaware, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island.¹⁴

Foley officially began working as a paid employee of the state library on July 1, 1914, at a salary of \$0.75 per hour.¹⁵ Later that month war broke out in Europe. Soldiers returning from war with disabling injuries such as blindness had a profound impact on both public attitudes toward disability and the development of welfare programs during the twentieth century.¹⁶ In 1914, however, war was still too distant to dampen California's progressive spirit entirely. Foley's reports on her activities, printed regularly in the state library's quarterly publication, *News Notes of California Libraries*, documented her work in detail. She was briefly based out of the Los Angeles Public Library before moving to the Los Angeles County Free Library, located on the tenth floor of the Hall of Records. She gave lessons at the library on Wednesday and Saturday

14. Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, *Seventy-seventh Annual Report of the Managers of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Presented to the Association at the Annual Meeting, December 16, 1909* (Philadelphia: F. McManus, Jr., 1910), 16.

15. California State Library, Report, 26 June 1914, Department of Education – State Library, Monthly Reports, 1913-1914, State Library Records, F3616: 454, CSA. One month later Foley's salary was raised to \$100 per month (California State Library, Report, 27 July 1914, Department of Education – State Library, Monthly Reports, 1913-1914, State Library Records, F3616: 454, CSA). By 1921 Foley's salary was \$150 per month, which was less than that of head librarians but greater than that of assistant librarians, according to the *Report by State Civil Service Commission and State Board of Control to the Senate and the Assembly Relative to Names, Titles, and Salaries of State Officers and Employees, February 25, 1921* (Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1921), 80.

16. Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 8-9; Kate Foley, "The Blind Adult and His Reeducation" (paper presented at the 23rd annual meeting of the California Library Association, Monterey, CA, June 18-23, 1918), in *Handbook and Proceedings of the Annual Meeting 1918* (Sacramento: California Library Association, 1919), 75; David A. Gerber, "Disabled Veterans, the State, and the Experience of Disability in Western Societies, 1914-1950," *Journal of Social History* 36, no. 4 (Summer 2003): 899.

afternoons. On other days, she traveled around the Los Angeles area to visit pupils in their homes, generally accompanied by either a family member or a paid guide. She added classes at the Pomona Public Library and Long Beach Public Library in late 1915.¹⁷

Although the ostensible purpose of her position was to broaden literacy rates and promote use of the state library's raised print collection, her activities were varied—as Steffens said, “every problem of the blind was her problem.”¹⁸ Foley herself identified her three primary functions: to teach adult blind persons to read, to locate blind children and ensure that they were properly educated, and to change public attitudes towards blindness.¹⁹ Foley referred to her work as “the Cause,” and did not separate her home teaching duties from other aspects of her advocacy on behalf of blind adults and children.²⁰ Foley was already considered an expert on teaching blind persons to read by the time she was hired, and the California State Library described her as “thoroughly informed on all problems of the blind.”²¹ Her methods achieved quantifiable results.

17. “Books for the Blind Department,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 9, no. 4 (October 1914), 898-99; “Books for the Blind Department,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 10, no. 1 (January 1915), 194; “Los Angeles Co., Pomona,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 10, no. 4 (October 1915), 869; “Home Teaching,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 10, no. 4 (October 1915), 989.

18. Suggett, *Beginning and the End*, 19.

19. Foley, “California State Library,” in *Proceedings* [22nd AAIB convention, 1915], 19.

20. Kate Foley to Mabel Gillis, 2 September 1916, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA; Kate Foley to Mabel Gillis, 7 October 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA.

21. Suggett, *Beginning and the End*, 52; California State Library, *Biennial Report* [1914], 11.

Moreover, her role as home teacher did not subvert expectations for appropriate behavior for disabled persons. She, in fact, served as a model.

Foley acquired considerable skill and knowledge after twenty years as a volunteer teacher. Her experience, ingenuity, sense of humor, and dedication all factored into the success of her teaching methods. Foley understood each student's needs, their reading level, what material was best suited to them, and whether they were likely to enjoy (or even complete) a particular title. She provided the library with regular and detailed reports on her activities, including the number of students visited, the number of lessons given, and the number of letters written. "Systematic" or "scientific" management was an important feature of the workplace during the Progressive Era and emphasized such functions as centralized planning and the outlining and documenting of specific instructions.²² Consequently, "A new elite emerged in the late nineteenth century composed of public administrators, efficiency experts, professional managers, and social scientists captivated by the vision of a scientifically managed society."²³ This had direct bearing on Foley's work with the state library.

In one of the earliest mentions of home teaching in *News Notes of California Libraries*, Foley's "Rules for Beginners" was printed with the preceding note: "The following rules for those who are trying to learn a type for the blind have been compiled by Miss Foley. They are valuable suggestions, since they are based on her wide experience as a teacher." Foley's "Rules" included advice on which system was best

22. Piott, *Daily Life*, 56.

23. Judith Rosenberg Raftery, *Land of Fair Promise: Politics and Reform in Los Angeles Schools, 1885-1941* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 15.

based on the age of the pupil, proper finger positioning, and recommendations on how many letters to learn at a time.²⁴ Foley developed her own teaching tools and modified or created new materials when necessary. In a letter to James Gillis, she discussed some of the techniques she employed, such as having a young child learn to string cube-shaped beads. She also made a frame to hold cloth that was affixed with buttons and buttonholes, noting that it was based on a Montessori device.²⁵ Foley's methods were demonstrably effective. In her letters and talks she touted her specific successes, particularly with the students that had been especially resistant or challenging. For example, in the paper she presented at the 1915 AAWB meeting, she mentioned that she had twelve pupils over the age of seventy and six over the age of eighty, countering the common belief that elderly blind persons were not capable of learning to read.²⁶

Ultimately, Foley's transition from volunteer to state worker in 1914 was accepted because it conformed to social norms. Like social work, home teaching was previously a charitable activity conducted by volunteers. "As professionals took over from volunteers, female reformers created jobs for other women and themselves," wrote historian Judith Raftery. "But the jobs the women created were extensions of their volunteerism, extensions of their domestic sphere, jobs that rarely threatened men and

24. "Rules for Beginners," *News Notes of California Libraries* 9, no. 4 (October 1914): 899.

25. Kate Foley to James Gillis, 30 May 1916, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA.

26. Foley, "California State Library," in *Proceedings* [22nd AAIB convention, 1915], 20.

were not meant to challenge the social order.”²⁷ Foley performed a valuable albeit traditional service, selfless and nurturing, a blind woman helping blind persons even less fortunate than she was. A 1914 article described her thusly: “After meeting a person like Miss Foley, one is reminded of the little verse: ‘How far that little candle throws its beams! So shines a good deed in a naughty world.’”²⁸ Although she had transitioned from volunteer to professional work, Foley’s home teaching was still likened to a “good deed.”

In her role as home teacher Foley’s visual disability was an asset rather than a liability. Harkening back to her childhood essay on the “Advantages and Disadvantages of Blindness,” Foley had identified another advantage: it allowed her students, who were frequently isolated and depressed, to connect with her through their shared experience. “Because I speak from experience and not theory,” she explained, “the pupils have confidence in me, for they know that every step in their difficult path is familiar to my feet.”²⁹ This made her more relatable, as did her sense of humor, which she used to great advantage. “The work has its funny side, too, and teacher and pupil laugh together over the slips of the untrained finger, or at some absurd question asked by a thoughtless, but well-meaning friend . . . I have established a rule that the pupil must laugh at least once during the lesson.”³⁰

27. Raftery, *Land of Fair Promise*, 46.

28. Van Court, “A Patient Worker,” 244.

29. Foley, “California State Library,” in *Proceedings* [22nd AAIB convention, 1915], 20.

30. *Ibid.*, 22.

Foley provided a model to her students of what early-twentieth-century society considered the appropriate response to adversity. She was portrayed in publicity about her work as uncomplainingly cheerful, persistent, and unwilling to let any obstacle prevent her from accomplishing what she set out to do. In spite of her disabilities, she conveyed the social Darwinian ideal of brawny stoicism in the face of difficulty. “In these days of pessimists and chronic kickers, it is good to hear, once in a while, of some one that is so busy he or she has no time for complaining,” said a description of Foley that appeared in 1914 in the *Congregationalist*. “[I]nstead of sitting in a corner and bewailing her fate, she determined, when old enough to reason for herself, to overcome her misfortune.”³¹ Although the reality for most blind adults included high unemployment rates and some form of dependency, the grip of the Protestant work ethic on society was firm. Combined with the Progressive Era’s emphasis on social Darwinism, distinguishing between “worthy” and “unworthy” disabled persons (an attitude that Foley herself would internalize and reflect) became important.

Foley used language that was spiritual in nature, describing her objective as her “Vision Beatific.”³² Literacy was a path to enlightenment and productivity. Emerging readers would find, once they had accomplished the task of reading, that they were capable of many other things as well. As Foley once observed, “Old aims and pursuits, relinquished when the eyesight failed, are once more remembered and discussed, and, in

31. Van Court, “A Patient Worker,” 244.

32. Kate Foley, “Home Teaching for the Blind, a Phase of State Library Extension,” (paper presented at the 22nd annual meeting of the California Library Association, Hollywood, CA, June 4-9, 1917), in *California Library Association Handbook and Proceedings of the Annual Meeting 1917* (Sacramento: California State Library, 1918), 57.

many instances, resumed, thus bringing back the light, not to the eyes, but to the mind, through Work.”³³ “Work” did not necessarily refer to paid employment (although vocational opportunities for blind persons were a chief concern of Foley’s), but could be as simple as re-engaging in the basics of daily life and resuming the activities that were appropriate to one’s gender. For example:

I encourage the women to knit, crochet, sew, and cook, by proving to them that this is possible without eyesight, and I feel certain that, through my efforts, many a domestic tragedy has been averted. I induce the men to work in the garden, cut lawns, chop wood, go to the nearby stores, help about the house, thus making themselves an essential factor in the home. Whenever practicable, I urge the men to resume their former occupations, and a number are thus making a good living.³⁴

In addition to educating blind adults to ensure that they were able to achieve a degree of participation and engagement in the world, thus escaping “enforced idleness,” Foley was heavily involved in the education of children. Education reform was popular during the Progressive Era because it was viewed as a means to solve the social problems caused by immigration, urbanization, and industrialization. Kindergartens, playgrounds, and school lunches were introduced during this time period.³⁵

One of the major thrusts of Foley’s teaching work in Los Angeles was to enhance educational opportunities for blind children. A place at the “over-crowded” residential school in Berkeley was not guaranteed.³⁶ “Ungraded” classrooms in public schools, which starting in the 1870s had functioned as “coaching or remedial classes” for “children and youths returning from the work force, incorrigibles, truants, and low

33. Ibid., 54.

34. Ibid., 55.

35. Raftery, *Land of Fair Promise*, 25-37.

36. Foley, “Home Teaching,” in *Proceedings* [22nd CLA meeting, 1917], 56.

achievers,” were another possibility (and occasionally a sympathetic teacher would allow a blind child to attend class in a regular classroom).³⁷ Foley resorted to teaching children herself when she could not place them at the school in Berkeley or in a suitable public school classroom.³⁸ The effective teaching of blind students required special materials and proper training.

Foley experienced growing disillusionment with the school in Berkeley under the administration of superintendent Lawrence Milligan. An incident with a student referred to as “Manuel” in Foley’s letters exposes Progressive Era biases regarding race, as well as her contentious relationship with the post-Wilkinson administration at her alma mater. Manuel, whom Foley regarded as an intelligent and well-behaved boy, was dismissed from the school after writing a love letter to a female student. Foley believed that this did not justify his expulsion and worked to have him readmitted. She felt that there were certain students that were not deserving of being there—for example, twenty-two-year-old Foy Sheffield, who was, according to Foley, a poor student, and only permitted to attend due to a family connection.³⁹ In her mind it was inherently unfair for Manuel to be denied a place. However, Milligan remained firm.

In a letter to James Gillis written in June 1916, Foley related a meeting that she had with Milligan to talk over Manuel’s readmission to the school. She reported that

37. Winzer, *History of Special Education*, 320. Winzer estimated that 4.5 percent of blind children were educated in public schools in 1910 (see *History of Special Education*, 331).

38. Foley, “Home Teaching,” in *Proceedings* [22nd CLA meeting, 1917], 56-57.

39. Kate Foley to Mabel Gillis, circa July 1916, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA.

Milligan “said that he did not see why I persisted in wanting ‘that Mexican’ to come back and deprive younger American children of an education.” Foley allegedly retorted, “I told him Manuel was born in Texas, and was quite as much of an American as I was, or he was either, for that matter.”⁴⁰ Foley was outspoken about unfairness, especially in matters pertaining to “the Cause.” Later, she complained to Mabel Gillis that Milligan was “without heart, justice, or common sense.”⁴¹ She increasingly associated the residential school in Berkeley with an outdated and inefficient educational model that undermined the ability of blind people to achieve parity with the sighted population. The circumstances regarding Manuel’s dismissal also underscores the dual disadvantages faced by those who were both students of color and visually disabled.

Foley felt strongly that the same laws that applied to sighted children in public schools should apply to blind children at the Berkeley school. She wrote to Mabel Gillis, “You know, of course, that the little ones in the public schools have two recesses in the morning, and have the lunch hour at noon. I do not see why the School is not under State laws as regards treatments of pupils, hours of study, etc. Do you think it would do it any good to call the attention of State Supt. Hyatt to the hours, and ask what redress, if any,

40. Kate Foley to James Gillis, 21 June 1916, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA.

41. Kate Foley to Mabel Gillis, 3 July 1916, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA.

there is in this connection?”⁴² Foley continued to press her superiors to assist her in ensuring that laws applied equally to both blind and sighted students.

A letter from Foley to Mabel Gillis related the unease she felt about removing children from their family environments. Foley endeavored to have a bright young girl named Mary Torres, to whom she had become particularly attached, placed in the school at Berkeley. Foley and others assisted with arrangements for her supplies and travel. “I have the certificate for State clothing for her, and sent it to Milligan. Miss Blend made her a white dress that I bought for her I explained it all to her, and told her she must not ask to come home for Christmas, and she promised not to,” Foley wrote, but then anxiously continued: “She cried bitterly on Saturday I’m so fond of the little girl, who is so mature and yet so childlike, and I’m wondering if it is right to remove her from her environment, and then expect her to be contented there again.”⁴³ One wonders if Foley was remembering her own experiences with familial separations as a young girl as she wrote about Torres’s arrangements.

Foley’s attitude toward residential schools for blind children was part of a wider trend that occurred during this time period. As explained by Margret Winzer in *History of Special Education*, educators of blind students began to argue in favor of “day schools” over residential schools in the late nineteenth century, although some—such as Wilkinson—remained adamantly opposed. Those favoring day schools espoused the

42. Kate Foley to Mabel Gillis, 2 November 1916, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA.

43. Kate Foley to Mabel Gillis, 8 August 1916, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA.

benefits of integration with the sighted community, the notion of public education as a right for all children, the potential reduction of intermarriage between disabled persons, and the fact that many children simply could not or did not attend residential schools. The first public school class specifically for blind students began in Chicago in 1900 and was followed over the next decade by classes in Cincinnati, Milwaukee, Boise, Cleveland, and New York.⁴⁴

Foley worked with superintendent of Los Angeles schools, Albert Shiels, on establishing California's first public school classroom specifically for blind children. Although he occupied the position for only three years, Shiels was known as a proficient organizer.⁴⁵ He enacted education reform measures for the children of immigrants and children with visual disabilities. He assented to the use of the public school system to assimilate immigrant families at the behest of the State Commission of Immigration, and was a supporter of the Home Teacher Act passed the previous year, the purpose of which was to educate adult immigrant women through classes at public schools and home visits.⁴⁶ The public school system provided a mechanism to reduce the differences among a diverse population and promote Progressive Era ideals regarding race, nationalism, and civilization. Blindness was as undesirable a physical characteristic as foreign birth, but its effects could be remediated through education and exposure to "normal" (i.e. sighted) children. "The library is glad to be the first to further this forward movement in the education of blind children," wrote Foley, "for it believes that, in

44. Winzer, *History of Special Education*, 319-21, 332.

45. Raftery, *Land of Fair Promise*, 62.

46. *Ibid.*, 45, 68-9.

mental attainment, at least, the blind child is the peer of its sighted companions, and that, trained side by side with normal children, doing the same work as well, if not better, its future success is practically assured.”⁴⁷

In the fall of 1916, with the support of Shiels, Foley concentrated on establishing the public school class. In September of that year, she wrote to James Gillis, “I am greatly pleased to tell you that I have the assurance from the new Supt. of City Schools, Dr. Sheils, that a class for totally blind children, or those who should not read any other print, will be started sometime this fall.”⁴⁸ Later that month she gushed to Mabel Gillis, “This school for blind children in a normal atmosphere is one of my dreams come true, and you are the one that made it possible.”⁴⁹

Foley sought out children in their homes with the assistance of “women’s clubs, church organizations and charities.”⁵⁰ Blind youth were also referred to her by physicians.⁵¹ As the involvement of medical, educational, and government institutions in the lives of children and families grew, social service workers like Foley sometimes encountered resistance. “I must ask the Charities in Orange County to help me get Angeleta De Agabo’s mother to send the child back to school. The mother left here in

47. Foley, “Home Teaching,” in *Proceedings* [22nd CLA meeting, 1917], 56.

48. Kate Foley to James Gillis, 1 September 1916, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA.

49. Foley to M. Gillis, 20 September 1916, CSA.

50. Foley, “Home Teaching,” in *Proceedings* [22nd CLA meeting, 1917], 56.

51. Kate Foley to James Gillis, 2 June 1916, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA.

the hope of evading us, but the child must go to school, you know.”⁵² Not all parents were willing to comply with an outsider’s determination of what was best for their child.

Foley functioned similarly to a social worker in her interactions with adults and children. She endeavored to identify all of the blind people in the greater Los Angeles area in order to make assessments about their eye health and level of vision, place them in schools or teach them how to read, and ensure that they did not engage in panhandling. Foley worked with various agencies, such as the Los Angeles County Department of Charities, to refer visually disabled adults not able to support themselves financially or depend on family members to the appropriate state or county institution. Poor farms, county hospitals, and the industrial home in Oakland were some of the options available, and Foley’s recommendations were given weight by other social service workers. For instance, she reported to James Gillis: “On Saturday two visitors from the Charities called to see me, one about the Howard children, the other about a man in Long Beach. Mr. Williams, the Director, will not act upon cases of the blind now until after I visit them, and see what is best to be done.”⁵³

Foley’s efforts to place blind individuals in schools and other state-run facilities demonstrate the profound impact of progressivism on the expansion of the government’s role in the social welfare of adults and children. The involvement of the government in family life grew more pervasive during the early decades of the twentieth century.

52. Kate Foley to James Gillis, 24 October 1916, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA.

53. Kate Foley to James Gillis, 6 June 1916, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA.

Anxiety caused by social change and the desire for a homogenized population led to extensive interest in public education and public health for children.⁵⁴ The problems introduced by rapid urbanization in the late nineteenth century drove the demand for legislation to clean up city streets, whether through sanitation measures, campaigns against vice, or legislation that discouraged vagrancy. Public funds were used to establish institutions to house and supervise those deemed unfit to contribute to the workforce. The institutions that arose in the nineteenth century to care for disabled, aged, and/or impoverished adults were centralizing under state control. In California, the State Board of Charities and Corrections took over the administration of county hospitals in 1903.⁵⁵ Furthermore, public health and public education became closely linked. The first school nurse was hired in 1903, and free school health exams were introduced in 1907.⁵⁶ With these programs, schools planned to identify and “reduce defective eyesight, hearing loss, enlarged adenoids and tonsils, poor teeth, and irregular heartbeats.”⁵⁷

States also passed legislation to control and reduce disability. Categories of disability (including blindness) and race together were used to exclude immigrants.⁵⁸ Eugenics, which became popular in Britain and the United States in the early twentieth century, provided adherents with a “scientific” basis for advocating this exclusion, supported by research conducted at the Cold Springs Harbor Laboratory on Long Island

54. Moore, *Empire On Display*, 10-11.

55. Cahn and Bary, *Welfare Activities*, 146.

56. Raftery, *Land of Fair Promise*, 22-32, 36-40.

57. *Ibid.*, 33.

58. Baynton, “Disability and the Justification of Inequality,” 45-50; Desmond King, *Making Americans: Immigration, Race, and the Origins of the Diverse Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 176.

from 1910 to 1940. Through “institutions, sterilization, individuation, and supervision,” the state’s control over the lives of disabled persons grew significantly.⁵⁹ The removal of what was defined as ugly, defective, or different provided a foundation for progressive reform and could apply to individuals (e.g. through eugenics) or cities (e.g. through city “beautification” projects) alike.⁶⁰ Legislation permitting sterilization of those deemed undesirable by the state became more widespread beginning in the 1910s after the advent of new surgical procedures. California had the highest number of state-mandated sterilizations performed, over six thousand during the twenty-year period between 1909 and 1929.⁶¹

The early nineteenth century’s preoccupation with manliness, nationalism, race, and civilization was best captured in the personality of Theodore Roosevelt. He romanticized western frontier masculinity and espoused social Darwinist beliefs that advocated bringing the “light” of civilization to the “darkness” of what were believed to be inferior races.⁶² Blindness was a perfect parallel metaphor. The justification for publicly supported education for blind children and adults capitalized on clichés of darkness and light that were rampant in writings about and by blind persons.

In this environment of social Darwinist ideas about “fitness,” which had both a physical and a moral component, Foley attempted to counter the public’s attitude that blindness was “something more than the readjustment of a normal person to new

59. Katz, *Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 182, 185.

60. Raftery, *Land of Fair Promise*, 45, 69-70.

61. Katz, *Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 183-84.

62. Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 171-75.

conditions.”⁶³ Foley found that public speaking to a wide variety of groups was the most effective means to promote the “normalcy” of blind persons. Foley’s public speaking work was frequently mentioned in *News Notes of California Libraries*. The state library’s update on home teaching from the last quarter of 1914, for example, stated that she had spoken at five clubs.⁶⁴ During the first quarter of 1915, she made presentations at “seven clubs in or near Los Angeles, at one club convention, one church convention and . . . [to] the employees of two large department stores” in her efforts to educate the public and raise awareness of her work.⁶⁵ She was a popular, inspiring speaker, and her addresses to women’s clubs, educational associations, religious groups, and other organizations were invariably well received. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Foley was “one of the most interesting figures in Los Angeles club life.”⁶⁶ She credited her public speaking skills to her former principal Wilkinson.⁶⁷

James and Mabel Gillis encouraged her outreach efforts. After securing an engagement for Foley to speak to the California Federation of Women’s Clubs, James Gillis wrote, “I hope you won’t be worn out with all the talking you are to do these next

63. Isabel Blend, “Octogenarians Learn to Read Without Use of Eyes,” n.d., Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA.

64. “Books for the Blind Department,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 10 no. 1 (January 1915): 194.

65. “Books for the Blind Department,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 10 no. 2 (April 1915): 422.

66. Agnes Thurnau, “Women’s Work and Women’s Clubs,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 17, 1915.

67. Foley to Ferguson, 8 April 1918, CSA.

few weeks. I believe all these talks are sure to bring results.”⁶⁸ But she was also warned by the state librarian not to overtire herself. “When you have so many papers to prepare do not try to keep up the lessons so strenuously. Let some lessons go and stay at home and work on your paper without worrying. We don’t want you to break down, you know, and we realize what a lot of time it takes to plan talks and papers.”⁶⁹ Foley was not a young woman—she was in her early forties—but she insisted that these public outreach efforts were critical to “the Cause.”⁷⁰ “I have been asked to speak at a Young People’s meeting of the Congregational Church next Wednesday evening,” she wrote James Gillis. “I am not anxious to go out evenings, but there are exceptions, and we do want the work known, and it is good to impress young people with the fact that eyes are not the only mediums through which information may be acquired.”⁷¹

According to a newspaper account of a lecture she delivered to the Woman’s City Club in Los Angeles in March of 1915, Foley’s “exceptional talk was far too short In the history of the Woman’s City Club there has never been a more exceptional programme, nor on a more humane topic.”⁷² Foley claimed that she was uncomfortable being social and disliked the publicity she garnered from speaking engagements. “It’s a

68. [James Gillis] to Kate Foley, 23 April 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 799, CSA.

69. [James Gillis] to Kate Foley, 30 April 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 799, CSA.

70. Foley to M. Gillis, 2 September 1916, CSA; Foley to M. Gillis, 7 October 1917, CSA.

71. Kate Foley to James Gillis, 14 October 1916, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA.

72. “Women’s Work, Women’s Clubs,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 16, 1915.

joke, my wanting this publicity, when I hate it so,” she admitted to Mabel Gillis, “but with us both the Cause comes first.”⁷³ Perhaps she was being somewhat disingenuous, as she continuously related the acclaim she received for her talks in her letters to her superiors. Clearly the praise she received from public speaking was gratifying to her. In December 1916 she announced that she had been invited to speak in front of three thousand teachers at the City Teacher’s Institute.⁷⁴ She reported to James Gillis on December 22 that her presentation was “very well received, and Mrs. Waters told me it was said by many, to be the very best delivered during the sessions.” Her year was ending on a high note. “This is the happiest holiday season I have ever known, even if I am pretty tired,” she told him.⁷⁵

In addition to her public appearances, Foley built both her local and national reputation through her participation in the community of organized blind persons. As a member of the alumni of the California School for the Blind, she petitioned along with other graduates for legislation that she believed would benefit other visually disabled persons. The paramount concerns for organized blind adults in California were the separation of the schools for the deaf and blind, the appointment of a blind principal to the school, public health measures regarding blindness prevention and sight conservation, and pensions.

73. Foley to M. Gillis, 7 October 1917, CSA.

74. Kate Foley to James Gillis, 8 December 1916, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA.

75. Kate Foley to James Gillis, 22 December 1916, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA.

According to historian Thomas A. Krainz, pensions for blind persons were among the earliest welfare benefits provided by the state. Moreover, blind persons themselves called for pensions in one of the first instances of an organized interest group determining how financial assistance would be delivered.⁷⁶ Between 1830 and 1909, Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, Massachusetts and Wisconsin enacted laws to assist blind persons financially. Foley initially expressed ambivalence about pensions. Robert Irwin, director of the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), opposed them on the grounds that they were burdensome to taxpayers and not based on need, but their popularity among the blind community forced him to change his opinion. By 1917, Foley, too, had become more supportive.⁷⁷

Foley communicated with other prominent persons in library work and social services for blind persons, such as Gertrude Rider at the Library of Congress.⁷⁸ This networking added to her national as well as local reputation, as did her work with the AAWB. Foley served as second vice president of the AAWB, which was the first national advocacy group made up of blind individuals. In contrast, its older companion

76. Thomas A. Krainz, *Delivering Aid: Implementing Progressive Era Welfare in the American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 182-83.

77. Perry Sundquist, *Aid to the Blind in California: Fifty Years of Program Development, 1919-1969* (Los Angeles: California Council of the Blind, 1969), 6; Foley to M. Gillis, 8 August 1916, CSA; Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 39-40; Kate Foley to James Gillis, 20 March 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 800, CSA.

78. Kate Foley to James Gillis, 7 November 1916, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA.

organization, the AAIB, was limited to educators (many of whom were sighted).⁷⁹ The AAWB addressed a range of issues such as “industrial education, employment, standardization of a tactual reading system, the welfare of elderly blind persons, boarding homes and other housing arrangements for blind adults, nurseries for blind babies, and home teaching services for adults.”⁸⁰ The standardization of raised type was one of the organization’s chief preoccupations during this time. It entailed a decades-long struggle between the proponents of New York Point and the proponents of braille. Irwin, who named the drawn-out controversy over raised type “The War of the Dots,” blamed the sighted administrators of residential schools for the protracted debate. The introduction of a third version, Standard Dot, at the 1915 convention in Berkeley further complicated matters.⁸¹ “[B]lind people, who were the real sufferers as a result of the controversy,” wrote Irwin, “had become heartily disgusted with the fight going on between superintendents of schools for the blind, few of which could read either system.”⁸²

In addition to the uniform type issue, the 1915 AAWB/AAIB convention emphasized blindness prevention and sight conservation. The National Society for the Prevention of Blindness was founded the same year. Measures such as the elimination of the common, or roller, towel, and mandated use of eye prophylactics upon birth, were introduced in California and supported by Foley. Common towels were blamed for

79. Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 15-17; Kudlick, “Outlook of the *Problem*,” 188-89.

80. Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 16.

81. Irwin, *As I Saw It*, 25-26, 38-40.

82. *Ibid.*, 21.

severe eye infections that could cause blindness.⁸³ The banning of reused towels as well as common drinking cups provide examples of Progressive Era public health and sanitation-related legislation. Another issue of great personal importance to Foley was the eradication of ophthalmia neonatorum. It was also an ideal cause célèbre for the Progressive Era, with its tie-in to midwives (who were often immigrant or African-American women serving their respective communities) and sexually transmitted disease.

During this time of increasing professional and political activism, Foley formed a relationship with Dr. Edward F. Glaser, a San Francisco ophthalmologist who led public health efforts regarding blindness prevention and sight conservation. His request to the state library for a home teacher in the San Francisco Bay Area was a key factor in Foley's eventual transfer. She would continue to work closely with him on sight conservation efforts, which became an important aspect of her work (and which will be discussed more extensively in the subsequent chapter). Both Glaser and Foley were aligned in their support for legislation such as the 1915 ophthalmia neonatorum laws passed in California. These laws required the reporting of any eye infections in newborns within twenty-four hours, the free distribution of silver nitrate prophylactics, and mandatory recordkeeping of any infections.⁸⁴

Foley continued to establish relationships with leading individuals in the state that she believed to be in support of "the Cause." The blind community increasingly voiced

83. George H. Kress to William D. Stephens, 11 May 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 799, CSA.

84. Dr. Edward F. Glaser, "The Ophthalmia Neonatorum Law," *California State Board of Health Monthly Bulletin* 11, no. 5 (November 1915): 190-94.

opinions and ideas that differed from the primarily sighted individuals that occupied positions of authority in education, medicine, and the government. Foley was outspoken, even when her opinions differed from those of her beloved “Boss,” such as when she criticized James and Mabel Gillis’s reluctance to support a blind principal for the Berkeley school. In a passionately worded letter, Foley argued for a blind administrator over one who was sighted. “You know, of course, there is nothing that could induce me to consider you ‘disloyal’ to the Cause, but your attitude with regard to a blind Supt. of the School at Berkeley only strengthens my conviction that the blind must fight hard and long to convince the public of their fitness for certain lines of work.”⁸⁵ Later she apologized for writing “too strongly.”⁸⁶ There were times when she was advised by her superiors to refrain from taking action or speaking out. In January 1917 Mabel Gillis wrote to Foley that she did not believe the bill separating the schools for the blind and deaf would pass. “Father says you will only be wasting your time and energy if you try to help it by writing letters, etc., and he would rather you did not do it.”⁸⁷

The year 1917 proved to be a watershed in Foley’s life. In January, after multiple delays, the public school class that she had worked so hard to establish formally began at the West Jefferson Street School with seven students.⁸⁸ In April the United States officially entered World War I, which was to have an indelible impact on her career, on the Progressive movement, on the development of social welfare, and on public attitudes

85. Foley to M. Gillis, 2 September 1916, State Library Records, CSA

86. Foley to M. Gillis, 20 September 1916, State Library Records, CSA.

87. Mabel Gillis to Kate Foley, 16 January 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 800, CSA.

88. Foley, “Home Teaching,” in *Proceedings* [22nd CLA meeting, 1917], 56.

toward disabled persons. In June the CLA held its annual meeting at the Hollywood Hotel in Los Angeles. The war was a major theme of the 1917 event but attendees managed to enjoy festivities as well, including a movie studio visit followed by a tea, an evening Author's Dinner, and trips to Exposition Park and the University of Southern California.⁸⁹

During the meeting, Foley outlined her work with the state library to CLA members in a talk titled, "Home Teaching for the Blind, a Phase of State Library Extension." "[I] go fearlessly forward," she stated at its conclusion, "overcoming obstacles, uprooting prejudices, laboring with heart and mind and voice toward the fulfillment of my cherished dream—my Vision Beatific—the emancipation of the blind in this state."⁹⁰ Foley's ultimate goal for blind persons was their "emancipation" from a state of idleness and self-pity. However, this goal was in many ways accomplished by subjecting blind persons to state control through the passage of legislation and the establishment of a social welfare bureaucracy. Home teaching, like social work, could be both "empowering and paternalistic."⁹¹

After the 1917 CLA meeting, Laura Steffens wrote to Foley complimenting the talk she gave: "Many who sat near me murmured that it was the best number on the evening's program, and they enjoyed it very much. . . . To me, seeing you was a very great pleasure, and to have the other library workers have this chance to get a little acquainted with you and your work was very gratifying." She continued, "If Mr. Gillis

89. "Annual Meeting of the California Library Association, Hollywood, June 4-9, 1917," *News Notes of California Libraries* 12 no. 3 (July 1917), 453-55.

90. Foley, "Home Teaching," in *Proceedings* [22nd CLA meeting, 1917], 57.

91. Simon, *Empowerment Tradition*, 83.

ever arranges any way for you to work in San Francisco, you can count on the assistance of every one here at the Sutro Branch. We shall all be delighted to have you with us.”⁹²

The possibility of expanding the state library’s home teaching into the Bay Area had been discussed at least a year earlier, when a letter to Foley mentioned that “Dr. Glaser . . . is anxious that we have a regular Home teacher in San Francisco The need of a teacher there is certainly urgent.”⁹³ At the time Foley thought that Glaser would desire her former classmate Mary Eastman, who taught at the Berkeley school, for the Bay Area’s home teacher, as “[s]ome of her relatives and he are very good friends.” However, she said to James Gillis that she “had hoped to ‘break ground’ there” herself.”⁹⁴

James and Mabel Gillis expressed great confidence in Foley and nurtured all aspects of her work, even those that were only tangentially related to the state library’s mission. Foley wrote to James Gillis, “Your confidence in my ability to do the work renders seemingly difficult things comparatively easy. The fact that I am unhampered and permitted to pioneer, so to say, puts me on my mettle, and I feel that I must prove worthy of your confidence in me.”⁹⁵ Upon receiving considerable praise from James Gillis about her performance, she was brought to tears, as she expressed to Mabel Gillis: “Your

92. Laura Steffens to Kate Foley, 11 June 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 799, CSA.

93. Mabel Gillis to Kate Foley, 6 November 1916, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA.

94. Kate Foley to James Gillis, 10 November 1916, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA.

95. Kate Foley to James Gillis, 13 July 1916, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA.

father's letter was better than I deserve, and he gives me too much credit for doing the things I love. The letter made me cry, and that is not usual with me. I seldom get praise for anything, you know—never at home, and never did at School.”⁹⁶ Foley found much personal fulfillment in her work with the state library.

Two events that occurred during the summer of 1917 delayed Foley's transition to the Bay Area and impacted her career. On July 20, 1917, her mother had a stroke that left her largely incapacitated. One week later, on July 27, Foley's mentor James Gillis died suddenly of a heart attack on his way to the state library. His loss was mourned by many, and to some marked the demise of the state library as a leading institution. Gillis's immediate successor, Milton Ferguson, had served as his assistant for ten years. Ferguson was experienced and competent but lacked Gillis's interpersonal skills.⁹⁷ Steffens claimed that qualified women had been passed over for the position in favor of a male administrator (and later wrote a book called *The Beginning and the End of the Best Library Service in the World*, which castigated state library leadership after James Gillis's death).⁹⁸

At the beginning of his administration, at least, Ferguson appears to have had an amicable relationship with Foley. There aren't any records describing Foley's feelings about Gillis's death, but undoubtedly she grieved for the man who had been so instrumental in helping her establish her professional career. Shortly before his death

96. Foley to M. Gillis, circa July 1916, CSA.

97. Kunkle, "Extension Activities," 149, 155.

98. Suggett, *Beginning and the End*, 59.

Gillis approved Foley's transfer to the San Francisco Bay Area.⁹⁹ By October 1917 she was making plans to move, writing to Mabel Gillis and Ferguson about locating an apartment and establishing her headquarters. A suitable replacement home teacher for Los Angeles had been found, a blind woman named Catherine Morrison. "This has been such a hard year for me, but harder still for you," Foley wrote Mabel Gillis as she planned her departure.¹⁰⁰

Without her mentor James Gillis, she faced a period of career insecurity. Moving to a new location was daunting enough, and her transition was complicated by a growing rivalry with Eastman. The relationship between the two women was strained. Foley wrote to James Gillis in June of 1916 about her visit with Eastman, "I think it is as well to be agreeable to her, since she is not particularly well disposed toward me, although nothing in her present attitude suggests this condition."¹⁰¹ In a letter to Mabel Gillis, Foley mentioned that she had heard that Eastman had criticized her method of teaching finger reading, making her feel "very cross." Defending herself, Foley continued, "As a matter of fact, I read faster than any blind person I ever knew, faster than anyone ever at the school With the finger held parallel with the lines, I read four or five letters at once, and that is why I read so fast, much faster than Miss Eastman could read if she tried from now till Doom's Day."¹⁰² Perhaps their rivalry began much earlier when they were

99. Foley, *Five Lectures*, 26.

100. Foley to M. Gillis, 7 October 1917, CSA.

101. Kate Foley to James Gillis, 13 June 1916, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA.

102. Foley to M. Gillis, circa 1916, CSA.

classmates. They were both bright, capable women who had been pressured to succeed by Wilkinson in a world in which their opportunities were severely constricted.

By the time Foley's transfer was official, Eastman had already started to establish herself in the Bay Area region as home teacher with the San Francisco Association for the Blind, or SFA (formerly the San Francisco Reading Room and Library for the Blind). The SFA had founded the first reading room for blind persons in the state in 1902 and provided reading lessons there. In September of 1916 (which was almost a year before James Gillis's death and just over a year before Foley's transfer), Foley advised the state librarian, "I do not feel that Miss Eastman should be permitted to teach over in San Francisco when she already has more than she can do . . . Here the public school teachers are not allowed to take private pupils after school hours Suppose you look up the school laws, and see if there is any mention of this."¹⁰³ The situation appears to have remained unresolved, for animosity between the two home teachers continued to simmer. "I can work in harmony with Miss Eastman, because I expect to see very little of her," Foley wrote Ferguson tartly in October of 1917. A few days later she received word from the state librarian's office that the SFA "has assured us that they will at least not interfere with our work in any way."¹⁰⁴ How the state library approached the SFA about expanding state home teaching in the SFA's territory is unclear, but Foley's transfer to the Bay Area was understood by Eastman to be an incursion.

103. Kate Foley to James Gillis, 29 September 1916, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 798, CSA.

104. Office of State Librarian to Kate Foley, 24 October 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA.

In Los Angeles, Foley earned recognition and esteem for her work. She built important relationships, became a noted public speaker, and participated actively in the organized blind community. Her involvement in child and adult welfare provided her with authority and influence via the state. Although she adhered to social norms and expectations, she was not afraid to express her opinions in support of “the Cause.”

Foley’s career with the California State Library had a promising start, but circumstances such as the death of James Gillis, her move to San Francisco, and growing conservatism in the State of California presented substantial new challenges. In addition to facing personal difficulties, including her mother’s declining health, Foley endured a great deal of stress caused by her intensifying professional struggle with Eastman, and she worried whether she would be able to replicate her success in Los Angeles in a new city.

Chapter 5

“Out of the Darkness, Through Blood, Into the Light”: Transition to the San Francisco Bay Area, 1917-1923

The year 1917 was pivotal for Foley. Her mentor James Gillis died and control of the library shifted to Milton Ferguson. Even more consequential was Foley’s transition to the San Francisco Bay Area. Foley endeavored to replicate the success she had achieved in Los Angeles in her new home, but complicated professional dynamics, less family support, impediments to transportation and mobility, and a new library administration presented substantial challenges. The background of war and heightening conservatism affected Foley’s work during this period as well. Despite the travails she endured, her professional reputation continued to grow, and she found new opportunities to champion “the Cause,” such as capitalizing on the public’s interest in rehabilitation services for disabled soldiers and maternal-child welfare. She participated in national organizations, attending conventions and positioning herself as a leader both within the State of California and outside of it.

In late October 1917, Foley moved to hilly, foggy San Francisco, accompanied by her aunt. Her mother and sister joined her later. She found an apartment in the centrally located Civic Center neighborhood near the newly built city hall.¹ The Civic Center complex had been conceived several years earlier under the guidance of James Rolph, San Francisco’s longtime mayor. Construction on the complex, which was to include the city hall, library, opera house, auditorium, state office building, and other smaller

1. Foley’s residence, formerly known as the Argyle Apartments, is a six-story building still located at 146 McAllister Street in San Francisco.

buildings arranged around a central plaza, commenced in 1913 and was still underway when Foley moved in nearby.²

Although San Francisco had emerged from the 1906 earthquake triumphant and celebrated its regeneration by hosting the Pan-Pacific International Expo in 1915, the city was eclipsed by its sunny neighbor to the south. Los Angeles surpassed San Francisco in the rate of population growth over the first decades of the twentieth century.³ Rolph, for personal and financial reasons, had become less active in politics starting in 1916, leaving various factions to clamor over the void left by his retreat. That same year, a bomb exploded at the Preparedness Day parade, killing nine and injuring forty. The subsequent trial of Thomas Mooney received national attention. The trial split the community and contributed to the tilt toward conservatism in the United States, as did entry of the United States into World War I in April 1917.⁴ Foley arrived in a city affected by labor strife, war, and political turmoil.

Foley's first official day of work in the San Francisco Bay Area was November 1, 1917. Laura Steffens, head librarian at the Sutro branch of the state library in San Francisco, provided a great deal of professional and personal support to Foley during this time. "I do not know how I should have managed through these trying days without [Miss Steffens'] cheer and encouragement," Foley wrote to Ferguson about her first week of home teaching in San Francisco. Her immediate goals were to gauge her standing with the San Francisco Association for the Blind (SFA) and Mary Eastman, clear up any

2. Issel and Cherny, *San Francisco*, 165-66, 171-76.

3. Roger W. Lotchin, "The Darwinian City: The Politics of Urbanization in San Francisco between the World Wars," *Pacific Historical Review* 48, no. 3 (1979): 364.

4. Issel and Cherny, *San Francisco*, 179-80.

misconceptions about the state library's intent in the Bay Area, and locate a suitable headquarters.

For four years, from late 1917 through 1921, Foley's letters to Ferguson and Mabel Gillis were dominated by the topic of her professional rivalry with Eastman. The ongoing frustrations expressed by Foley reveal the complex relationships of those involved in the early blind community as well as those prominent in charitable organizations, clubs, and local government. Her commentary on the Eastman situation illustrates the transition from charity to state-delivered social services that occurred during the early twentieth century.

Only one side of the story is presented through Foley's letters, but it is not difficult to understand the positions of both women. Eastman had grown tired of working with children at the California School for the Blind and wished to move into home teaching.⁵ Like Foley, she initially engaged in this activity as a volunteer, but the possibility of a new profession was appealing to a woman whose vocational choices were extremely limited. Not surprisingly, she felt threatened by Foley's arrival in the Bay Area. Lawrence Milligan, superintendent of the California School for the Blind, explained this to Foley when she met with him in early November 1917. He claimed that Eastman had desired to work as the state library's home teacher in the Bay Area, but that they were both under the impression that there were no funds for the work, so Milligan

5. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 12 December 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA; Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 19 December 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA.

saw nothing wrong with permitting her to volunteer in her free time. As Foley explained to Ferguson, Milligan “said he had always felt that the [Industrial Home for Adults] should do the home teaching, but since Miss Eastman was so insistent, and had so many friends, he was obliged.”⁶

Some of Eastman’s “friends” included SFA members Elizabeth Livermore, Ruth Quinan Marks, and Josephine Rowan, whom Foley regularly mentioned in her letters as she attempted to expand the state library’s work in San Francisco. Rowan established the San Francisco Reading Room for the Blind at the San Francisco Public Library in 1902. It became the SFA in 1914 and was headed by Marks, then by Livermore. Along with the school in Berkeley, the SFA dominated services for blind persons in the Bay Area.

Despite the friction in her new environment, Foley plunged right into the work of home teaching. Steffens and her future husband Dr. Allen Suggett took Foley on initial trips in the Bay Area to establish relationships with the various institutions involved in providing services to blind adults. “We had a wonderful afternoon yesterday,” Foley wrote to Ferguson on November 8, 1917, which made up for the “trying days” of her first week. Steffens and Suggett (they would marry a few months later in April of 1918) drove Foley to the Relief Home, where she encountered a former classmate from Berkeley. “[He] was delighted, called me by the name I went by as a child, ‘Katie,’ and told all the men how well I used to read, and said I had a right to come and talk to them.” Next they visited the County Hospital, where they fortuitously met with a second person

6. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 10 November 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA.

with whom they had a previous connection. “[T]o our surprise, [we] found [that] Miss Saunders, head of the social service bureau, was the granddaughter of Mrs. Charlotte White, our oldest borrower. This fact proved an ‘open sesame,’ and we own the place now.”⁷ As in Los Angeles, Foley’s cultivation of relationships was key to her success in the Bay Area.

As she navigated the complicated dynamics of those involved in services for blind persons in San Francisco, however, she reported incidents of Eastman’s animosity toward her. For example, Eastman and the SFA interfered with Foley’s attempts to secure a suitable headquarters for herself. The state library’s branch in San Francisco, the Sutro Library, was at the time housed on the third floor of the Lane Medical Library at Webster and Sacramento Streets. It was not ideal for a headquarters due to a “rather . . . inconvenient location,” although it did have a small office that she could use.⁸ Foley had hoped to use a room at the San Francisco Public Library but the request was repeatedly put off.⁹ The SFA had also asked for the room, and Foley learned from her former classmate, Newel Perry, that Eastman appealed to local officials with whom she was

7. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 8 November 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA.

8. Mabel Gillis to Kate Foley, 18 October 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA.

9. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 5 November 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA; Foley to Ferguson, 6 November 1917, CSA; Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 1 December 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA.

friendly to refuse the state library's request.¹⁰ Foley investigated other options, such as the auditorium at the Civic Center, but this was deemed unsuitable, due to inadequate heat, light, and elevator services. She and Steffens planned to look into either City Hall or Hastings Law School. "If this fails, I don't think we can get anything," she wrote to Ferguson.¹¹ By the end of December the request to use the public library had been formally withdrawn, and Foley—evidently tired of the matter—announced that she would be using the Sutro branch as her headquarters after all.¹²

Multiple people urged Eastman and Foley to meet to resolve their differences, but both stubbornly refused. In a letter to Ferguson, Foley mentioned that Livermore had contacted her and asked if she would "call on Miss Eastman, and have a talk with her, and see if that 'hard feeling' would not disappear. I told her that, of course, it was not my place to call on Miss Eastman, and that, as for 'hard feeling,' I knew nothing of it until I came up here."¹³ A few weeks later Foley related hearing from a certain "Mrs. Ospina," who worked as a reader for Eastman, that she "had been trying to induce Miss Eastman to see me so we could clear up the misunderstanding, but that Miss E. said it was not her

10. Foley to Ferguson, 29 December 1917, CSA; Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 31 December 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA. Foley specifically mentioned that Eastman and Dondero were "intimate friends of Galliger, the head of the School Board." (She may have been referring to George Gallagher, President of San Francisco's Board of Education.)

11. Foley to Ferguson, 10 November 1917, CSA.

12. Foley to Ferguson, 19 December 1917, CSA.

13. Foley to Ferguson, 12 December 1917, CSA.

place, since I had injured her, and taken her work.”¹⁴ When Foley later met with Marks at the SFA’s offices, “Mrs. Marks asked me if I, as the biggest one of the two, would not go to Miss Eastman and try to adjust matters, as her opposition and jealousy made it very hard for them.” Foley was unmoved. “I told Mrs. Marks that as an individual, I had nothing to say to Miss Eastman, since her attitude toward me has been most surprising, and that the State Library certainly had no reason to make overtures and ask her to ‘be good,’ when our Institution was getting on quite well.”¹⁵

Foley immediately sought to distinguish the state library’s work—which was taxpayer-funded, efficient, methodical, and efficacious—from the work of the SFA and Eastman, which in Foley’s view was “philanthropic,” well-meaning but counterproductive, and based on outdated practices of charitable almsgiving. When Foley was asked if she would share the room at the public library with Eastman, she refused, stating that it would “complicate matters in the mind of the public,” as “those who would be glad to avail themselves of tax-paid advantages, might hesitate to accept philanthropic instruction.”¹⁶ As she explained to the state librarian, “Miss Eastman’s efforts at teaching make me think of what the Charities call ‘friendly visiting,’ often

14. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 5 January 1918, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 799, CSA.

15. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 31 January 1918, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 799, CSA.

16. Foley to Ferguson, 6 November 1917, CSA.

doing more harm than good.”¹⁷ Foley asserted that this form of sporadic charitable relief actually exacerbated panhandling. As she explained in another letter to Ferguson, “We called on the cigar stand of Gilbert Kaunitz . . . and found him to be . . . a very prosperous young business man” who said that “He had nothing to do with the S.F.A. because he did not like the way it encouraged men to sit on corners and really beg, while not seeming to do so.”¹⁸

Foley worked diligently to eliminate public panhandling by blind persons, which she felt reinforced negative stereotypes. On September 12, 1918, she wrote to Mabel Gillis: “The police have stopped the blind street musicians in the Mission, and I’ll be blamed for that, but I don’t mind.”¹⁹ Foley believed that a limited amount of regular assistance (such as pensions or home teaching) provided via the state would enable blind persons to achieve parity with their sighted counterparts, and remove the undesirable public display of physical disability associated with begging. “We must have permanent relief, not spasmodic assistance,” she stated.²⁰ The justification offered for social services for blind persons was that a *limited* amount of assistance predictably delivered by the state was more effective than charity in reshaping indolent blind persons into productive citizens.

17. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 24 January 1918, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 799, CSA.

18. Foley to Ferguson, 8 November 1917, CSA.

19. Kate Foley to Mabel Gillis, 12 September 1918, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA.

20. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 25 January 1918, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 799, CSA.

Foley felt it was critical to obtain an official distinction between the state library's taxpayer-funded home teaching and Eastman's "friendly visiting" and continued to press Ferguson. "What is to be done to really get at the facts in the case? If the State is really paying her, then we cannot make comparison between her work and ours, but if the School is merely lending its moral support, we ought to be permitted to explain this whenever it seems necessary, or would strengthen our cause. Will you please examine the pay roll of the School, and see if her salary has been raised? Can't you do this soon?"²¹ Whether Eastman was being paid for home teaching or not was critical. As Foley pointed out on multiple occasions, it wasn't fair for a blind person to receive a charitable service provided by a volunteer over the taxpayer-funded (and, presumably, higher quality) state library service to which all blind residents of California were entitled.

Despite Foley's efforts, the stalemate persisted for four years. To most people the distinction between Eastman's home teaching and Foley's home teaching remained unclear. As Livermore observed, Foley and Eastman "were both home teachers, doing identically the same work," and that "it would not matter to the public for whom we worked."²² Foley sought to demonstrate that Eastman's methods were lacking. Eastman was hurried and had far too many pupils to devote adequate time to their individual needs. The fact that her students checked out few books from the state library was proof. She noted that Eastman counted all visits as lessons even when she didn't actually teach.

21. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 3 December 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA.

22. Foley to Ferguson, 6 November 1917, CSA.

Foley also questioned whether Eastman was capable of handling those in delicate emotional states.²³ An “important development” during this time period “was the new and widespread concern with winning professional status,” and for Foley this was part of the battle with Eastman.²⁴

In early 1918 Foley began to make inroads with the women of the SFA, who reluctantly acknowledged that she was a powerful presence. She had only been in San Francisco for three months when she met with Rowan and reported: “Mrs. Rowan said that, while she was very grateful to Miss Eastman, her personality did not fit her to do all that I was doing, and that she could not reach the public as I was reaching them, although she was a very good teacher. Hurrah! Isn’t that funny! . . . This is worth all the trials in the beginning, isn’t it?”²⁵ However, neither Milligan nor the women of the SFA were willing to confront Eastman or put a stop to her activities. They admired Eastman for devoting herself to helping blind adults in addition to her regular teaching duties but also wanted to avoid engaging her temper. Foley reported in letters that Milligan described Eastman as having a “combative disposition,” while Marks complained that Eastman

23. Kate Foley to Mabel Gillis, 1 October 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA; Kate Foley to Mabel Gillis, circa October 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA; Foley to Ferguson, 10 November 1917, CSA; Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 22 November 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA; Foley to Ferguson, 3 December 1917, CSA; Foley to Ferguson, 12 December 1917, CSA; Foley to Ferguson, 31 January 1918, CSA.

24. Clarke A. Chambers, *Seedtime of Reform: American Social Service and Social Action, 1918-1933* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963), 91.

25. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 14 March 1918, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 799, CSA.

“reproaches them” every time they mentioned the possibility of Foley visiting someone.²⁶ When Foley visited her former principal, Wilkinson, who was living with his daughter, Maud Richardson, in Berkeley, both Wilkinson and Richardson advised Foley to “be on the alert” regarding Eastman, who was “unscrupulous and resourceful,” and would “leave nothing undone to remove me from her path.”²⁷

State Librarian Ferguson initially instructed Foley to avoid visiting any of Eastman’s existing pupils, but Eastman refused to provide a list of her current students (which Steffens and Foley suspected was “so that Miss Eastman will not need to show Miss Foley the courtesy to leaving her pupils to her entirely”).²⁸ Shortly thereafter Ferguson changed his mind and permitted Foley to call upon anyone. The discord with Eastman caused embarrassment and frustration for Foley. In August 1918 she was asked to visit a blind man, G. W. McWilliams, who was having trouble learning braille. When Foley arrived at the McWilliams residence, Mrs. McWilliams answered the door and immediately told Foley that her husband was already studying with Eastman. “She stood in the hall and did not ask me to come in,” Foley wrote to Ferguson. “I wish Mr. Milligan had to take such insults, and was treated like a common peddler, and I feel sure

26. Foley to Ferguson, 10 November 1917, CSA; Foley to Ferguson, 31 January 1918, CSA.

27. Foley to Ferguson, 29 December 1917, CSA.

28. Lawrence Milligan to Kate Foley, 16 November 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA; Laura Steffens to Mabel Gillis, 19 November 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA.

he would not stand it very long.”²⁹ The state librarian was annoyed when he heard about this. He told Foley that he would write to Milligan. “The fact that Eastman is continually saying that she was on the point of being employed here is maddening, and we think that is a place where we can begin to ‘complain’ to Mr. Milligan,” Ferguson replied. However, his timorous handling of the situation was evident. “I know how discouraging conditions are there and want to do the best things to straighten them out but just what the best thing is, is hard to decide,” Ferguson wrote.³⁰ He was sympathetic, but not particularly effective.

These hindrances compounded the difficulties inherent in moving to a new place, which, for a disabled woman, were already formidable. Foley’s position required a great deal of travel throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. She regularly went across the bay to Oakland, Berkeley, and Alameda, as well as outlying locations such as San Mateo, which was an hour’s trip each way. The home teaching report published in the April 1918 issue of *News Notes of California Libraries* stated that, between the two of them, Foley and Morrison (her successor in Los Angeles) made nearly 500 visits during the first quarter of the year, meaning that each teacher traveled to approximately seventy-five different locations in the San Francisco and Los Angeles areas per month.³¹

29. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 3 August 1918, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA.

30. Milton Ferguson to Kate Foley, 5 August 1918, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA.

31. “Books for the Blind Department,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 13, no. 2 (April 1918): 234.

Visiting so many new places over a wide geographic range necessitated the assistance of a family member or a hired guide. Independent travel was, and continues to be, a significant challenge for blind individuals. Canes were first mentioned as an assistive device in the late nineteenth century, while guide dogs were introduced in the United States in the late 1920s (but have only been utilized by 2 percent of blind individuals). Both canes and guide dogs have been controversial as highly visible symbols of disability, and many blind people resist using them.³²

Finding a suitable guide was an ongoing problem for Foley after she moved to San Francisco. By comparison, in Los Angeles, Foley had relied heavily on support from immediate and extended family members. Her mother and sister, for example, assisted in secretarial duties and errands and also interacted with pupils. However, her mother's declining health precluded this in San Francisco, and her sister, who served as their mother's primary caregiver during her illness, was less available. Foley was occasionally escorted by a colleague, but this was not a permanent solution.

In December 1917, Foley wrote to Ferguson, "I think I'll have to look for a boy to go out with me mornings, as my aunt cannot stand the work here at all, and my sister cannot be away from my mother all day."³³ However, she discovered that "the boys are learning trades and going to night school, and the girls are working in factories, and earning from eight to ten dollars a week, more than I could possibly pay."³⁴ She decided

32. Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 335-38, 343.

33. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 15 December 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA.

34. Foley to Ferguson, 31 December 1917, CSA.

to try to find a middle-aged woman.³⁵ She finally hired someone suitable in early January. “I have found a guide now that is promising. She will either go out with me, or stay with my mother, and this is the combination I have been looking for. My sister will take the bay trips, as they are hard, and I feel safer with her, but . . . the guide, will go with me about the city hereafter. I have to pay her twenty-five dollars a month, but if she only continues as she is now, it will be worth it.”³⁶ Although Foley had received a salary increase in 1917 to offset the cost of hiring a guide, the expense and inconvenience was still burdensome.³⁷

Unfortunately, by the end of February, Foley had lost the guide, just as her mother experienced more health problems, and finding another one caused her a great deal of worry.³⁸ Despite the fierce independence that she espoused, Foley depended on assistance from family members, from colleagues, or from paid guides in order to conduct her work. She herself noted this in a letter to Ferguson about her upcoming attendance at the Conference of Social Agencies in Santa Barbara, California, a rare solo excursion for her. “Don’t think the trip will be too much for me, and I am not in the least

35. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 3 January 1918, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 799, CSA.

36. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 6 January 1918, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 799, CSA.

37. Kate Foley to Mabel Gillis, circa July 1917, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 802, CSA.

38. Kate Foley to Mabel Gillis, 25 February 1918, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 799, CSA.

afraid to go down alone. You know the Home Teacher must be an exemplar of all her own theories, and this is one of them.”³⁹

In March 1918 Foley wrote to Mabel Gillis that her mother was not doing very well. “My mother is still not improving, though no one can say how long she may linger, growing weaker each day. My brother is here on business this week, and is heart-broken over the change in her appearance.”⁴⁰ Bridget Dunn Foley would live another year, but in April 1918 Foley’s former principal Wilkinson died. “Dr. Wilkinson has always been like a father to me,” she said in her letter informing Ferguson that she would be attending the funeral.⁴¹ In less than a year she lost two mentors, Wilkinson and James Gillis, and faced the impending death of her mother. Her mother’s poor health continued to preoccupy her through the end of the year, and traveling throughout the city became even more problematic when the influenza epidemic occurred. “My guide will not come back, even till I get some one, so I may be without one for a few days. Just now people are all upset over the influenza, and not anxious to mix with people or go on cars,” she wrote Ferguson in October. “I may not need a guide very long, but I must have one, as my sister cannot leave home now.”⁴²

39. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 3 April 1918, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 799, CSA.

40. Kate Foley to Mabel Gillis, circa March 1918, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 799, CSA.

41. Foley to Ferguson, 8 April 1918, CSA.

42. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 19 October 1918, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA.

Despite these tribulations, Foley earned publicity and recognition for her work in San Francisco almost immediately. She was mentioned in local newspapers and her public speaking opportunities proliferated. An article published in the *San Francisco Bulletin* shortly after she moved to the Bay Area set forth the major themes of her work. Foley was pleased with the article, “Bringing Light to the Blind,” which she felt conveyed her message accurately. “The soul of her work . . . is teaching the blind how to take the bit in their teeth and convert their blindness into an asset. She does this, as she says, ‘not by shoving out the darkness but by shining it out,’” wrote author Pauline Jacobson, employing one of Foley’s favorite quotes.

Foley began to address to clubs and other organizations as soon as she moved to San Francisco. In an early 1918 letter Foley reported the following conversation she had with Livermore of the SFA: “She finally said, ‘I never supposed you would take so with the clubs; in a year, you will be a real power here.’ I said, ‘in so short a time as a year? Thank you,’ but I smiled in such a way that she knew I was making fun of what she said, for we are becoming a ‘power’ right now, and she knows it, and is not pleased.”⁴³ Foley was indeed becoming a “power.” Her letters from early 1918 mention an increasing number of speaking invitations and relate the commendation she received. San Francisco, like Los Angeles, found her to be an engaging, humorous, and inspiring speaker. Foley was her own best advertisement for her work.

In 1918 World War I was at the forefront of the public consciousness. Foley took advantage of public sympathy for wounded soldiers to arouse interest in the issues faced

43. Foley to Ferguson, 14 March 1918, CSA.

by blind civilians. World War I had repercussions for Foley's career in other important ways as well, such as bringing about her relationship with the Red Cross. Foley trained nurses to work with soldiers blinded in war.⁴⁴ She also initiated braille transcription efforts by training teams of volunteers to copy reading materials for blind soldiers and blind civilians.

When Foley spoke at the annual California Library Association meeting in June of that year, the title of her presentation was "The Blind Adult and his Reeducation." "Rehabilitate, reconstruct, reeducate—these are familiar words in this hour of stress and world conflict," Foley began. She immediately raised the issue of the blind soldier, but broadened her talk to include all blind adults in need of rehabilitation services. "[T]oday, stirred by the knowledge of war and its frightful consequences, every one is eager to share in the rehabilitation movement now sweeping over the land," she said. World War I marked the beginning of federal rehabilitation efforts. The Smith-Fess Act was passed in 1919 to provide federal funding for vocational rehabilitation. Although few blind persons benefitted from federal rehabilitation services before the 1940s, the act was a first step.⁴⁵ Foley urged the public to begin employing "the blind men and women right here at home" to "blaze the trail" for returning blind soldiers.⁴⁶

A letter written to Mabel Gillis by Frances Carlton-Harmon of the Los Angeles Public Library about her interaction with Foley at the 1918 CLA meeting reveals more

44. Pauline Jacobson, "Bringing Light to the Blind," reprinted in California State Library, *News Notes of California Libraries* 13, no. 2 (April 1918), 156.

45. Louis H. Rives, "History of Federal Vocational Rehabilitation as it Affects the Blind," in *Social and Rehabilitation Services for the Blind*, ed. Richard E. Hardy and John G. Cull (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1972), 70-71.

46. Foley, "Blind Adult," in *Proceedings* [23rd CLA meeting, 1918], 79.

about Foley's emotional state than the content of her talk, however. Having attended the CLA meeting as well, Carlton-Harmon afterward wrote, "I hope Miss Foley is in better health, spirits, and circumstances than she was when I talked to her in Del Monte. It seemed to me that I had never before known her to be really depressed."⁴⁷ Although the source of Foley's depression wasn't specifically named, perhaps the difficulties of moving to a new city, her mother's health, the stress of dealing with Eastman, the change of administration at the state library, or something else altogether, were responsible for the melancholy noted by her colleague. In "The Educated Woman and Professionalization: The Struggle for a New Feminine Identity, 1890-1920," historian Joyce Antler describes the emotional challenges experienced by women in pioneering social services roles. The following excerpt, though about Jane Addams, is strikingly applicable to Foley as well:

There is no question that Addams in her mature career successfully surmounted the sense of uselessness that caused much of her depression during her post-graduate years. Whether Addams achieved autonomy and self-realization through her work is a problem not so easily addressed. Like many other women of this era, Addams shared the emotional burdens imposed by the often monumental difficulties inherent in establishing themselves in new and untried fields . . . The fragility of identities constructed around such experiments becomes apparent only in the personal letters and diaries of such women. Without continual support, we learn, these identities were constantly subject to collapse.⁴⁸

Foley, too, constructed her identity around her professional achievements—perhaps even more so than her non-disabled counterparts—which was the crux of her competition with Eastman. Both women were pressured to succeed in a world that

47. Frances Carlton-Harmon to Mabel Gillis, 12 July 1918, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA.

48. Antler, *Educated Woman*, 157-58.

offered them very few opportunities. Foley, who had spent twenty years as a volunteer before earning her professional credentials, did not intend to relinquish her status. She was determined to win the war with Eastman in order to validate her superiority as home teacher.

Foley frequently expressed downheartedness in her letters while alternately touting her successes in the Bay Area. “[I] never know when I am to be opposed or embarrassed or humiliated,” she told Ferguson in one letter.⁴⁹ In another, she wrote, “I try so hard here, and then people try to discountenance me, and rob me of any little satisfaction I may get out of this hard work.”⁵⁰ When she had been in San Francisco for one year she wrote to Ferguson about what she perceived to be disappointing results. “It is just a year today since I came up here, and it has been a very long year. I wish I felt it had been a profitable one, but, measured by the other years of my work, I feel I have not done very much, and that there still remains a great deal to do and to combat.”⁵¹

Despite the misgivings she expressed to the state librarian, one of Foley’s most notable accomplishments occurred during the summer of 1918 when she was invited to deliver a series of lectures during the University of California’s summer session.

Wilkinson’s son-in-law Leon Richardson, who was a professor of Latin at the University

49. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 18 April 1918, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 799, CSA.

50. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 14 October 1918, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA.

51. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 31 October 1918, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 801, CSA.

of California, had recommended her.⁵² The summer session was a six-week long extension program designed for teachers, school administrators, university students, recently-graduated high schools students, “housewives, graduate nurses, social workers, students of public health,” and anyone else interested in attending.⁵³ Foley lectured both in Berkeley and in Los Angeles. The state library eventually published the series with the title *Five Lectures on Blindness*. This was Foley’s only published work and for many years served as the sole authoritative source on the topic of home teaching.

Five Lectures on Blindness provided an overview of her experiences as a blind woman, her beliefs about disability, and her professional philosophy. The topics of her lectures included, “The Psychology of Blindness,” “The Blind Child and His Development,” “The Blind Adult,” “Attitude of the Public,” and “Prevention.” She had been specifically asked to discuss the psychology of blindness, but was given the freedom to come up with additional topics on her own. About the psychology of blindness, she wrote modestly, “I’m afraid I don’t know much about that, though Miss Steffens says I do.”⁵⁴ Steffens herself had studied psychology in Germany.⁵⁵ Psychology was just being

52. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 6 April 1918, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 799, CSA.

53. University of California, “Summer Session, June 24 to August 3, 1918,” *University of California Bulletin* 11 no. 10 (Berkeley: University of California Press), 3-4.

54. Foley to Ferguson, 6 April 1918, CSA.

55. Mary R.S. Creese and Thomas M. Creese, *Ladies in the Laboratory II: West European Women in Science, 1800-1900: A Survey of Their Contributions to Research* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 220.

introduced in the United States and became increasingly popular (particularly the theories of Freud) in the 1920s.⁵⁶

Foley dealt with depression as a routine part of her work and listed “some knowledge of nervous diseases” as an “essential” skill of the home teacher.⁵⁷ A letter to the state librarian described “a trying day” that she had: “Mr. Bergman was so discouraged, and threatened suicide. I had to plead with him for an hour, telling him how it would encourage other despondent blind people to do that same awful thing, and how it would make me feel I had somehow failed to do my best for him.” Later that same day she provided marital counseling. “In the afternoon Mr. and Mrs. McCormick came to tell me their marital differences, and to get my advice,” she wrote. Foley felt that Mrs. McCormick found fault with her husband too readily. “I argued and urged and scolded, and at last the quarrel was patched up These interviews are trying, and harder than real teaching.”⁵⁸

In her lectures, Foley also addressed blindness prevention, which was becoming an important aspect of her work. Foley spoke about ophthalmia neonatorum, the infection that caused her own blindness, and related how she learned as a twelve-year-old that it was preventable. This infection was the target of a public health campaign to which Foley contributed much awareness. “Physicians are only now beginning to realize that, in all phases of preventative medicine, their strongest, most necessary, and, indeed,

56. Michael E. Parrish, *Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression, 1920-1941* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 154-55; Chambers, *Seedtime of Reform*, 95.

57. Foley, *Five Lectures*, 26.

58. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 14 March 1919, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 800, CSA.

essential ally, is the public,” she stated.⁵⁹ Both World War I and the growing emphasis on maternal and child welfare heightened social anxiety about sexually transmitted infections and their effects. Ophthalmia neonatorum punished children for the “unclean” lifestyles of adults.⁶⁰ California’s Bureau of Social Hygiene was established in 1917 as a result of the presence of military personnel stationed in the state.⁶¹ Elements of social hygiene intended largely to protect women and children included legislation requiring health certificates before marriage. Sanitation (both physical and moral) was an obsession during this time period. In addition to its strong association with STIs, ophthalmia neonatorum was linked to poverty and midwifery. “Infant ophthalmia is found among all classes, but more especially among the poor, who must so often depend upon the services of a midwife or neighbor who, in most instances, does not know the meaning of the word antiseptic,” Foley said.⁶² The campaign against ophthalmia neonatorum contributed directly to the dissolution of midwife-assisted births in the United States.

Foley also addressed other preventable diseases and injuries in children, such as those caused by “an unwise and harmful selection of toys, such as scissors, forks, toy pistols, air rifles and bows and arrows.”⁶³ Blindness prevention befit the country’s preoccupation with maternal-child welfare and the relatively new concept that childhood

59. Foley, *Five Lectures*, 40-41.

60. *Ibid.*, 42.

61. Walter M. Dickie, M.D., “Program of the Bureau of Social Hygiene of the California State Board of Health” (paper presented at the Session on Personal Hygiene, American Public Health Association, San Francisco, CA, September 15, 1920).

62. Foley, *Five Lectures*, 41.

63. *Ibid.*, 43.

was a vulnerable time that needed to be protected and conserved.⁶⁴ In the 1920s social reform led by women persisted, despite the waning of progressivism, but was largely preoccupied with legislation specifically related to women and children (such as the Sheppard-Towner Act, which was intended to reduce infant and maternal mortality).⁶⁵ Other examples of maternal-child welfare introduced during this period included restrictions on child labor, pure milk laws, and juvenile courts.

By 1919 the war had come an end, though its scars were deep and its impact on society lasting. For Foley, the year began with her mother's failing health. From January until March, her mother lingered on, but she was dying. "The coughing is distressing, but she is in no pain. . . ," Foley wrote to Mabel Gillis. "She knows us, but is weak and quiet. It will be better for her and for us when the release comes, as my sister is completely worn out."⁶⁶ Bridget Dunn Foley died on March 23, 1919. She was buried at the San Gabriel Mission cemetery in southern California.⁶⁷ Foley would continue to live at the Argyle Apartments in San Francisco with her sister.

Not long after her mother's death, Foley made plans to attend the AAWB convention in Toronto in June 1919. This was the first time the organization met outside the United States. Foley had been asked to present at the convention and conduct a round

64. Chambers, *Seedtime of Reform*, 49.

65. David J. Goldberg, *Discontented America: The United States in the 1920s* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 52-53.

66. Kate Foley to Mabel Gillis, circa January 1919, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 799, CSA.

67. California Death Index, 1905-1939, California Department of Health and Welfare, accessed August 3, 2016, ancestry.com; US Find a Grave Index 1600s-Current, accessed August 3, 2016, ancestry.com.

table on home teaching. The state agreed to pay for the trip for her and a guide.

Ferguson tried to convince Foley to allow one of the other state library employees to accompany her to Toronto, but Foley was firm about preferring to have her sister as her companion and was willing to pay the additional expense. “[F]or many personal reasons it would be less of a strain for me to have [my sister] with me,” she wrote Ferguson.⁶⁸ A cross-country train trip of several days each way would be too stressful for her without the comfort and reliability of her sister’s presence.

The AAWB convention, which was held from June 24 to June 28 at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, was a great success, according to Foley. She was re-elected second vice president of the organization, but, more importantly, her participation in the meeting cemented her reputation as the leading home teacher of the blind. Foley spoke on “The Re-education of the Blind Adult” and alluded to the rebuilding of postwar Europe in her language. “I am by nature a reconstructionist,” she stated. As home teacher, she would lead her pupils ““out of darkness, through blood, into light,”” using a phrase that referred to the flag of Germany, with its black, red, and yellow stripes, and evoking the often violent and painful process of reconstruction.⁶⁹ Foley said that her

68. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 5 May 1919, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 800, CSA; Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 7 May 1919, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 800, CSA; Milton Ferguson to Kate Foley, 19 May 1919, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 800, CSA; Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 20 May 1919, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 800, CSA.

69. Kate Foley, “The Re-education of the Blind Adult” (paper presented at the American Association of Workers for the Blind conference, Toronto, Canada, June 24-

paper received more applause than any others. “Walter G. [Holmes] told me afterward he never saw an audience so moved, and that the paper was voted the best of all, and there were some wonderful ones given,” Foley wrote to Mabel Gillis. “Please understand why I tell you this, for in the minute that followed the applause, I thought of you, your father, and mamma, and was glad I had acquitted myself creditably.”⁷⁰

Foley included the following anecdote about Eastman, who also attended the convention: “Mary spent her time trying to prejudice people against me, and I myself heard her in a bus one day, say, ‘Miss Foley came up north when I had things well started, and, although she had a good position in the south, she was jealous and so took away the position I had all but gained.’” However, Foley explained that many other convention delegates seemed to be on her side and wondered why Eastman was so insistent on denigrating her. “Mr. Campbell said Mary made no impression on the convention, and would be remembered only as the woman who ‘knocked Miss Foley.’”⁷¹ Even Eastman’s mean-spiritedness couldn’t ruin her triumph. Before returning home she traveled to Baltimore to visit the Red Cross Institute, where she gave a talk to soldiers, followed by Washington, D.C., where she visited the National Library for the Blind and the Reading Room for the Blind at the Library of Congress. Foley noted proudly that the

28, 1919), reprinted in *Outlook for the Blind* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1919), 48, 50; Brand Whitlock, “The Great Seal of Illinois,” *Chamberlin’s* 12, no. 135 (July 1914), 34.

70. Kate Foley to Mabel Gillis, 7 July 1919, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 802, CSA.

71. *Ibid.*

California State Library's circulation statistics compared favorably (and speculated whether this could be due to the efforts of its home teacher).⁷²

Several months after Foley returned by train to California, the state government was brought into the home teaching dispute. In December 1919 representatives from the state library began to meet with members of the state Board of Control, which had been founded by former governor Hiram Johnson to oversee state finances and reduce corruption and waste.⁷³ Foley hoped that the Board of Control would instruct the California School for the Blind to cease home teaching activities, as it had no legal right to teach adults. Unfortunately, as Ferguson explained to Foley, the attorney general had determined that although the California School for the Blind was not specifically allowed to perform home teaching, neither was the state library.⁷⁴ Later that month while Ferguson was out of town Mabel Gillis attended a Board of Control hearing on the matter. She reported the outcome to Foley on December 31, 1919. The Board of Control ordered the two organizations to reach some sort of agreement. Although Mabel Gillis pressed for the state library to be permitted to do the work, the Board seemed to be unwilling to consider her argument that the state library and not the school was best equipped to conduct home teaching. "Every time that I brought up the point that there was absolutely no sense in [Eastman] doing home teaching at all, they veered off from

72. "Books for the Blind Department," California State Library, *News Notes of California Libraries* 14, no 4 (October 1919), 821-22.

73. Rawls and Bean, *California*, 253.

74. Milton Ferguson to Kate Foley, 3 December 1919, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 802, CSA.

the point and would have nothing to do with that side of it.”⁷⁵ The distinction between Foley’s home teaching and Eastman’s home teaching was still poorly understood by the powers-that-be.

The Board of Control did order Milligan to ensure that Eastman kept to whatever agreement was made between the two organizations or threatened that she would be fired. Milligan and Mabel Gillis decided that the school and state library would maintain separate lists of pupils and each time a new pupil was identified would determine which organization would take on the work. Milligan (who appeared ill during the hearing) asked Mabel Gillis if the state library would be willing to hire Eastman. Although Gillis provided him with a firm “no,” she broached the possibility to Foley in her letter. “[I] say this with trepidation for I know it will be as much of a shock to you as it was to me at first—do you think that there is any possibility of that being a solution. . . . Suppose we did employ her and told her exactly what we wanted her to do in the matter of conduct, reports and methods of teaching.”⁷⁶

One can only imagine Foley’s reaction at reading these words and being forced to consider the possibility of working alongside her adversary. Her reply was remarkably measured, however. “I have thought very carefully over taking Miss Eastman as our home teacher,” she wrote to Mabel Gillis on the first day of 1920, “but I don’t see how we could consistently do it since we have contended all along that she is inefficient, and that she was not serving the best interests of the adult blind.” Later in the letter Foley

75. Mabel Gillis to Kate Foley, 31 December 1919, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 802, CSA.

76. Ibid.

wondered: “She must have some powerful influence backing her, and I am wondering who it can possibly be.”⁷⁷

In early 1920 Milligan departed California for health reasons and went to Colorado, leaving William Caldwell, who was a teacher at the Berkeley school, in charge. Milligan died in March.⁷⁸ His death would open up the possibility for Foley to repair her deteriorated relationship with the school’s administration. Foley was satisfied with the choice of Caldwell to replace Milligan, as Caldwell was not allied with Eastman. For the time being, however, the state library and the school continued to vie for control of home teaching. “You told me once to keep you informed of little things,” Foley wrote to Mabel Gillis in July, and related a story she had heard from someone about Eastman: “She said she hoped to be a full-time teacher this fall, and that she could be unless Miss Foley did the only thing she could do that would stop her. That ‘thing’ she went on to explain, was that if we wanted to, we could insist that she teach five hours a day in the school, since she receives a salary as teacher in the school, and not as home teacher.”⁷⁹ If the state library couldn’t receive official sanction to conduct home teaching, perhaps a legal basis could be sought immediately to curtail Eastman. That summer Foley met with

77. Kate Foley to Mabel Gillis, 1 January 1920, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 803, CSA.

78. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 24 February 1920, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 803, CSA; Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 28 March 1920, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 803, CSA.

79. Kate Foley to Mabel Gillis, circa July 1920, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 804, CSA.

Will C. Wood, the state superintendent of public instruction, to discuss the issues at the California School for the Blind. Wood initially told her that he didn't want to get involved in the home teaching conflict. In response, Foley pointed out to him that it was for the benefit of the students. Resources were being devoted to salary increases for teachers (such as Eastman, who was more focused on her work outside the school) even though the quality of education was poor and the school understaffed. This caught Wood's attention.⁸⁰

In June 1921, Foley made another long trip outside California, this time traveling with her sister by train to Vinton, Iowa, to the AAWB convention at the Iowa School for the Blind. This meeting was an important event in the history of blindness. The need for a cohesive organization that would serve as a national voice for blind persons in the United States was identified and the American Foundation for the Blind was formed.⁸¹ For Foley, the convention provided another opportunity to promote her methods and theories on home teaching to an attentive national audience that included virtually every person significant in the early organized blind community.

Foley discovered upon arrival at the convention that, of the 145 attendees, she had been assigned to room with Eastman. She immediately requested a change.⁸² Despite the

80. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 16 August 1921, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1921-1922, State Library Records, F3616: 806, CSA.

81. Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 17.

82. Kate Foley to Mabel Gillis, 30 June 1921, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1920-1921, State Library Records, F3616: 804, CSA. The rooming incident would be brought up months later in a letter to Foley from Henry Randolph Latimer, who served as Acting Director of the AFB during its first years. Latimer wrote, “[I]f you recall, some of our embarrassing experiences at the

awkwardness of the incident, Foley proclaimed “the meeting at Vinton was the best attended and most enthusiastic one I have thus far attended, and I feel that for me, at least, it was a good investment. Our success in home teaching has awakened the interest of all the workers, and we have made a definite place in library service.” She pointed out that *Five Lectures on Blindness*, however “incomplete and inadequate” it might be, was “recognized as the only material available on home teaching,” and mentioned that a textbook on home teaching had again been requested of her.⁸³

Several months after she returned to California, the situation with Eastman came to a head. Ferguson informed Foley that Alexander Heron, who had recently been appointed the deputy directors of institutions in charge of normal and special schools (including the California School for the Blind), was “very anxious to investigate the matter of home teaching from the School and is earnestly trying to come to a logical conclusion about the matter.”⁸⁴ When Heron and Wood showed an interest in resolving the home teaching rivalry, Foley became cautiously optimistic. Although Wood’s

Vinton convention grew out of the fact that you good people of California were unable to adjust your own differences,” which prevented Ferguson’s selection as a trustee of the newly formed national organization. Foley was insulted by the letter. “I really believe that the fact that I asked for a change of room was told freely by Latimer, Hayes and Palmer, who should have kept it to themselves,” she explained to Ferguson. (See H.R. Latimer to Kate Foley, 27 January 1922, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1922-1924, State Library Records, F3616: 807, CSA; Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 4 February 1922, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1922-1924, State Library Records, F3616: 807, CSA.)

83. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 18 July 1921, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1921-1922, State Library Records, F3616: 806, CSA.

84. Milton Ferguson to Kate Foley, 4 October 1921, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1921, State Library Records, F3616: 805, CSA.

opinion on the need for home teaching was skeptical (“[He] said he did not see that it was necessary just to teach ‘a blind woman to read.’ He said if they could be taught to sew, cook, and keep house it might be all right”), she felt encouraged that Wood did not believe that the Berkeley school should have responsibility for home teaching.⁸⁵

In October 1921, the California School for the Blind was ordered to cease engaging in all home teaching. “The opening gun has been fired in the home teaching situation, and I am telling you this morning, as I think it is well to be up on all developments,” Foley wrote to Ferguson as soon as she received the news. Her friend Christine LaBarraque heard from their former classmate Newel Perry that Eastman was “furious.”⁸⁶ Foley was concerned that Eastman would blame her. Through the alumni network, she learned that Eastman hoped to find a way to continue home teaching outside of school hours.⁸⁷

Foley was relieved that the state government had finally sanctioned the authority of the state library to conduct home teaching, although she was sure that Eastman would continue to attempt to interfere in the state library’s work. The situation dragged on through the end of the year. In November, Foley wrote, “I understand that Mary still

85. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 15 October 1921, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1921, State Library Records, F3616: 805, CSA.

86. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 21 October 1921, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1921, State Library Records, F3616: 805, CSA.

87. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 26 October 1921, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1921, State Library Records, F3616: 805, CSA.

goes out afternoons She says I need not think I can stop her.”⁸⁸ Then, several days later: “I was reliably informed yesterday that Mary feels ‘elated’ since her interview with Mr. Heron, for she reports his having told her he was sorry that, for legal reasons, he had to discontinue home teaching now, but at the next Legislature he would try to have the law fixed up.”⁸⁹ When Mabel Gillis met with Heron to inquire about this, he explained that it was not true and that Eastman had twisted his words. He “went so far as to intimate” that he would have Eastman fired from the Berkeley school if her claims could be confirmed.⁹⁰ It was Heron’s vexation with Eastman that finally ended the four-year dispute. On December 30, 1921, Ferguson informed Foley that “Heron . . . told Mr. Caldwell to let Miss Eastman know that the Board has enough important problems to deal with without any complications from any of the staff there, and particularly from this home teaching work.”⁹¹

88. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 12 November 1921, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1921, State Library Records, F3616: 805, CSA.

89. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 19 November 1921, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1921, State Library Records, F3616: 805, CSA.

90. Milton Ferguson to Kate Foley, 23 November 1921, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1921, State Library Records, F3616: 805, CSA.

91. Milton Ferguson to Kate Foley, 30 December 1921, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1921, State Library Records, F3616: 805, CSA. At this point Foley’s letters stop mentioning Eastman (although there are few letters from her to the state library after 1922). Eastman continued home teaching in the Bay Area with the SFA. She left the California School for the Blind in 1927. Eastman died in 1940, the same year that Foley did. It is unknown whether the two women ever mended their relationship. (See “Rites Held for Blind Leader,” *Oakland Tribune*, December 23, 1940.)

“It has been a hard, unpleasant four years for me,” Foley wrote Ferguson in November 1921.⁹² She had finally won the battle with Eastman, however, and the year that followed was a period of relative calm. Foley traveled to Texas to attend the AAIB convention. Additionally, her sight conservation work with Glaser escalated. Sight conservation went hand-in-hand with blindness prevention and was designed to preserve limited vision in those with vision impairments. Sight saving classes offered students books with large type, limited reading, blackboards in desks, and proper lighting.⁹³ *News Notes of California Libraries* announced that the “first sight-saving class in the West” would begin on April 3, 1922, in San Francisco.⁹⁴ Later that year, in her home teaching report, Foley wrote, “During the past year, it has been my privilege to cooperate with Dr Edward P. Glaser and the Board of Education of San Francisco in organizing a sight-saving class. Such a class is now part of the public school system of this city, the first class of the kind to be organized in the state. The pioneer work requires time and patience, but the end is worth any effort and sacrifice.”⁹⁵

In 1923, Foley, who turned fifty years old, faced another professional crisis under the state’s parsimonious new governor. The country’s shift toward conservatism affected the government of California as well as the rest of the nation. California Republicans drew away from progressivism and become more business-oriented. The influence of

92. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 29 October 1921, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1921, State Library Records, F3616: 805, CSA.

93. Foley, *Five Lectures*, 43.

94. “Home Teaching,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 17, no. 2 (April 1922): 197.

95. “Report of Kate M. Foley, Home Teacher of the Blind, July 1, 1921-June 30, 1922,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 17, no. 4 (October 1922): 845.

white middle-class Protestant values continued to assert itself in legislation that restricted immigration, the eugenics movement, the expansion of welfare, a resurgence of anti-Catholicism, and, perhaps most significantly, women's suffrage and prohibition.⁹⁶ However, although Progressives had always charted a middle course between wealthy business interests on one side and the labor movement on the other, they became even more strongly anti-union in the 1920s.

Fears of socialism and the labor movement, compounded by concerns over immigration and World War I, aggravated nationalism and xenophobia. The many social and cultural changes that occurred during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries created a feeling of national anxiety. The Ku Klux Klan experienced a resurgence in the 1920s, fueled largely by apprehension regarding Catholicism and sexuality, the latter prompted by changing gender roles, women's suffrage, and the influences of Freud, Mead, Sanger, and others. Anti-Catholicism festered as part of the general antagonism toward immigrants and the labor movement. The Masons and the Ku Klux Klan were the chief organizations espousing anti-Catholicism during the period.⁹⁷ As a Catholic, Foley experienced the effects of this personally. According to gossip from Perry, Eastman

96. Jackson K. Putnam, "The Persistence of Progressivism in the 1920s: The Case of California," *Pacific Historical Review* 35, no. 4 (November 1966): 396-97.

97. Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 146-49; Goldberg, *Discontented America*, 118, 120-24; Lynn Dumenil, "The Tribal Twenties: 'Assimilated' Catholics' Response to Anti-Catholicism in the 1920s," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 11 (Fall 1991): 23-24.

complained that Foley “was a Catholic, and had an artificial limb.”⁹⁸ Foley related a story about visiting the Masonic Home, where she had been warmly received before, to find the matron behaving in a “nervous and uneasy” manner. She learned from one of the residents that Eastman had been there and had asked the matron if she knew that Foley was Catholic. “As the matron is a staunch orthodox Presbyterian, and has lots of Masons as friends this accounts for her change in attitude,” Foley wrote, and stated that she felt Eastman should be held accountable for her attempt to use Foley’s religious beliefs against her.⁹⁹

The transition from progressivism to conservatism in California impacted Foley’s career with the state library directly. California’s progressive governor, Hiram Johnson, resigned in 1917 to become a senator and was succeeded by William D. Stephens. Known as a “neoprogressive” Republican, Stephens supported spending on social services while also emphasizing economy.¹⁰⁰ Governor Stephens raised corporate taxes and increased appropriations for spending on social services, which was anathema to conservatives in the business-oriented early 1920s, and in 1922 Friend W. Richardson defeated him in the primary and was subsequently elected governor of California.

98. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 10 March 1920, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1921, State Library Records, F3616: 805, CSA.

99. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 12 April 1918, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 805, CSA.

100. Jackson K. Putnam, “The Progressive Legacy in California: Fifty Years of Politics, 1917-1967,” in *California Progressivism Revisited*, ed. William Deverell and Tom Sitton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 248, 251.

Richardson was a former Progressive Republican who championed extreme fiscal conservatism.¹⁰¹ He became “a sworn enemy of progressivism,” and “made a mighty effort to destroy every remnant of it.”¹⁰² His budget “drastically reduced appropriations, particularly for regulatory boards, humanitarian agencies, and education.”¹⁰³ Just as the open-handed enthusiasm of California’s Progressive Era government provided the stimulus to hire Foley as home teacher, so the tight fist of Richardson’s conservative leadership brought her career to a halt.

“I found my check upon my return from the Library Saturday afternoon, and also your letter of May 31. I am very sorry that Home Teaching must be discontinued by our State Library,” she wrote Ferguson on June 5, 1923.¹⁰⁴ Ferguson terminated twenty-five employees, including Foley and Morrison, as a result of the governor slashing the state library’s budget by one-third. Ferguson’s justification for eliminating home teaching was that it was “not a library function.”¹⁰⁵ It is not difficult to understand the state librarian’s predicament, given the budget issue, but undoubtedly Foley felt hurt and betrayed.

In August 1923 Foley was packing up her things at the Sutro branch and sending her records off to the state library. She wrote with displeasure to Ferguson, “In reply to your letter . . . suggesting that I request the blind to apply direct to the State Library, I

101. J. Casey Sullivan, “Way before the Storm: California, the Republican Party, and a New Conservatism, 1900–1930,” *Journal of Policy History* 26, no. 4 (2014): 579–80.

102. Putnam, “Progressive Legacy,” 252.

103. Rawls and Bean, *California*, 275.

104. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 5 June 1923, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1922–1924, State Library Records, F3616: 807, CSA.

105. “Revised Practice,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 18, no. 3 (July 1923): 288.

would say that, although you have been permitted to deprive the blind of the services of a paid teacher, I challenge your right to deprive them of the volunteer service of a teacher who understands them and loves them, and must serve them as long as she lives.”

Apparently Ferguson had told her to direct requests for instruction to the state library, which upset her. “You have recently stated that it is not the function of the State Library to teach, and so your suggestion comes as somewhat of a surprise,” she pointed out.¹⁰⁶ Foley intended to continue to teach blind persons how to read, whether she was employed by the state library or not, as she had been doing for twenty-eight years.

At this point, if she had not already, Foley likely joined her colleagues who held Ferguson responsible for the demise of the visionary county library system and extension services that his predecessor James Gillis had inspired. Ferguson endured strained relationships with multiple staff members. In 1919 he had requested permission to ask for Suggett’s resignation, although he did not follow through with it at the time. Harriet Eddy left her position as county library organizer in 1919 and blamed Ferguson for detrimental decisions. Suggett resigned from the library on May 31, 1923, the same day that Foley’s letter of termination was written. The librarian who replaced her at the Sutro branch, Ruth McLaughlin, was fired for insubordination later that year because of her continuing loyalty to Suggett.¹⁰⁷ These women found Ferguson unremarkable as a state librarian.

106. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 11 August 1923, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1922-1924, State Library Records, F3616: 807, CSA.

107. Kunkle, “Extension Activities,” 157-60; “Staff News Items,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 18, no. 3 (July 1923): 287.

Shortly after the library's termination of home teaching, Ferguson was ordered to reinstate both Foley and Morrison. Interestingly, the person who issued the demand was the very person deemed responsible for implementing Governor Richardson's draconian budget requirements. Her name was Nellie B. Pierce, and she was an attorney and member of the state Board of Control.¹⁰⁸ Ferguson considered Pierce's order to be a usurpation of his authority as state librarian. Richardson sided with Ferguson. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, the governor "called Ferguson into his office and told him he was head of the State library and would not be forced to reinstate the two teachers."¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, the two home teachers were, in fact, reinstated several months later on December 1, 1923, under the Board of Control. It is not clear what strings Pierce pulled on behalf of Foley, or what her interest in the home teaching situation was. Given Foley's widespread network of supporters throughout California, it is possible that she had a prior connection to Pierce. Additionally, prominent state officials, such as Foley's former ally, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Wood, generated considerable discontent over the new budget and Pierce's interference with public education.¹¹⁰

For the next two years Foley and Morrison served under the Board of Control.¹¹¹

After Foley was reinstated, Ferguson wrote coolly, "Under present conditions, it is

108. "Richardson Breaks with Mrs. Pierce," *Oakland Tribune*, July 22, 1923; Marcia Wilson, "Women in the Law: Pioneers," *New Mexico Bar Journal* 6, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 23-24.

109. "Richardson Denies Right of Board of Control Member to Reinstate Library Employees," *Los Angeles Times*, July 21, 1923.

110. "Books for the Blind Department," *News Notes of California Libraries* 19, no. 1 (January 1924): 49; "Richardson Breaks With Mrs. Pierce," *Oakland Tribune*.

111. "Staff News Items," *News Notes of California Libraries* 20, no. 3 (July 1925): 225.

impossible for us to handle daily reports of the work”; the Board of Control would be “satisfied” with monthly reporting.¹¹² He later sent a terse note requesting that Foley direct all future correspondence to him only, not Mabel Gillis, leaving one to speculate if Ferguson sought to restrict their professional communications due to the problems with insubordination he had experienced with other employees.¹¹³ Unfortunately, it is at this time that Foley’s frequent letters to the state librarian’s office, with her near-daily accounts of her struggles, come to a stop.

Foley’s early years in San Francisco were characterized by division and disharmony. During this period she faced two of the greatest challenges of her professional career: a four-year struggle to position herself as the leading home teacher in the Bay Area, followed by the temporary elimination of her position due to deep cuts in the state’s budget. She also experienced personal difficulties, such as the death of her mother. However, Foley also garnered some of her most notable achievements, such as the publication of *Five Lectures on Blindness*, as her state and national reputation continued to grow. She maintained a busy public speaking regimen to promote her work and her ideas and successfully navigated the byzantine alliances and relationships of those involved in state government, public and charitable institutions, and the organized blind movement. World War I provided Foley with an opportunity to heighten interest in services for blind persons. Her work expanded to include blindness prevention and sight

112. Milton Ferguson to Kate Foley, 3 December 1923, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1922-1924, State Library Records, F3616: 807, CSA.

113. Milton Ferguson to Kate Foley, 4 March 1924, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1922-1924, State Library Records, F3616: 807, CSA.

conservation. Most importantly, Foley effectively reconstructed her career in the Bay Area and was victorious in her battles with Eastman and Ferguson regarding the fate of home teaching.

For the remainder of her career, Foley enjoyed a relatively stable work environment. Despite the challenges of the Great Depression, the state library maintained home teaching as an essential part of its services for blind residents. As both the state and federal welfare bureaucracies expanded under the New Deal, home teaching grew as well and became increasingly professionalized.

Chapter 6

“A Joyous Adventure”: Home Teaching, 1924-1940

Kate Foley remained employed as home teacher from 1924 until shortly before her death in 1940. Although this was a transformative and challenging time for the United States, Foley’s career remained relatively stable. She took advantage of new technologies to broaden her outreach efforts, and continued to speak publicly and represent the interests of blind individuals at the national level. She worked with the Red Cross to initiate braille transcribing, which became a popular volunteer activity, and maintained close relationships with public health, public education, and state welfare officials. Foley’s work as home teacher and activist provides an example of the continuity of progressive values through the 1920s and 1930s. The appointment of Mabel Gillis as state librarian likely contributed to the longevity and stability of Foley’s career, as did the centralization and growth of both the state and federal welfare systems.

Technological and cultural innovations enabled Foley to reach a wider audience for her home teaching and advocacy work during this period. World War I had ushered in a new era, and over the decade of the 1920s American life was transformed. Standards of living improved as people in the United States enjoyed better food, higher wages, and an increased life expectancy. The use of petroleum and electricity increased industrial output, while the identification of quartz crystal properties prompted radio development. By 1929 there were 26 million registered automobiles in the United States.¹ Foley’s work benefitted from the use of both the automobile and the radio.

1. Parrish, *Anxious Decades*, 30-34, 40.

Foley first mention of the radio in her home teaching reports occurred in 1927. “The radio is a great help in readjusting the blind adult, and I sometimes wonder how we ever got on without its curative ministrations,” she wrote, joking that “[I] always apologize when I find it necessary to give a lesson during a baseball game.”² In addition to providing a source of information and entertainment for blind persons in general, the radio offered Foley an additional outlet for publicity. Two years later, starting in April 1929, she gave a series of ten Saturday afternoon talks broadcast by the radio station KGO. The series was called “Bringing Light to the Seeing” and included interviews with successful blind individuals as well as discussions on home teaching work and public attitudes toward blind persons.³

After Foley’s reinstatement under the Board of Control at the end of 1923, she taught lessons from her home at the Argyle Apartments on Thursdays rather than from the Sutro Branch, which had been relocated to the San Francisco Public Library.⁴ On other days she traveled throughout the Bay Area, gradually widening the geographic area that she covered. Her home teaching reports in *News Notes of California Libraries* listed the many locations that she visited during this period, including Oakland, Berkeley, Alameda, Hayward, San Mateo, Santa Clara, San Jose, Pacific Grove, Modesto, Fresno, Stockton, Marysville, Salinas, Monterey, Sacramento, Bakersfield, and Petaluma. For transportation, Foley often relied on automobiles. She noted in her reports when she used

2. “Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Vicinity, July 1, 1926-June 30, 1927,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 22, no. 4 (October 1927): 484.

3. “Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Bay Region, July 1, 1928-June 30, 1929,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 24, no. 4 (October 1929): 498.

4. “Home Teaching,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 20, no. 4 (October 1925): 455.

them for travel. For example, in November 1925 she went to Salinas and Monterey “in the County Librarian’s Ford, ‘Romero.’”⁵

Alice Foley served as her younger sister’s secretary and guide after their mother’s death. In 1928, at the age of fifty-nine, Alice assumed a new duty and learned to drive a car. “Last summer my brother made it possible for me to get an automobile, which my sister willingly learned to operate, and on which the state agreed to allow mileage,” Foley reported.⁶ She continued to rely heavily on family support to pursue her work. A car made it possible for her to visit a greater number of students more efficiently, particularly those who lived further away, providing her with more time for correspondence. By 1926 she was teaching pupils in twenty-seven counties within California, as well as in Arizona, Idaho, Nevada, Washington, Oregon, North Dakota, and South Dakota, via correspondence.⁷

Alice Foley accompanied her sister on many outings and became known for her own dedication to helping blind individuals. Foley mentioned that Alice regularly came with her to the Industrial Home for the Adult Blind in Oakland. “My sister is helpful to the women in many little ways, doing things to add to their comfort and convenience,” Foley wrote about Alice’s interactions with women residents of the institution.⁸ Alice

5. “California Libraries—Quarterly News Items,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 21, no. 1 (January 1926): 23.

6. “Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Bay Region, July 1, 1928-June 30, 1929,” California State Library, *News Notes of California Libraries* 24, no. 4 (October 1929): 498.

7. “Summary of Annual Reports of Home Teachers for the Blind,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 21, no. 4 (October 1926), 516.

8. “Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Vicinity, July 1, 1927-June 30, 1928,” California State Library, *News Notes of California Libraries* 23, no. 4 (October

was also an honorary member of the AAIB and AAWB.⁹ She traveled throughout the United States to these organizations' regular meetings with her sister. Kate and Alice Foley attended events at Hudson, Ohio, in 1925, Lake Wawasee, Indiana, in 1929, and Vancouver in 1930.¹⁰

In addition to the technological innovations and family support that enabled her to enlarge the scope of her work, Foley's career also benefitted from the enduring climate of progressivism in California. The state's sharp turn toward conservatism in the early 1920s proved only temporary when Governor Richardson, who earned widespread enmity with his controversial budget, lost the nomination to Progressive Republican C.C. Young. Young succeeded Richardson as governor of California in 1927.¹¹ Throughout the United States, expenditures on schools, hospitals, highways, and public welfare ballooned between 1920 and 1931. Resistance against government intervention applied primarily to the economic sphere; "health, safety, and morals" remained suitable areas for progressive reform long past World War I.¹²

The relationship that Foley formed with the Red Cross during World War I enabled her to continue to enlist clubwomen in support of "the Cause." In 1919 Foley

1928), 496; "Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Bay Region, July 1, 1928-June 30, 1929," *News Notes of California Libraries* 24, no. 4 (October 1929), 498.

9. "Report of the Credentials Committee," *Proceedings of the Thirtieth Biennial Convention of the American Association of Instructors for the Blind* (n.p., n.d.), 586.

10. "Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Bay Region, July 1, 1928-June 30, 1929," *News Notes of California Libraries* 24, no. 4 (October 1929): 498; "Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Bay Region, July 1, 1929-June 30, 1930," *News Notes of California Libraries* 25, no. 4 (October 1930): 531.

11. Issel and Cherny, *San Francisco*, 186.

12. William R. Brock, *Welfare, Democracy, and the New Deal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 10-11.

began training teams of sighted braille transcribers to increase the amount of reading material available to blind persons. Transcribers often worked on short stories and news, which was especially helpful for less skilled readers overwhelmed by longer books.¹³ In an example of the enduring spirit of women's voluntarism, Red Cross transcription efforts became a fashionable philanthropic activity during the 1920s across the United States. The Perkins School for the Blind archives contains a scrapbook of newspaper clippings from the years 1921 to 1932 devoted entirely to volunteer transcription efforts, indicating how widespread this work was. "Making books for blind veterans is the newest kind of 'after the war work' to become popular," noted the Manchester, New Hampshire, *Union*. "Knitting needles and embroidery hoops are being discarded for the metal slate and stylus with which Braille books are handwritten." An Indiana newspaper article from 1925 described braille transcribing as an "opportunity to fill idle hours," and fairly easy to learn how to do. Another claimed in 1932 that braille transcribing offered women an activity that was "more interesting than motion pictures and more fascinating [than] bridge."¹⁴ Although club involvement began to wane after enfranchisement,

13. "Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Vicinity, July 1, 1927-June 30, 1928," *News Notes of California Libraries* 23, no. 4 (October 1928): 497.

14. Frederic J. Haskin, "Make Books for Blind Veterans," *Union* (Manchester, N.H.), September 7, 1922, in Perkins School for the Blind Bound Clippings: Braille Transcribing, 1921-1932, Perkins Archives, Watertown, MA, accessed September 1, 2016, <http://www.perkinsarchives.org/complete-scrapbooks.html>; Laura A. Smith, "Braille Transcribing for Blind is Way to Serve," *Star* (Indianapolis, IN), in Perkins School for the Blind Bound Clippings: Braille Transcribing, 1921-1932, Perkins Archives, Watertown, MA, accessed September 1, 2016, <http://www.perkinsarchives.org/complete-scrapbooks.html>; "Dallas Women Aid Blind to 'See' by Transcribing Literature into Braille During Their Leisure Time," *Dispatch* (Dallas, TX), August 26, 1932, in Perkins School for the Blind Bound Clippings: Braille

middle-class women of the 1920s had more leisure time than ever before. Braille transcribing was deemed a worthwhile way to spend it (more so than movies or card games). Foley continued training volunteers to transcribe braille until the San Francisco chapter of the Red Cross eliminated its transcription activities for economic reasons in 1932.¹⁵

Child welfare became a prime target of social reform during the 1920s. Preoccupation with child welfare grew after World War I and was encouraged by women reformers, organized mothers, and reformist scientists. It included studying children from a scientific perspective and providing advice literature to parents based on what was considered to be the latest science regarding child development. *Parents' Magazine*, for example, was first published in 1926. The impetus for this new focus on children was the belief that “saving” children would save society. Eliminating problems at the root in a young child created an improved adult.¹⁶ Foley, who had worked with children since the beginning of her career with the state library, wholeheartedly applied this precept. In *Five Lectures on Blindness* she issued a warning against coddling and inhibiting the independence of blind children:

If a child lives in a house where he is waited upon, and made to feel that mere existence and the ability to eat and sleep are all that may reasonably be expected of him, and that he must depend upon his family for everything, he will grow up helpless, selfish and awkward, and no amount of later training will entirely counteract the pernicious effect produced in these early, formative years. When

Transcribing, 1921-1932, Perkins Archives, Watertown, MA accessed September 1, 2016, <http://www.perkinsarchives.org/complete-scrapbooks.html>.

15. “Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Bay Region, July 1, 1931-June 30, 1932,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 27, no. 4 (October 1932): 551.

16. Alice Boardman Smuts and Robert W. Smuts, *Science in the Service of Children, 1893-1935* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 1-3, 7.

placed in school with other children, he will be very sensitive to correction, and may become morbid and unhappy, thus giving a wrong impression of the blind in general.¹⁷

The wrong start in childhood, Foley believed, would ripple through the rest of one's life and spread outward to society. The concern was not just for the welfare of individual children, but also for the community as a whole. Improperly trained and educated blind children caused "a wrong impression of the blind" that negatively impacted the blind community as a whole. Foley advocated early intervention and as much exposure to "normal" children as possible.

Foley had many opportunities to put her educational theories into practice. The sight conservation classes that she established with Dr. Glaser continued, a perfect fit for the decade's emphasis on protecting youth. Foley taught children who were not able to attend either the residential school at Berkeley or a public school, and even cared for a very young child herself. In the 1927 *News Notes of California Libraries* publication Foley noted that she was "still looking after the blind baby."¹⁸ The circumstances were not elaborated upon, and no corroborating sources have been found, but Foley continued to mention the child's progress in her reports. In 1928 Foley stated she was teaching five children not healthy enough to attend school, and that "the little blind baby" she was caring for was "now a sturdy child of three." Also in the same report she mentioned that no cases of infant ophthalmia had been reported for the past three years, an

17. Foley, *Five Lectures*, 14.

18. "Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Vicinity, July 1, 1926-June 30, 1927," *News Notes of California Libraries* 22 no. 4 (October 1927), 483.

accomplishment she was proud of.¹⁹ In 1930, she wrote, “Our blind baby is a baby no longer. She will be six years old next January, when I hope she may be sent to school.”²⁰ The following year Foley reported that she was teaching nine children in their homes, three of who would be attending the Berkeley school, along with “our blind baby” (who was six years old).²¹

The sight conservation class that Glaser and Foley started in San Francisco had grown to nineteen students, and Foley visited the classroom regularly to monitor their progress.²² Additional classes were added, such as one at Jean Parker School specifically for Chinese children with nearsightedness.²³ Foley spoke regularly on the welfare of blind children to various audiences. For example, in 1926 she addressed sight conservation at a conference on disabled children organized by State Superintendent of Education Will C. Wood.²⁴ In 1932 she presented a paper on “The Social Adjustment of Blind Children” at a meeting of the Northern California Council on the Education of

19. “Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Vicinity, July 1, 1927-June 30, 1928,” California State Library, *News Notes of California Libraries* 23, no. 4 (October 1928), 496.

20. “Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Bay Region July 1, 1929-June 30, 1930,” California State Library, *News Notes of California Libraries* 25, no. 4 (October 1930): 531.

21. “Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Bay Region July 1, 1930-June 30, 1931,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 26, no. 4 (October 1931): 548.

22. “Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Vicinity, July 1, 1927-June 30, 1928,” California State Library, *News Notes of California Libraries* 23, no. 4 (October 1928), 497.

23. “Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Vicinity, July 1, 1927-June 30, 1928,” California State Library, *News Notes of California Libraries* 23, no. 4 (October 1928), 496.

24. “Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Vicinity, July 1, 1926-June 30, 1927,” California State Library, *News Notes of California Libraries* 22, no. 4 (October 1927), 483.

Exceptional Children at Mills College.²⁵ As child welfare increased in importance, Foley highlighted her expertise in this area.

Foley sought to ensure that she (and, by extension, the State of California) were aware of the existence of every blind person in the state, from infants to the elderly. This level of supervision was achieved with the help of medical and educational professionals. Foley noted that she was called to the University of California hospital “whenever blind babies or older children are there as patients,” in order to establish contact with their families and intervene in their development.²⁶ In addition to ensuring blind children were raised to integrate successfully with the sighted community, Foley continued her efforts to rehabilitate blind adults. Foley taught individuals residing in nursing homes, hospitals, and prisons. In 1925 she mentioned that she had two pupils incarcerated at San Quentin.²⁷ A 1929 newspaper article reported that Foley was teaching a “life-terminer” that she had found as a result of her radio talks. “Once chronicled as a ‘hard case,’ this man is now a model prisoner,” stated the article. “He has become an inspiration to other prisoners.”²⁸

Another factor in the long-term success of Foley’s career was the change in administration at the state library. In 1928 Ferguson took a one-year leave of absence as state librarian to conduct a survey for the Carnegie Corporation on libraries in South

25. “Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Bay Region July 1, 1931-June 30, 1932,” California State Library, *News Notes of California Libraries* 27, no. 4 (October 1932), 552.

26. “Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Bay Region July 1, 1934-June 30, 1935,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 30, no. 4 (October 1935): 305.

27. “Summary of Annual Reports of Home Teachers for the Blind,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 21, no. 4 (October 1926): 516.

28. “Radio Talks Win Pupils,” *Oakland Tribune*, August 4, 1929.

Africa. Mabel Gillis was appointed Acting State Librarian in his absence. Although Ferguson resumed work at the state library in May 1929, he did not remain in his position for long. In 1930 he resigned and moved to New York to become librarian at the Brooklyn Public Library. Mabel Gillis was subsequently appointed state librarian.²⁹ She was later described as wishing to maintain her father's legacy and did not make fundamental changes to the state library's structure.³⁰ This likely suited Foley, whose professional security was assured by the longtime relationship that she had had with the woman whose father had hired her and who she referred to in letters as her "dear 'Boss.'" In 1931, Foley reported, "[T]he year's work has been lightened by the confidence and unfailing sympathy of Miss Mabel R. Gillis, State Librarian, who is actively interested in all effort looking to the happiness and welfare of the [Books for the Blind] borrowers."³¹ The following year she wrote about the state librarian, "Her attitude makes our work a joyous adventure."³² As the long-time head of Books for the Blind at the California State Library, Mabel Gillis was a nationally known leader in the area of library services for blind readers. She spoke at numerous meetings and conferences regarding this aspect of library work.

29. "Staff News Items," *News Notes of California Libraries* 23, no. 4 (October 1928): 491; "Staff News Items," *News Notes of California Libraries* 25, no. 4 (October 1930): 527-28.

30. Kunkle, "Extension Activities," 154, 186-87.

31. "Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Bay Region July 1, 1930-June 30, 1931," *News Notes of California Libraries* 26, no. 4 (October 1931), 549.

32. "Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Bay Region, July 1, 1931-June 30, 1932," California State Library, *News Notes of California Libraries* 27 no. 4 (October 1932), 553.

Books for the Blind and home teaching remained key components of the state library's services under Mabel Gillis's administration. Foley reported in 1930 that the California State Library had the third highest circulation rate of books for blind in the country, second only to Library of Congress (which had a national circulation) and the New York Public Library.³³ The State of California was proud of Foley's pioneering activities, and, similar to her friend and counterpart Helen Keller, she was a popular public figure for the remainder of her life. A newspaper announcement of an upcoming radio interview with Foley by radio personality "Duke" Meyer on the station KPO claimed enthusiastically, "Kate M. Foley heads the list of America's greatest women today in the hearts of thousands of westerners."³⁴ In a paper presented at the 1925 AAWB convention, Foley described one of her recent workdays, indicating the broad reach of her professional endeavors:

I recently made a first trip to one of the smaller counties, and on my arrival, the county librarian met me and told me she had planned a very full two days for me. She said, 'You are to meet the public health nurse, a Red Cross worker, and a teacher at dinner, give a talk to the Elks in the evening, and incidentally see the county probation officer and a reporter. Tomorrow you are to visit the homes of the blind, address a woman's club in the afternoon, and give a talk to the Parent-Teachers in the evening. I hope you don't mind doing all this, but it all seemed to me to have a bearing on your work.'³⁵

33. Kate Foley, "Home Teaching a Library Function in California" (paper presented at the 30th biennial convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Vancouver, Washington, June 23-27, 1930), 491.

34. "Famed Leader of Blind KPO Speaker," *San Francisco Call-Bulletin*, November 15, 1933, in Perkins School for the Blind Bound Clippings: California Adult Blind, 1930-1933, Perkins Archive, Watertown, MA, accessed September 1, 2016, <http://www.perkinsarchives.org/complete-scrapbooks.html>.

35. Kate Foley, "Civic Responsibilities of Home Teachers" (paper presented at the 11th biennial convention of the American Association of Workers for the Blind, Hudson, OH, June 22-26, 1925), in *Report of Eleventh Biennial Convention of American Association of Workers for the Blind* (n.p., n.d.), 75-76.

Foley's position survived a budget reduction of \$77,000 in 1933. Several employees were let go and vacancies remained unfilled, but the impact of the Great Depression on civil service workers was less than those employed in the private sector.³⁶ The worst years of the Depression in California were 1933 and 1934. Major strikes occurred among agricultural and maritime workers. There was an increase in radicalism as people looked for new solutions to solve problems, while others remained staunchly conservative. Intense fears of communism fueled fascism in California.³⁷

The radicalism of the 1930s affected the disability rights movement. The League of the Physically Handicapped was established in 1935 by a group of six individuals with disabilities. This group pursued labor tactics such as sit-ins and picketing in order to attack employment discrimination of disabled persons by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which excluded individuals considered "dependent" (e.g. the elderly, mothers with children, and people with disabilities).³⁸ The year before, in 1934, Foley's former classmate Newel Perry founded the California Council of the Blind. This organization selected Foley as their state library representative, and she served on its

36. "Quarterly Notes," *News Notes of California Libraries* 28, no. 3 (July 1933): 195; Lillian Symes, "Research and the Sciences" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the California Library Association, May 11, 1932), reprinted in *News Notes of California Libraries* 28, no. 1 (January 1933): 1.

37. Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 156, 193-94.

38. Paul K. Longmore and David Goldberger, "The League of the Physically Handicapped and the Great Depression: A Case Study in the New Disability History," *Journal of American History* 87, no. 3 (2000): 888-90.

committee for prevention of blindness and conservation of vision.³⁹ The California Council of the Blind was the precursor to the National Federation of the Blind, which became one of the primary organizations for blind persons in the United States. The NFB, established in 1940 by Perry's protégée Jacobus tenBroek, contrasted itself with the AFB. Like the League of the Physically Handicapped, the NFB called for its members to demand equal opportunities and civil rights. "Individually, we are scattered, ineffective and inarticulate, subject alike to the oppression of the social worker and the arrogance of the government administrator," tenBroek said in his first address to the new organization.⁴⁰

Foley herself did not take part in this newer, more radical movement of disabled people that would agitate for civil rights over the course of the twentieth century. As a member of an earlier wave, the first organized blind community, Foley tended to reflect what historian Paul K. Longmore described as a "rehabilitation ideology" that "refined and systematized already existing ideas about disability." According to Longmore, this ideology "attested that disability was a medically caused limitation in the individual's capacity to achieve economic self-sufficiency and to fulfill expected social roles, as it prescribed a route to productive independence and a socially legitimate identity. Disabled individuals must engage in continuous cheerful striving to recapture some semblance of social normality, a quest at once physical, psychological, and moral."⁴¹

39. "Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Bay Region, July 1, 1934-June 30, 1935," California State Library, *News Notes of California Libraries* 30 no. 4 (October 1935), 305.

40. Matson, *Blind Justice*, 101.

41. Longmore and Goldberg, "League," 897.

Rehabilitation ideology shaped Foley's work as home teacher and guided how she interacted with blind individuals and nonprofit and government entities.

As a member of the earliest organized blind community, Foley helped to create a discussion on blindness that was led by blind persons themselves, rather than medical and educational professionals. She voiced her frustration over employment discrimination and public prejudice toward blind persons and strove to expand literacy and access to reading material. She sought to change public attitudes about blind people. In 1919, during her University of California lectures, Foley remarked that a friend had "facetiously" suggested that she change the title of her talk from "Bringing Light to the Blind" to "Bringing Light to the Seeing."⁴² Ten years later, she used the phrase, without jest, to title her series of radio talks.

Foley asserted that the primary difficulty faced by blind persons was their treatment by the sighted community. If blindness were a 25 percent handicap, as had been stated by others, Foley believed that 24 percent was due the "prejudice and unbelief of the public," and only 1 percent attributable to "the lack of eyesight."⁴³ In her outreach to the public, she attempted to dispel common myths about blindness, such that blind persons could "feel" colors or that they were unusually talented musicians, and urged members of the public to trust in blind workers and advocated for the government to reserve certain professions (such as selling newspapers) for blind individuals.⁴⁴

42. Foley, *Five Lectures*, 36.

43. *Ibid.*, 21.

44. *Ibid.*, 32-33.

Foley sought to feature blind people at their best, in order to convince the public of their capabilities. However, she simultaneously believed that blind people needed to make more effort to integrate successfully with the sighted community. Her ideas about child development exemplified this. A poorly trained child, according to Foley, would never be fully capable of achieving “normalcy.” Foley was often critical of other blind people. She complained about the students at the California School for the Blind making a “poor showing” at the commencement exercises.⁴⁵ She had great distaste for those who engaged in begging, an activity that she felt also included “itinerant street musicians” and “gum or pencil vendors.”⁴⁶ Other members of the organized blind community expressed similar sentiments. A discussion at the 1927 AAWB convention was titled, “Are Blind People of Normal Intelligence Doing All They Can to Make Themselves Socially Acceptable Among Seeing People?” The speaker asserted that they were not.⁴⁷

Foley supported pensions for blind individuals, but only if they were “deserving.” In one of her letters to the state library, she relayed that a blind man named Sam Bean blamed her for his pension being taken away. “I simply called the attention of the Alameda Charities to the fact that he was begging and collecting a hundred dollars per

45. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 24 May 1921, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, Foley 1920-1921, State Library Records, F3616: 804, CSA.

46. Foley, *Five Lectures*, 38.

47. Anne Connolly, “Are Blind People of Normal Intelligence Doing All They Can to Make Themselves Socially Acceptable Among Seeing People?” (paper presented at the 12th Biennial Convention of the American Association of Workers for the Blind, June 20-24, 1927), 8.

month,” Foley wrote.⁴⁸ Foley sought to improve the lives of blind people through access to public education and vocational opportunities, rather than through the provision of direct aid. This was part of a larger debate that occurred during the 1930s. President Roosevelt, though much more in favor of using the federal government to deliver assistance than his predecessor, preferred to implement work-based programs, such as the WPA, to direct relief.⁴⁹

Home teaching as a profession ultimately benefitted from the expansion of state and federal welfare programs during the 1930s. The Great Depression and New Deal accelerated federal involvement in the lives of residents of the United States. Organized groups of blind individuals claimed a portion of the developing welfare system for themselves, often in opposition to officials that sought control over the disbursement of funds.⁵⁰ Various forms of aid to blind individuals, including home teaching, grew during this time, both at the state and federal levels. The status accorded to social workers during the New Deal period provided further validation for home teaching. “[Home teaching] work has been given a place among the welfare agencies of California, and is recognized as one of the highest types of social service,” Foley reported in *News Notes of*

48. Kate Foley to Milton Ferguson, 4 September 1920, Department of Education – State Library, Home Teacher for the Blind Files, 1916-1920, State Library Records, F3616: 804, CSA.

49. Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1974), 287.

50. Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 198.

California Libraries.⁵¹ Members of the early organized blind community considered the aid that they received to be distinct from other types of aid.

During the Progressive Era, states began to reform their welfare systems, while federal oversight increased. State boards of charities and corrections eventually became Departments of Public or Social Welfare.⁵² “In the 1920s, technical experts presided over the reorganization of states’ welfare apparatus into specialized departments that centralized fiscal control, systematized procedures, evaluated results, wrote new poor laws, tightened supervision of public and private agencies, and spent more money,” explained historian Michael Katz.⁵³ The state library experienced the effects of this as well. The library abolished its Board of Trustees in 1921 due to the reorganization of the state government. For several years the state library was under the jurisdiction of the Department of Finance, and then in 1927 it became part of the Department of Education.⁵⁴

Home teaching for blind persons expanded in the 1920s in California. By the 1930s, three different state agencies delivered the service: the Department of Education, the Department of Social Welfare, and the Department of Institutions.⁵⁵ A newspaper article from 1932 noted that a “middle-aged man [with] increasing deafness and total blindness” received three different offers of assistance: one from Foley under the

51. “Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Bay Region July 1, 1929-June 30, 1930,” California State Library, *News Notes of California Libraries* 25, no. 4 (October 1930): 532.

52. Brock, *Welfare*, 18-22.

53. Katz, *Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 208.

54. California State Library, “Profiles of State Librarians 1850-Present,” accessed September 1, 2016, <http://www.library.ca.gov/history/statelibrarians.html>.

55. Foley, “Library Function” [30th AAIB convention, 1930], 490.

auspices of the state library, one from her former rival Mary Eastman, who continued home teaching with the SFA, and one from Bernice McCreary, who had started home teaching on behalf of the Oakland Industrial Home for the Blind.⁵⁶ Without Foley's letters, it is not known how she responded to the increase of home teaching (also labeled "field work") in the State of California, or if she and Eastman ever mended their relationship. Ultimately, however, home teaching benefitted from the expansion of the work and the various state agencies supporting it, which increased its professional recognition and provided employment to blind women.

Federal welfare increased during the 1930s because charitable organizations and local governments were unable to cope with the scale of the Great Depression and were quickly overwhelmed. These entities had been established to deal for the most part with the "chronically" poor, rather than a large number of newly impoverished individuals. President Herbert Hoover was intent on balancing the budget, which he believed would be the fastest way to restore prosperity, rather than spending on relief. Despite his ties to Progressive Republicans and his capabilities as an engineer and problem solver, Hoover was ineffective in meeting the challenges of the Great Depression.⁵⁷ Roosevelt's election in 1932 marked the beginning of unprecedented federal involvement in Americans' lives. The Social Security Act, the most significant piece of federal legislation passed during

56. "1500 Families Made Happy," *San Francisco Call-Bulletin*, May 4, 1932, in Perkins School for the Blind Bound Clippings: California Adult Blind, 1930-1933, Perkins Archive, Watertown, MA, accessed September 1, 2016, <http://www.perkinsarchives.org/complete-scrapbooks.html>.

57. Chambers, *Seedtime of Reform*, 191-92, 202.

the New Deal, included old age insurance, unemployment insurance, aid to blind persons, child welfare, and maternal-child health provisions.⁵⁸

The presidential administration of Roosevelt and the New Deal transformed the welfare landscape of the United States. Roosevelt himself, as a disabled individual, presented a paradox. On one hand, he felt compelled to present a public image of strength, health, and vitality, opposite to what was viewed as the emasculating condition of disability, and made great efforts to keep the extent of his disability hidden from the public. However, on occasion Roosevelt used his disability to provoke empathy (especially from women), such as when he pointed out that he knew and understood suffering.⁵⁹

Roosevelt pursued a strategy that emphasized work-based relief programs such as the WPA over direct relief. A version of this debate already existed in the blind community regarding pensions versus sheltered workshops, such as the Oakland Industrial Home for the Blind. Foley, who had personally endured employment discrimination, spoke regularly on the need for increased vocational opportunities for blind persons. She supported pensions for those blind individuals deemed deserving of them, but ultimately believed that the best solution was to convince the public of the fitness of blind workers. She exhorted her sighted audiences to support blind workers: “[L]et us employ the blind,” she urged. “Let us create a demand for their labor; let us ask for work made by the blind, and tell our friends to ask for it; let us buy our newspapers

58. *Ibid.*, 211-13, 226.

59. Davis W. Houck and Amos Kiewe, *FDR's Body Politics: The Rhetoric of Disability* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 7-10, 95.

from the men on the streets, and let us give our magazine subscriptions to blind men who have subscription agencies; let us patronize blind lawyers, osteopaths, salesmen, piano tuners and musicians.”⁶⁰ Federal legislation regarding vocational opportunities for blind persons passed in the 1930s included the Randolph-Sheppard Act of 1936, which granted vending stand privileges to blind persons, followed by the Wagner-O’Day Act two years later, which required government agencies to purchase certain products from organizations that employed blind workers.⁶¹

In the 1930s three significant advances occurred at the national level regarding literacy for visually disabled persons and provided further support for Foley’s role as home teacher. First, federal legislation established a national library service for blind persons and increased funding for raised type printed materials. The impetus for this legislation was a survey commissioned in 1928 by the American Library Association, which identified scarcity of materials and lack of accessible libraries as two primary impediments to literacy.⁶² As a result, Congresswoman Ruth Baker Pratt introduced a bill that increased the federal appropriation for raised type materials and established a regional network of libraries to distribute these materials to blind readers. The Pratt-Smoot Act passed in 1931.

The following year, in 1932, the United States finally adopted Standard English Braille as the standard form of raised type. Foley participated in the standardization of

60. Foley, *Five Lectures*, 39.

61. Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 237.

62. *Ibid.*, 131-34, 142; Francis K. St. John, *Survey of Library Service for the Blind* (New York: American Foundation for the Blind, 1957), 9-10.

raised type and chaired the American Braille Commission in 1934.⁶³ She submitted the commission's report at the AAWB convention in Louisville the following year. Under Foley's leadership the commission sought to increase cooperation between the United States and England and promote a more unified use of braille contractions (i.e. shortened versions of words) and stricter observance of rules and regulations.⁶⁴ As chair of the American Braille Commission, she led meetings in New York and St. Louis in 1934.⁶⁵ This participation and authority at a national level further solidified her reputation as a leader in work for blind persons.

The third major development for literacy for blind persons in the 1930s was the development of "talking books." When Thomas Edison patented the phonograph in 1877, he immediately recognized the benefits that this invention offered to blind persons. However, it was not until the 1920s that the technology became available to make recordings easier to distribute. In 1935, Congress authorized federal funding specifically for the production of "talking books" for blind individuals. Helen Keller provided publicity for this new program, and President Roosevelt was a supporter.⁶⁶ In California, the state library began circulating "talking books" in 1934. Initially, the AFB made the

63. "Quarterly Notes," *News Notes of California Libraries* 29, no 2 (April 1934): 52.

64. "Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Bay Region July 1, 1934-June 30, 1935," California State Library, *News Notes of California Libraries* 30, no. 4 (October 1935): 305.

65. *Biennial Report for the California State Library for the Eighty-four and Eighty-fifth Fiscal Years, July 1, 1932, to June 30, 1934* (Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1935), 7.

66. Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 144-45, 159-63.

machines available to blind persons living in the state for a cost of \$20 to \$37.50.⁶⁷

Later, as part of a WPA project, the state library issued machines for free to those who could not afford them.⁶⁸

Despite these promising professional advances and changes, Foley experienced a loss she described as “irreparable” when her beloved sister and companion Alice, who had been ill for several months, died on Christmas morning 1934.⁶⁹ In an article titled “Worker Among Blind Mourned by Associates,” published on December 27, 1934, Eugenie Schenk, director of the county welfare department, paid tribute to Alice, describing her as “Quiet. Unobtrusive. Tireless. Thoughtful. Constantly on the watch for ways of being of service to those who could not see, she gave herself to her task since 1919.” Although Alice “had no official connection with the department,” Schenk continued, “through her constant association with her sister she was very close to its efforts to aid the condition of the adult blind and to make them self-supporting.”⁷⁰

Friend and colleague Helen Keller described Foley’s response to her sister’s death:

67. “Talking Books,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 29, no. 4 (October 1934): 344.

68. “Books for the Blind Section,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 31, no. 4 (October 1936): 324.

69. “Home Teaching Report for San Francisco and Bay Region July 1, 1934-June 30, 1935,” California State Library, *News Notes of California Libraries* 30 no. 4 (October 1935), 305; “Quarterly Notes,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 30, no. 1 (January 1935): 8.

70. “Worker Among Blind Mourned by Associates,” *San Francisco Call-Bulletin*, December 27, 1934, in Perkins School for the Blind Bound Clippings: California Adult Blind, 1934-1938, Perkins Archive, Watertown, MA, accessed September 1, 2016, <http://www.perkinsarchives.org/complete-scrapbooks.html>.

Kate Foley called. She knows the hand alphabet, and as we have long been comrades in the struggle towards a happier world for the blind, we spent a cozy hour together. Now there is another close bond between us. Her sister, whose discerning sympathy and rich helpfulness carried her through innumerable difficulties, passed away last year, and Kate is quite as much alone as I am on the dark trail. More than ever I admire the cheerful courage with which she raises the newly blinded out of despair and pushes forward the campaign for the prevention of blindness. With modest simplicity she startled me by saying she would travel all by herself to the convention for the blind in Toronto, Canada—she, Kate Foley, who is both crippled and without sight!⁷¹

As Keller noted, Foley continued to travel for the last several years of her life, even without her sister as her guide and companion. She went to AAWB meetings in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1935, and Toronto in 1937 (with Catherine Morrison), as well as the AAIB meeting in Lansing, Michigan, in 1938. She was also present at the World Conference on Work for the Blind in New York, which was attended by representatives from thirty different countries.⁷² Foley adroitly used these meetings to publicize and promote her work through the late 1930s. In December 1935, for example, Foley spoke on the radio during a program about rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities.⁷³ The American Library Association held its annual conference in San Francisco in 1939, at which Foley discussed “The Relationship Between the Home Teacher of the Blind and

71. Helen Keller, *Helen Keller: Selected Writings*, ed. Kim Nielsen (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 61. Foley was able to communicate directly with Keller. Foley learned the manual alphabet while she was a student at the California School for the Blind, and occasionally had deaf-blind students. A 1929 newspaper article said that Foley planned to read a message from Helen Keller over her radio program, and described Keller as a “personal friend.” (See “Helen Keller Message to be Read on Radio,” *Oakland Tribune*, 24 May 1929.)

72. “Staff News Items,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 26, no. 3 (July 1931): 277-78.

73. “Quarterly Notes,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 31, no. 1 (January 1936): 8.

the Library for the Blind.”⁷⁴ In 1939 she spoke at the AAWB convention in Los Angeles on “Home Teaching and Library Work in California” and “The Need for More Books in Grade 1½.” These were the last papers she presented to the AAWB. She concluded the former by quoting a poem she once received from a student:

“I heard a Voice in the darkness
That lifted the curtain of Mind;

I found that fingers could be
Also eyes to the blind.

I touched, I thought, I saw.
And the dark shades rolled aside.

So to you my heart pays tribute,
Dear teacher, friend and guide.”⁷⁵

Due to her declining health, in June 1940 the state library announced Foley’s retirement. She was sixty-seven years old, and had been employed by the state library for twenty-six years. “Miss Kate M. Foley retired from state service on June 10,” read the notice in *News Notes of California Libraries*. “She has been home teacher of the blind since 1914 and in that capacity has given help and inspiration to countless blind pupils in California and has won for herself national recognition in her field. Her retirement is a real loss to the state.”⁷⁶

74. “Quarterly Notes,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 34, no. 3 (July 1939): 91.

75. Kate Foley, “Home Teaching and Library Work in California” (paper presented at the 18th biennial convention of the American Association of Workers for the Blind, Los Angeles, CA, July 10-14, 1939), in *Proceedings of the Eighteenth Biennial Convention of the American Association of Workers for the Blind* (n.p., n.d.), 94.

76. “Quarterly Notes,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 35, no. 3 (July 1940): 101-02; “Quarterly Notes,” *News Notes of California Libraries* 35, no. 4 (October 1940): 326.

Foley spent the last months of her life living with her brother in Los Angeles, where she died on October 6, 1940. She was buried next to her sister Alice at the San Gabriel Mission cemetery in San Gabriel, California.⁷⁷ Foley's obituaries lauded her lifelong dedication to "the Cause" and the many lives she touched during her career as well as her importance to the State of California. For example, the *Los Angeles Times* described her as a "sightless pioneer in the field of adult blind education," and a "nationally known blind teacher of the blind."⁷⁸ Her obituary in the *Oakland Tribune* stated, "Thousands of sightless persons in the Bay area and throughout the State mourned the death today of Miss Kate M. Foley . . . who devoted her life to teaching the blind how to 'see.'"⁷⁹ As Irene Jones declared in her tribute to Kate Foley delivered at the 1941 AAWB convention, "She worked unceasingly to create a better understanding of the blind on the part of the general public. Her accomplishments, the quality of her leadership, the influence of her life, as well as the far-reaching results of her efforts are recognized and will continue to be felt in all constructive undertakings for the blind throughout the nation."⁸⁰

The state library appointed Juliet Bindt as Foley's successor in September 1940. Bindt carried on home teaching work in the San Francisco Bay Area for the state library until 1951. That year Mabel Gillis retired and the state library's home teachers were

77. "Blind Teacher of Blind Dies," *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 1940; US Find a Grave Index 1600s-Current, accessed September 1, 2016, ancestry.com.

78. "Pioneer Teacher of Blind Will Be Laid to Rest Today," *Los Angeles Times*, October 8, 1940; "Blind Teacher of Blind Dies," *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 1940.

79. "Blind Teacher's Death Mourned," *Oakland Tribune*, October 8, 1940.

80. Jones, "Tribute to Kate M. Foley," in *Proceedings* [19th AAWB convention, 1941], 123.

transferred to the Department of Education's Division of Special Schools and Services, along with the state's other field workers for the blind.⁸¹ The state library's thirty-seven year provision of home teaching for blind residents of California, initiated by Foley in 1914 under the administration of James Gillis, came to an end.

Several important factors contributed to Foley's longevity as home teacher. These included changes in technology, the state library's administration, the growth of federal and state welfare, and the endurance of progressivism. After a difficult transition to San Francisco in 1917 and the temporary elimination of home teaching from the state library's services, the last sixteen years of her career were relatively stable, even during the economic tribulations of the Great Depression. As part of the New Deal, the federal government enacted legislation to increase educational and vocational opportunities for blind people. Continuing to promote and publicize "the Cause," Foley played a prominent role in national organizations and took advantage of technological innovations such as the radio and automobile to reach a wider audience. Mabel Gillis, who became state librarian in 1930 when Ferguson resigned, supported and encouraged Foley's work until Foley was forced to retire in 1940. The following conclusion reviews Foley's achievements and discusses the impact that her work had on blind people both in California and in the United States.

81. "Staff," *News Notes of California Libraries* 46, no. 3 (July 1951): 359.

Conclusion

During her lifetime, Kate Foley was well known and highly respected for her home teaching work and the significant contributions she made to the lives of blind individuals both within California and outside the state. As a former student lauded in a 1925 *Los Angeles Examiner* article, ““In some future age when the great and noble women of this State are enrolled in some hall of fame the names of Kate M. Foley and Catherine J. Morrison will surely be among, the list of those who rendered notable service, to their fellow man.””¹ However, despite the reputation she built, her pioneering role in developing rehabilitation services for the blind, and her devotion to “the Cause,” Foley’s name appears infrequently in the historical literature. Foley left no direct descendants to remember and promote her legacy, and the history of library services to disabled persons remains undeveloped. Blind women in library work, which includes not only Foley but also Gertrude Rider and Adelia Hoyt, who were instrumental in establishing national library service for blind individuals, have been largely ignored by historians.

Despite this historical neglect, Foley’s achievements were substantial. When she began working for the California State Library in 1914, the Books for the Blind service counted 635 blind persons as borrowers. By the time she retired in 1940, the state library

1. Lannie Haynes Martin, “Few Books in Print for Blind to Read,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, September 4, 1925, in Perkins School for the Blind Bound Clippings: California Adult Blind, 1911-1930 Vol. 1, Perkins Archive, Watertown, MA, accessed September 21, 2016, <http://www.perkinsarchives.org/complete-scrapbooks.html>.

circulated materials among 4,289 individuals.² That Foley was instrumental in this expansion is incontrovertible. Foley's impact, however, went far beyond teaching blind adults how to read. Through public speaking and published writings, she influenced societal attitudes toward blind people. She played an essential role in implementing special education in public schools for visually disabled students. She advocated for legislation to prevent blindness and to provide aid to blind persons. She contributed to the standardization of raised type in the United States and promoted the use of technologies such as "talking books." She pioneered home teaching as a professional career rather than a charitable activity. As a member of the early organized blind community, which represented one of the first interest groups in the United States, she helped to initiate the fight for equal opportunities and civil rights that culminated in the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990.

Foley faced significant challenges as a blind woman during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Chronicling how she created a successful career as home teacher with the California State Library, when vocational opportunities for blind persons—especially blind women—were extremely limited, is an engaging and complex task. Foley's biography illuminates much about the history of disability, the history of voluntarism, the history of library services for blind readers, and the history of Progressive Era California, as well as Foley herself. Primary sources reveal her as intelligent, witty, tenacious, and sometimes egotistical or insecure. The external factors

2. "Books for the Blind Department," *News Notes of California Libraries* 9, no. 3 (July 1914): 628; "Books for the Blind Section," *News Notes of California Libraries* 35, no. 1 (January 1940): 11.

that enabled her to achieve the success and prominence that she enjoyed during her lifetime included her supportive family, the education she received, the popularity of women's voluntarism, the state library's interest in services for blind readers, the persistence of progressivism, and the growth of federal and state welfare bureaucracies.

Foley's family was well connected in the state of California. Although her parents were both immigrants, and her father died when she was young, her maternal uncles became successful in California in business, landowning, and government. Foley's mother and siblings ensured that Foley was able to live a comfortable life. Like many blind and disabled women, she did not marry, and lived with her mother and sister for most of her adult life. Her family supported her volunteer and professional work, including traveling with her and performing secretarial duties.

Foley's education at the California School for the Blind provided her with essential skills, such as public speaking, that allowed her to carve a niche for herself, despite the discrimination that she faced as a blind woman. Residential schools for blind students, founded in the middle of the nineteenth century, were located primarily on the East Coast and in the Midwest. The California School for the Blind in Oakland was the only school for blind students in the western United States. A small percentage of blind children were able to attend residential schools; others were occasionally accommodated at public schools, but prior to the advent of formal special education in the mid-twentieth century, opportunities to achieve literacy were extremely limited.

Foley trained for a career as a typist under the idealistic tutelage of superintendent Warring Wilkinson, but she was unable to find work in this field due to prejudicial

attitudes and discrimination. When she graduated from the School for the Blind in 1895 and moved to Los Angeles to live with her family, she, like many blind adults, suffered from boredom and melancholy. Her vocational opportunities were nearly nonexistent, her status as a woman who was both blind and an amputee impacted her prospects of marriage and motherhood, and she was affected by a lack of reading material and limited mobility. She turned to volunteer work to combat what she described as “enforced idleness.” Voluntarism was a popular and socially appropriate activity for middle-class women during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and through this type of unpaid work many women gained considerable influence.

Foley’s work with blind adults began as part of her early volunteer efforts. Originated in England by Reverend William Moon, who eventually brought his technique and team of missionary teachers to the United States, home teaching of the blind was an offshoot of the “Friendly Visitor” concept that originated during the nineteenth century. The Friendly Visitor was typically a white middle-class woman, largely inspired by religious motivations to provide charitable relief to the less fortunate. A devout Catholic, Foley began teaching others to read raised type while she was a student at the California School for the Blind. She continued to develop her home teaching volunteer work in Los Angeles and benefitted from the heightened interest in religiously motivated social reform that characterized the city during the Progressive Era.

Eventually Foley’s volunteer work came to the attention of the California State Library. The state library had established its Books for the Blind division in 1904 as a part of its Extension Department. Library extension services developed during the

Progressive Era from the same elements that influenced social reform and the growth of social work. This type of outreach was largely designed to promote Americanization among an increasingly disparate population, combating the social problems caused by rapid demographic changes and industrialization. As a progressive library leader, State Librarian James Gillis implemented far-reaching changes in the state library's purpose in order to provide library services to all residents of the state not served by a municipal library. This included developing services for the state's blind residents, who received reading materials from the state library through the mail via Books for the Blind.

Gillis put his daughter, Mabel Gillis, in charge of the Books for the Blind division shortly after she was hired to work at the California State Library in 1904. The Gillises determined that in order to effectively provide library service to all blind residents of the state of California, the state library needed to provide instruction on reading raised type and hired Foley to develop the library's new service in 1914. Foley was not the first state-supported home teacher, but she pioneered the profession by creating the first home teaching methodology. Based in Los Angeles, she not only taught blind adults to read, she worked with the city's supervisor of city schools to establish the first public school class for blind children in the State of California. She also began to publicly discuss the value of home teaching work and to promote fair treatment of blind individuals, becoming a popular and sought-after speaker. During this time, she established relationships with prominent educational and medical professionals, as well as government officials, and would take advantage of these connections throughout her life.

In 1917 James Gillis died and the state library transferred Foley to San Francisco. She found upon arrival in the city that the San Francisco Association for the Blind (SFA), the California School for the Blind, and a former classmate, Mary Eastman, were already in control of home teaching in the Bay Area and viewed Foley's transfer as an incursion. The conflict with Eastman persisted for four years. This greatly affected Foley, as reflected in the letters she wrote to Mabel Gillis and state librarian Milton Ferguson, who was James Gillis's successor. In contrast to Eastman, Foley endeavored to distinguish state home teaching work from charity and to obtain official validation of the state library's role in providing this service.

The decline of progressivism in the 1920s further impacted Foley's career. In 1923, due to a severely reduced state budget enacted by California's conservative new governor, her position was temporarily eliminated, as Ferguson claimed that home teaching was not a library function. However, Foley took advantage of the connections she established and was reinstated later that year. Progressivism in California resurged in the late 1920s, with social reform efforts concentrating primarily on child and maternal welfare. As a result, Foley, in addition to teaching blind adults, spent a great deal of time identifying and locating blind children and working with their parents to ensure that they were educated. Those who could not be placed in school she taught herself. With the advent of the Great Depression and the subsequent New Deal, federal involvement in the lives of blind individuals increased. Home teaching work benefitted from the expansion of both state and federal welfare programs. Thus Foley's position remained stable under

the leadership of Mabel Gillis, who was appointed state librarian after Ferguson's resignation in 1930.

Over the last two decades of her career, Foley developed a national reputation as a leader in services for blind persons. She served on the board of national organizations and committees, such as the American Association of Workers for the Blind and the American Braille Commission. Foley was considered an expert in her field, particularly after the publication of a series of lectures she delivered at the University of California in 1919 that addressed various topics related to blindness, including home teaching. Her desire to standardize methods of home teaching and distinguish them from what had previously been a charitable activity was an essential part of her work.

Home teaching is now primarily referred to as rehabilitation teaching, with job titles including "independent living specialist, living skills instructor, vision rehabilitation specialist, or blind rehabilitation specialist."³ Services provided include low vision skills, communication (e.g. reading), personal care, orientation and movement, home management, and leisure time activities such as games and crafts. Currently, rehabilitation teachers in the United States are employed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, which is part of the United States Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services; the United States Department of Veterans Affairs; and private nonprofit organizations for both children and adults. The first

3. Ponchillia and Ponchillia, *Foundations of Rehabilitation Teaching*, 3.

master's program in rehabilitation teaching was instituted at Western Michigan University in 1963.⁴

When Foley spoke at the 1925 AAWB convention on “Civic Responsibilities of Home Teachers,” she noted, “It is a hopeful augury for the future of this work when the importance of home teaching is recognized by such institutions of learning as Columbia and Harvard universities.” The validation of home teaching provided by these elite educational institutions was a point of pride. She continued, “The teachers thus trained should be so much better equipped than the pioneers in this field; but it should be a comfort to these pioneers to feel that they blazed the trail and demonstrated the importance of this service to their communities and to their states.”⁵ Foley was correct in her prediction that home teaching would become increasingly professionalized, and her pioneering work played a significant role in making this happen. Despite discrimination and prejudice against disability, Foley found a way to use her blindness as an advantage in developing a successful career, wielding influence, and leaving a lasting impact on services for blind individuals in the United States.

4. Ibid., 4-5, 18.

5. Foley, “Civic Responsibilities,” in Report [11th AAWB convention, 1925], 75.

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