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Lillian Williams Linsey: A Legacy of Leadership (Poster Session)

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LILLIAN WILLIAMS LINSEY: A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP

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The period of teacher training in normal schools from around 1870 to 1920 presented opportunities for education after high school. These schools served a population that was often rural, and initially taught a curriculum that was often shorter than university curricula of the time. One such normal school was the Tempe Normal School in Tempe, Arizona. This school was formed in 1885 by act of the Territorial Legislature and would eventually become what is now Arizona State University.¹

As has been noted by Bugaighis, the students and faculty of normal schools were often a majority of women.² She also suggested that teaching at normal schools provided important career opportunities that might not have been otherwise available to women at that time. Ogren further suggests that historical examination of normal schools has proceeded mainly on the basis of analyzing the perspectives of male leaders of such institutions, rather than examining the roles and lives of the largely female students and faculty.³ Study of these neglected individuals could enlighten a new historical perspective and allow a viewing of the normal school period through a new lens.

By 1915, the Tempe Normal school student enrollment probably numbered less than 300 at the campus in the town outside the larger city of Phoenix, Arizona. The school had been expanding in enrollment, and adding courses in new departments including manual arts and

agriculture.\textsuperscript{4} Onto this stage in 1915 strode musician and teacher Mrs. Lillian Charles S. Williams, later known by a second marriage as Lillian Linsey\textsuperscript{5} (Figure 1).

**Early Life and Education**

Williams Linsey’s early life and education is not well documented by primary source material. Based on her death at the age of 94 in 1971, she was born around 1877.\textsuperscript{6} Other sources indicate that she was born and raised in or near Dallas, Texas.\textsuperscript{7} Several sources indicate that she attended and most likely graduated from the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, Massachusetts, and she may also have studied at Baylor University, Franklin College, and in Berlin, Germany.\textsuperscript{8} She probably began teaching band and orchestra around 1897, at the approximate age of 22. At some time prior to 1915, she married Mr. Charles S. Williams and had seven children with him. She was later widowed.

As a band and orchestra teacher, Williams Linsey taught in several schools in Texas, including instructing at Midland College. She later moved to Roswell, New Mexico, to work as a music instructor at the Military Institute high school there. Around 1913, she moved to the Phoenix, Arizona area.\textsuperscript{9}

**Music Education in Phoenix**

In the early 1910’s in Phoenix, there was a men’s band under the direction of a Dr. Francis Redewill.\textsuperscript{10} Upon coming to the city, Williams Linsey worked with Dr. Redewill and

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\textsuperscript{4} “The new ASU story.”

\textsuperscript{5} Because of name changes associated with marriage, earlier records refer to her as Lillian Williams or Mrs. Charles S. Williams, and later records refer to her as Lillian Linsey. No records indicated that she ever used a hyphenated last name, so that usage is avoided in this paper. For the sake of clarity throughout this paper she will be referred to at all periods of her life by both last names as Williams Linsey.


\textsuperscript{7} “Doll float will be seen in parade,” *Arizona Republic*, March 14, 1957.


\textsuperscript{9} “Doll float,” 1957.

\textsuperscript{10} “Lillian Linsey the incomparable,” Undated.
organized a women’s band to play in the Phoenix area. The group performed at the state fair for three days, and was paid $600.00 for their performance.\textsuperscript{11}

In 1914, the Phoenix Union High School hired Williams Linsey as a faculty member in music for the 1914–1915 school year. The school had previously had vocal ensembles and orchestras, and the students had organized a student-led band the year prior. Williams Linsey took over all the instrumental music programs and was the first faculty member to lead and instruct a band at the school.\textsuperscript{12}

Williams Linsey apparently excelled at managing and recruiting for the music program. From its small student-led beginnings in 1913–1914, she organized the 1914–1915 instrumental program to include at least two bands, an orchestra, a mandolin club, a brass quartet, a string quartet, and a saxophone quartet that the school claimed to be the only one in the state, performing on “genuine Buffet instruments.”\textsuperscript{13} In addition to teaching this wide variety of ensembles, Williams Linsey also performed with the groups. She is pictured in the yearbook playing first violin with the orchestra, cello with the string quartet, and holding a conducting baton with both bands.

The two bands appear to have been made up of all boys, while the orchestra was boys and girls. The Phoenix Union High School (P.U.H.S.) band is pictured all in military-style uniforms, numbering 17 in all including Williams Linsey and a student in drum major costume. The instrumentation appears to be oriented towards a military-style wind band with brass, woodwinds, and percussion. This band gave marching concerts on the school grounds twice a week, and was much respected for their entertainment value, as shown by their description in the 1915 yearbook: “The P.U.H.S. Band is one of the most enjoyable organizations in the school.

\textsuperscript{11} “Doll float,” 1957.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{The Phoenician: 1915}, Yearbook of Phoenix High School, vol. 6.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 118.
Since last year it has increased both in quantity and quality, and in the new uniforms, makes quite a showing.”\textsuperscript{14}

A new feature that Williams Linsey brought to Phoenix Union in 1914–1915 was the addition of a Beginners’ Band. This band was made up of 17 boys, playing brass instruments, saxophones, and percussion. They practiced in the cafeteria in the afternoons, giving an insight into the not-quite-curricular niche that the band program occupied in an era before a dedicated performing and rehearsal space. Perhaps in the fashion of good-natured schoolmate fun-poking, the beginners’ band was derided in the yearbook for their early sounds, but complemented for their eventual “great progress.”\textsuperscript{15} It is interesting to note that although led by a woman, the two school bands were entirely made up of boys, and there is no evidence of a girls’ band.

A yearbook picture of the orchestra shows 14 members holding string, brass, woodwind, and percussion instruments. Again Williams Linsey’s leadership was touted as a means to the groups’ success: “The orchestra has worked hard, but it could not have attained such a high degree of proficiency had it not been for Mrs. Williams, who has shown good judgment in the selection of pieces for the different occasions on which it has played.”\textsuperscript{16}

Williams Linsey was employed with Phoenix Union for only the 1914–1915 school year. Although there was no record found of any specific reason for her departure, her employment with the Tempe Normal School beginning in the fall of 1915 no doubt played a role. The fact that the Phoenix Union instrumental program appears to have declined in size during the following years under different directors is another testament to Williams Linsey’s strength as a leader and organizer. The staff of the yearbook remarked in 1915 that “interest in music has been steadily increasing until now we have one of the best music departments in the state. We

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 114.  
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 116.  
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 114.
have many more musical organizations than ever before in the history of the school. The work of the band, orchestra, and glee clubs is well known to the student body, and we owe our thanks to Mrs. Williams, Miss Scott, and Mr. Wilson for the many entertaining programs they have offered to us this year."\(^{17}\) While the yearbooks of 1916, 1917, and later still show instrumental music ensembles that were highly praised, the size and breadth of the programs did not match those under Williams Linsey’s direction.

Bands and Orchestras at the Tempe Normal School

“There has been initiated into the Tempe Normal School a new and rather unusual department which is creating a great deal of enthusiasm among our students. This is the department of Instrumental Music, under the direction of Mrs. Charles S. Williams, who comes to us highly recommended for this work.”\(^{18}\) This was the introduction that Williams Linsey received in an article of the October 15\(^{th}\), 1915 student newspaper at the Tempe Normal School. Having begun her work at the school on September 17\(^{th}\), 1915, she wasted no time in recruiting 103 students into a number of ensembles, described in the newspaper article:

> There have been organized so far a boys’ band of thirty-one pieces, a girls’ band of twenty-eight, and an orchestra which is to be the pride of our school, consisting of twenty-three violins, five cellos, three violas, one bass viol, three flutes, two clarinets, two trombones, drums and traps, with Miss McClure as pianist. A special six-piece dance orchestra is also being formed, made up of violin, cornet, clarinet, trombone, piano, and drums.\(^{19}\)

The Tempe Normal School Board had met on September 20\(^{th}\), 1915, and among other business had considered and approved a motion to employ Williams Linsey “as teacher of all

\(^{17}\) Ibid.
\(^{19}\) Ibid.
band and orchestral instruments, except piano, at a salary of $100.00 per calendar month.”

The amount of $100.00 in 1915 would be equivalent to $2,068.67 monthly in 2007, a comparably reasonable salary for a public school teacher in the area today. However, the conditions of her employment contract further specified that she was to freely provide to the students their instruments, uniforms, and sheet music at her own expense:

For the privilege of conducting a music studio and teaching orchestra and band students and being known as teacher and director of orchestra and band, I will agree to direct the orchestra and band, play at recitals and ball games, and upon all occasions when called upon in connection with the affairs of the Tempe Normal School. I will furnish the following band instruments: 14 band uniforms – coat and cap; 1 tuba; 1 baritone; 1 slide; 2 altos, 1 cornet; 1 clarionet [sic]; 1 flute, 1 bass drum, 1 snare drum; 1 tenor; and the following orchestra: 2 violins; 1 viola; 1 cello; 1 double bass; set drums; bells and traps. I will furnish all the above instruments and a large repertoire of standard and classical music.

The uniforms mentioned in her contract, along with some of the instruments, are shown in a 1916 photo of the band with Williams Linsey, standing on the steps of the building known today on the Arizona State University campus as Old Main (Figure 2).

Unlike a more permanent faculty member, Williams Linsey’s contract was monthly, with either she or the School Board able to terminate the agreement at the end of any month. The board minutes also stipulated that her music instruction would be done in connection with the school’s existing Department of Music. It is unclear what type of instruction this department provided, but it would be reasonable for the time period to presume that such a department might have instructed students in voice singing and theoretical study. The Board minutes also reveal that this proposed arrangement was tendered to the board by Williams Linsey herself, indicating that she actively sought out the position with the Tempe Normal School.

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20 Minutes of the Board of Education of the Tempe Normal School of Arizona, September 20, 1915. Arizona State University Archives.
22 Minutes of the Board of Education, September 20, 1915.
The instrumental classes rehearsed at various times during the school day. The schedule was apparently arranged around the students’ academic schedules to allow for participation without interfering in their other work. The band was noted to have played at school assemblies. The orchestra provided music for the 1916 senior play, performing four selections listed in the school newspaper. The writer of one student newspaper article captured the dynamic of the students and Williams Linsey working in the budding instrumental program: “It is difficult to say which is the more enthusiastic, our director or our students, but with all this enthusiasm to push our new department it cannot but be a success, and one that the Normal School may well be proud of.”

Williams Linsey taught at the Tempe Normal School for two years, through 1917. Although her tenure was short, she provided an important foundation for what would later become a major instrumental music program as the school transformed into what is now Arizona State University. In 1917, Lillian Williams married Mr. James Linsey of Phoenix. Mr. Linsey was a clarinetist in the men’s band of Dr. Redewill, which is likely how the couple met. Shortly after their marriage, the couple and their family moved to the Los Angeles, California, area, but returned to Phoenix between 1925 and 1927.

Later Life: Community Involvement

While in Los Angeles, Williams Linsey continued to teach music. She was noted for organizing a band of 30 boys who performed wearing Colonial costumes and toured in California. She also led children’s bands under organizations including the Klever Kiddies,

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27 Ibid.
Elks 99, and Southside Boys Band. Involving herself with the music industry in Los Angeles, she worked as an arranger for Grauman’s Million Dollar Theatre.

Upon returning to Phoenix between 1925 and 1927, Williams Linsey taught over several years in schools around the Phoenix area, including Tolleson, Pendergast, Alhambra, Avondale, Glendale, Fowler, and St. Johns districts. Her students performed in concerts and parades throughout the community. She also organized a band and orchestra for the Fox Theater, a major building and business in Phoenix that opened in 1931. By one account, the band and orchestra under her direction exceeded 200 members.

Williams Linsey was heavily involved with the community and her large family, who appeared to share her musical talents. For one parade sponsored by the Jaycees organization, she organized her 33 grandchildren to ride horses bareback while performing on bugles. Other community organizations with which she was involved included the Red Cross and a decades-long involvement with the March of Dimes, for which she raised funds by performing with one of her student ensembles known as “Linsey’s Dollies,” a name perhaps referring to her hobby of collecting antique dolls. She remained connected to the Tempe Normal School music program, now under the name of Arizona State University. A 1960 newspaper article honored the heritage of her founding of the band program at Tempe Normal. The article shows a picture of Williams Linsey with Ronald Halloway, an acting director of the Sun Devil Band, showing him the 1916 picture shown in Figure 2 of the band on the steps of Old Main.

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29 “Lillian Linsey the incomparable,” Undated.
30 Ibid.
33 “Doll float,” 1957.
34 Ibid.
Known as a staunch Democrat, Williams Linsey was involved with Democratic Women’s groups, and would present musical programs with her students. A very active member of the community, she joined the League of Business and Professional Women of Phoenix in 1945, for which she organized members into an orchestra and band shortly after joining. She was also involved in other community, professional, and political groups, including the Phoenix Musicians Club, Order of the Eastern Star, National Federation of Business & Professional Women, United Federation of Doll Clubs, Inc., and the Paradise Valley Democratic Women’s Club. Guests at her 94th birthday party included many notable Arizona political figures from the time: Governor Jack Williams, Secretary of State Wesley Bolin, and former U.S. Senator Carl Hayden, whose family was very involved with the early history of Tempe and the Normal School.37

Lillian Williams Linsey retired from teaching in 1967, although she may have taught private studio lessons after her official retirement. She died in 1971 at the age of 94. At the time of her death she was survived by 7 of her 10 children, 33 grandchildren, 72 great-grandchildren, and 11 great-great-grandchildren. She is buried in Greenwood Cemetery in Phoenix.38

Legacy of Leadership

According to Elizabeth Gould, less than 10% of all college band directors between 1976 and 1996 were women, with little change.39 Gould, in her work, suggests a need for female leadership role models in college bands. The legacy of Lillian Williams Linsey could provide one such model. Over her 94-year life, she demonstrated qualities of leadership that stand out against the backdrop of a stereotypically male-dominated band activity. Williams Linsey sought

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out opportunities and used her musical talents and organizational skills to build strong programs from humble beginnings.

It is fitting that the Arizona State University Sun Devil Band today gives an award in her name at their annual marching band festival. The award recognizes the band in each performing class with the largest number of alumni who now perform with the Sun Devil Band. Lillian Williams Linsey demonstrated many times that she could recruit and build instrumental music programs, and the Sun Devil Band’s Lillian Williams Award continues to honor that legacy of leading students to participate in music.
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Figure 1 - Lillian Williams Linsey, 1916 faculty photo from Tempe Normal School yearbook

Figure 2 - Tempe Normal School Band, 1916, director Lillian Williams at front with saxophone