Beyond a Shared Vision:

Charlotte Partridge, Miriam Frink, and Progressive Art Education in Wisconsin

Oli Pierce

HIST 600

Milwaukee: The Making of a Metropolis

Fall 2025

In early twentieth-century Wisconsin, two women's professional and personal partnerships played a central role in shaping progressive educational reform. Charlotte Partridge and Miriam Frink built together one of the most influential art schools in the Midwest while challenging traditional expectations of women and women's work during this time. Their relationship was more than two close female companions sharing a common goal; it was deeply intimate, rooted in shared interests and ideals. They positioned the arts as a form of civic responsibility through vocational education and rehabilitation in their school, Layton School of Art, and had a deep and personal commitment to the education of all who entered these doors. Taking a deep look into Charlotte Partridge's life, we can see how, through her lifelong partnership with Miriam Frink and her commitment to coeducation reform and therapy programs, she redefined the role of women educators in early 20th-century Wisconsin, utilizing education and art as tools for gender equality and communal advocacy.

Charlotte Partridge was born in Minneapolis in 1882 to Fredrick and Carrie Partridge. She graduated from Northern Illinois Teachers College in 1905, where she and her sister, Eleanor, attended, and later took various teaching jobs to help support her family following her father's passing. In 1909, Thomas Partridge Orr, her brother, was discharged from the Navy for bad conduct, and suspicion arose in the family that he was mentally unbalanced.[1] Later in her career, Partridge would take a personalized

[1] "Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers, 1862-1980," Finding Aid, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries' Archives Department, 1980 1862, https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/wiarchives.uw-whs-mil00167.

approach to helping World War I and World War II veterans, perhaps moved by her brother. She would care for Orr until his passing in 1963.

Her exposure to the arts came through her studies at the nontraditional Church School of Art in Chicago, named after Emma Church, a lifelong mentor and colleague of Partridge. The Church School of Art was one of the very few institutions at the time where women could receive advanced art training. It is there that Partridge absorbed the influence of the progressive women educators who believed that art and education should serve the broader good, and she received her diploma from the two-year Normal Art course in 1912. After completing her studies, Partridge began teaching art, first at Church's school and later at higher education institutions in Chicago. Partridge continued to keep herself busy during this time, a pattern that would persist throughout her life as she took up her own studio to freelance in commercial art and continued studying painting at the Chicago Art Institute during their night classes.[2]

When Partridge moved to Wisconsin in 1914 to join the art faculty at Downer College, an all-women's institution, she became involved in local art education initiatives, taking a progressive approach to her teachings by encouraging the students to study with a nude model, much to the displeasure of some of the more conservative members of the faculty.[3] While on the faculty at Downer, Partridge introduced various studio practices—including life drawing from nude models—that were typically reserved for male students in coeducational or men's institutions. These reforms generated tension with more conservative members of the faculty, yet they also revealed Partridge's conviction that women's education should be intellectually and professionally

[2]"Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers, 1862-1980."
[3]R. Richard Wagner, *We've Been Here All Along: Wisconsin's Early Gay History* (Wisconsin Historical Society, 2019),151-52

equivalent to men's. Frink's arrival at Downer in 1915 reinforced this approach, as the two women found common ground in their belief that artistic professions required a freedom from gendered constraints. Their shared frustrations with Downer's institutional limits helped clarify the need for an independent school where they could fully implement their educational ideals. Partridge and Frink would share more than their educational and feminist ideals with one another. Together, they also bonded over art, music, theater, and the flapper culture of the times. In correspondence with one another, they would often discuss the pop culture of the time, asking if the other had heard a favorite radio program or using slang terms popular at this time.[4] It was through their shared ideals and progressive attitudes towards education that their relationship began to bloom while working together.

Their relationship would grow as these two women entwined their lives, starting in 1917, when the pair bought their first car, a Saxon, together. As their careers progressed, so did their relationship. They rented an apartment together near the Layton Art Gallery, to be close to the school they founded, the Layton School of Art, which was housed in the gallery's basement. They would direct this institution, which was fundamental in their lives, for thirty-four years. When asked about their professional relationship and the school, Partridge responded, "Miss Frink is the head, and I am the feet of the school."[5] Perhaps playing off of Partridge's busy nature and always being on her feet, while Frink would often carry out more clerical work for the school. This sort of pattern would be reflected throughout their lifetimes, as Faythe Levine highlights this in

[4] Faythe Levine, *As Ever, Miriam*, First Edition (Combos Press, 2024), 21
[5] Francis Butler, "New Teaching Style Achives Recognition," Newspaper clipping, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, September 23, 1933, Box 1 Folder 1, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers, 1862-1980. UW-Milwaukee Libraries, Archives.

her piece, *As Ever, Miriam*, a collection of sign-offs that Frink used in her written communications with Partridge. Through this collection, one can see how deeply and emotionally intimate these two were with each other. Multiple times, Frink tells Partridge to take care of herself, once again hinting at her busy nature. Even while Frink was visiting different states, she would write Partridge, telling her to "Be good. At least until I get there and make you."[6] Even as their work began to take over their lives and much of their correspondence focused on the workings of Layton, Frink's letters still retained a sense of emotional intimacy. One example comes from April 20th, 1940, where Frink writes, "Now do take care of yourself. I could spank you for being so intemperate. Won't you ever learn? Do write briefly if necessary but definitely."[7] This playful and caring language underscores their intimacy. While they did not place a public label on their relationship, it is clear from their letters and shared coexistence that these two women had a relationship that went beyond female friendship.

Lillian Faderman's analysis of the "educated spinster" offers a crucial lens for interpreting the lifelong partnership of Charlotte Partridge and Miriam Frink. In *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, Faderman argues that the rise of women's higher education and women-led professional spaces in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries created environments where women could form emotionally intense relationships with one another. Faderman argues that these relationships were socially permissible because they could be framed as respectable "romantic friendships," often coined as "Boston Marriages," or simply the bonds of friendship that stemmed from girlhood. She also claims that during this period, it was socially better to be seen as a lover to a

[6] Levine, *As Ever, Miriam*.93
[7] Levine, *As Ever, Miriam*.104

woman, rather than a mistress to a man. These partnerships reflected the era's shifting gender norms, the growth of women's colleges, and the start of economic independence for women.[8] Faderman shows that such a relationship enabled women to build careers and institutions while relying on another woman for emotional intimacy and intellectual collaboration, much as Partridge and Frink did. Both were highly educated, professionally ambitious women, like Faderman's take of "educated spinsters," Partridge and Frink built a shared domestic and professional life together that allowed them to sidestep the traditional gender role limitations of marriage. Together, they were able to cultivate a partnership grounded in shared passions and a common vision for arts education in the Greater Milwaukee area. Within Faderman's framework, their partnership represents a case of two middle-class professional women who, through economic interdependence and shared passions for art and reform, created a socially acceptable "public pairing" that enabled them to pursue ambitious educational reforms at Layton.

When they co-founded the Layton School of Art in Milwaukee in 1920, they deliberately rejected the structures that defined traditional art institutions. Charlotte Partridge has received word from her mentor, Emma Church, who was declining in health, that she was interested in handing over the school's operations to her. Partridge bought all of the equipment from Church and moved the operation up to Milwaukee, possibly wanting to stick close to where she and Miriam Frink were starting to build careers together. The Layton Art Gallery granted her permission to use the basement to

[8] Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, Paperback ed, Between Men - between Women (Columbia University Press, 2012)23-27

create the Layton School of Art. Frink would join her as co-director shortly after the founding.[9]

The coeducational reforms built and implemented by these two women for their institute were rooted in their earliest efforts to establish an alternative model of art education in Wisconsin. The two initially opted to create an arts education model that decentered the traditional fine arts approach to commercial art and to establish a community-oriented school that prioritized a co-educational approach to arts education.[10] Their curriculum integrated painting, sculpture, design, crafts, and commercial arts, allowing students to pursue both creative expression and economic self-sufficiency, as many courses were in applied arts such as typesetting, graphics design, and advertising practices. However, other classes such as literature and psychology were offered, as Frink felt it was important for the students to be educated in areas outside of the arts, to give students a more rounded education. Students were relatively receptive to these lectures, as the course evaluations for the course Frink taught show a mutual interest from her students, especially for the psychology course.[11] This pedagogical structure supported coeducation by emphasizing collaboration and practical skill over gendered expectations. Students were encouraged to view art not as a leisure pursuit but as meaningful labor with civic and social value. This philosophy resonated strongly in Milwaukee's industrial and working-class communities. All classrooms were desegregated with men and women seated side by side in official

[9] "Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers, 1862-1980."
[10] John C. Eastberg and Eric Vogel, *Layton's Legacy : A Historic American Art Collection, 1888-2013*, First edition. (Layton Art Collection, Inc., 2013).
[11]"Miss Frink Course Evaluations," September 24, 1928, Box 18 Folder 8, Layton School of Art and Design Records, 1888-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, Archives Department.

photos and working from the same nude models.[12] A practice within eduational spaces that was not commonly seen in classrooms at this time. Women educated in Layton would often go on to become frontrunners in their chosen fields, especially as they began to carve their own paths in “male-dominated” artistic spaces, such as industrial design. In one clipped newspaper article among the Layton Gallery collection, two students, Geraldine Galagan and Adeline Strumeter, who gained employment at A.O. Smith Corp. in their automobile design branch, were among the remaining women who were hired during the wartime labor shortage. Strumeter even taught at Layton for a time.[13] These exemplary women highlight how Layton’s progressive coeducational message was instilled in their students as they entered their careers, pushing them to excel beyond the gender norms of the time.

This highly unusual approach was not something in art schools across the nation or schools within the city, as many women at this time were educated at Partridge and Frink’s alumnae, Downer College, the all-women’s school. Downer saw enrollment decline from 300 in 1916 to 243 in 1919. Still, with the establishment of its occupational therapy program, the school started to see an uptick in numbers for the class of 1920. This course was a response to a call from the U.S. Surgeon General in need of body reconstruction aides for the amputees of the First World War. Elizabeth Upham, the Downer College art director under whom Partridge and Frink were working at the time,

---

[12] Arijit H. Sen, “Charlotte Partridge, Layton School of Art and the Pedagogy of Social Engagement,” Slideshow, December 24, 2012, https://senspeaks.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/fromkin-final-slides.pdf.Slide 16.
[13] “Women Artist Gain Place in Man’s Field,” *The Milwaukee Journal* (Milwaukee, WI), 1947, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, Archives Department (Box 18 Folder 1 Layton School of Art and Design Records, 1888-1980).

was instrumental in developing this program.[14] When Partridge would leave to establish Layton with Frink within the next two years, she would also take a dedicated approach to assisting wartime efforts, perhaps influenced by her coworkers' early efforts in her career.

The Layton faculty was also far more diverse in gender and social makeup. Many of the male faculty would come from immigrant or military backgrounds, a few with a mix of both, to bring an interesting perspective to their arts education. George Adams Dietrich, Richard H. Jansen, William J. Owen, and Gerrit V. Sinclair, one of the first instructors at Layton, were among this social makeup.[15] The institute may have also been a small haven for local queer artists of the time. For Karl Priebe and Richard Lippold, it would come out that these men were in relationships much like Partridge and Frink's. Though Priebe was more open with his relationships, Lippold was rumored to have lived with men throughout his career.[16] The percentage of women faculty is also fascinating, and Partridge and Frink prioritized hiring local, capable women over renowned male artists, many of these women being graduates of Layton in its early years. The percentage of women to men instructors varied year by year, but Partridge and Frink were always in the classroom teaching during the academic year. Partridge's mentor, Emma Church, would come and give visiting lectures occasionally up until her death. Some notable names of these women include Emily Groom, Ruth Grotenrath,

[14] Grace Norton Kieckhefer, *The History of Milwaukee-Downer College, 1851-1951* Milwaukee-Downer College Bulletin, Series 33 ; No. 2 (Milwaukee-Downer College, 1950).83-85
[15] "Faculty Biographies," undated, Box 5 Folder 1, Layton School of Art and Design Records, 1888-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, Archives Department.
[16] Wagner, *We've Been Here All Along*.152

Helen Hoppin, a close friend of both Frink and Partridge.[17] This implication of social acceptance outside what was considered the normative for art schools at the time would echo into Layton's classrooms as well.

Partridge and Frink believed that segregated education reinforced artificial distinctions between men's and women's artistic capacities. At Layton, men and women studied side by side in the same studios, worked from the same models, and were held to identical professional standards. This approach was a direct continuation of Partridge's earlier insistence on life drawing and serious technical training for women at Downer College, now institutionalized within a school they controlled. The inclusion of nude figure study, commercial design, and architectural drafting reflected their belief that artistic professionalism required comprehensive training and that women should not be excluded from any area of artistic practice on moral or cultural grounds. Their reforms reshaped the cultural influence of art education in Wisconsin, aligning it with Progressive Era ideals of democracy, community service, and social responsibility. Layton thus stands as both a physical institution and a philosophical testament of these two women, one that illustrates how women educators used coeducation to transform classrooms along with the communities they served and lived in.

Another such reform might be inspired by Charlotte Partridge's brother, as at the Layton Art School, she was dedicated to providing vocational rehabilitation to all who entered its doors, including veterans of both world wars. In her 1965 oral interview with

[17] "Layton School of Art and Design Records, 1888-1980," Finding Aid, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries' Archives Department, 1980 1888, https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/wiarchives.uw-whs-mil00168.

Harlan Phillips, Partridge reflected on the differences in the attitudes and approaches she took toward returning veterans from World War I and World War II.

Veterans from the First World War returned to find themselves on their own, reintegrating into the workforce with no formal government assistance, unlike their successors. At Layton, the school saw around 10 to 14 of these veterans, struggling to adjust to their place in the changing nation. Partridge would muse that "They were not boys anymore, they were adults."[18]

In her interview, Partridge discusses how she and the faculty at Layton would strive to follow up with students as they leave the institution. One student, whom Partridge, spoke fondly of, had difficulties in this big adjustment from soldier to civilian. While speaking about his behavior in class, she claimed that no one could connect with him. But her dedication and innovation of a student-centric approach to her pupils shines through as she goes on to say, "They [the other teachers] couldn't manage him at all, and I knew that boy had something; I knew he did," referring to his effort in class.[19] Fondly, she recalled that this student taught painting at Layton for a short while before moving on to teach at the University of Minnesota. While unable to track down this student in particular, one of her students from this time, Raymond Redell, later reflected that his time in Layton set him up for a successful career. Speaking on his career after school, he writes, "Working now at the [Milwaukee] Journal doing commercial art, design, and illustration. Commissioned by the Treasury Dept. to paint murals for post offices. Have completed two and working on a third."[20] Later in his letter,

[18] Charlotte Partridge, "Oral History Interview with Charlotte Russell Partridge," circa 1965, Audio recording, Smithsonian Archives of American Art, https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-charlotte-russell-partridge-13289.
[19] Partridge, "Oral History Interview with Charlotte Russell Partridge."
[20] Redell Ray, "Ray Redell to Grace," Letter, January 10, 1940,Box 18 Folder 15, Layton School of Art and Design Records, 1888-1980. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries.

he explains how valuable his time at Layton was and how he feels that three to four years of teaching across all branches of art were essential to his being in the position he was in.

Charlotte Partridge was fearless in her mission and in her dedication to serving these student veterans. She recalls one incident that took place in a class adjacent to her office one evening. A fight broke out between two of the veterans taking classes that evening. Partridge wasted no time by physically getting in between the two men and pulled them apart. She laughs as she recounts how surprised these men were, stating how they dropped their punches immediately at the sight of her getting in between them. Sending one to the restroom to clean up, she took the other to her office to help cool the tension between them.[21] Not only was she dedicated to her students and to creating a welcoming environment, but her students also deeply respected her authority in the classroom.

After the Second World War, Layton experienced a significant increase in veterans seeking the institution as the federal government implemented the G.I. Bill to support educational endeavors. Veterans' presence on campuses nationwide shot up, with 2.2 million servicemen investing in their education under the Servicemen's Readjustment Act between 1944 and 1951.[22] Partridge took multiple approaches to her wartime contributions, during and after.

The Layton School of Art's *Army at War* ran from December 1944 to January 14th, 1945, to help stimulate the sale of war bonds while also reflecting the school's

[21] Partridge, "Oral History Interview with Charlotte Russell Partridge."
[22] John Bound and Sarah Turner, "Going to War and Going to College: Did World War II and the G.I. Bill Increase Educational Attainment for Returning Veterans?," *Journal of Labor Economics* 20, no. 4 (2002), 785

mission of art being responsive to contemporary social issues, like the Second World War.[23] Organized during wartime, the exhibit traveled nationwide. It brought together the lived experiences of soldiers in the United States, documenting and humanizing their experiences at the front and on the home front. The exhibit showcase was organized with the help of Charlotte Partridge and 58 other arts, government, or military officials nationwide. Two of these selected individuals were also women.[24] The exhibit was coined as a great success in terms of generating bond funds, pulling in $1,516.75 in direct bond funds, and attracting around 9,400 attendees during its run.[25] Partridge, however, felt the exhibit was lacking, and while she did not precisely specify what was missing, there was an apparent gap in the gallery's art. None of the artists showcased were women who were serving at the front lines or at bases around the homefront, even though 350,000 women served during the war.[26] This art show was heavily advertised throughout the local community, with WISN and WTMJ, local radio stations, and news networks running daily ads and explanations about the show while it ran. Along with this, various ads played in theaters, calling the community to see the Second World War from the “views of their boys fighting overseas.”[27] By embedding coeducation into the very foundations of the Layton School of Art, Partridge and Frink created an institution that embodied their broader social vision. The exhibit also served as a public-facing educational tool, inviting the Milwaukee community to engage with the realities of war

[23] Joesph Le Bolt, “Joseph Le Bolt to Charlotte Partridge,” January 22, 1945, Box 40 Folder 5, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers, 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, Archives Department.
[24] *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, “From the Archives.”
[25] “Army at War Showing Memorandum,” January 22, 1945, Box 40 Folder 5, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers, 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, Archives Department.
[26] D’ann Campbell, “Servicewomen Of World War II,” *Armed Forces & Society* 16, no. 2 (1990): 251.
[27]“GI Living Depicted,” *Milwaukee Sentinel* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin), January 7, 1945, Box 40 Folder 5 Layton School of Art and Design Records, 1888-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, Archives Department.

through visual media while reinforcing the idea that artists had an obligation and a profitable means to showcase the social dynamics of war. In this way, *Army at War* underscored Layton's role as both an educational institution and a civic actor, demonstrating how Partridge and Frink mobilized art as a means of social engagement for Wisconsin.

Postwar, with the influx of students nationwide, one of Partridge's connections within the state reached out for assistance in allocating veterans who could not score into a university's reading, writing, or math placement tests. Partridge would take an innovative approach with these men. Taking them into her office, one by one, she would often spend up to an hour and a half with them, pulling them apart as she so fondly states, "like a puzzle." Partridge would chat with these men, taking time to learn about their time before service, their hometowns and families, and to get a fuller picture of each man before giving her input back to the state. Taking it a step further, if she learned he was a Wisconsin or Milwaukee man and did not feel like Layton was a fit for him, she would use her connections to have him placed somewhere close to home. Partridge was dedicated to this student-focused approach, as when reflecting on her work, she states, "they do not give you anything that suggests their creative, their curiosity powers."[28] Taking this out-of-the-box approach was her contribution to the war effort, she explained, but it also reflects her broader dedication to reforming Wisconsin's higher education landscape during her lifetime.

The students and alumni of the Layton School of Art deeply loved and admired both Charlotte Partridge and Miriam Frink, although Partridge was more active in

[28]Partridge, "Oral History Interview with Charlotte Russell Partridge."

keeping up with her past students' lives. In 1942, she reached out to a past student, Rudolph Jaeger to see how his current project was coming along after not hearing from him for an extended period.[29] While unable to find which project in particular she was referencing, this letter is just one of many she sent out to various students and to Rudy himself, clearly caring about where her students ended up after their education. Partridge would also keep a multitude of newspaper clippings from whenever her students' work was reported, even when it appeared in newspapers she would not otherwise purchase.[30] Plus her students cared just as much to report to her on their career advancements or where their lives ended up after Layton. Sylvester Jerry, when asked to comment on his time at Layton, wrote a lengthy 3-page piece about his journey and how his education from Layton took him after graduation. He writes, "The Layton School in its progressive approach, is abreast of what is going on today as it relates to art, and makes it possible to give the student direction in many fields, hoping of course that by practical experience in a job, that they will specialize to their best advantage."[31] Jerry also writes about how committed the faculty were in helping the students with their problems and speaks on how much the encouragement and built connections in the art field was his foundation for his career. His words highlight how fundamental his time at Layton was to advancing his career and building a family.

---

[29] Charlotte Partridge, "Charlotte Partridge to Rudolph Jaeger," July 30, 1942, Box 18 Folder 15 Layton School of Art and Design Records, 1888-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, Archives Department.

[30] "Italian Tribune Selects Artist Nicola Conigliaro As August Man of the Month," August 20, 1954, Box 18 Folder 15, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers, 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, Archives Department

[31] Jerry Sylvester, "Sylvester Jerry to Grace Forster," January 24, 1940, Box 18 Folder 15 Layton School of Art and Design Records, 1888-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, Archives Department. 3

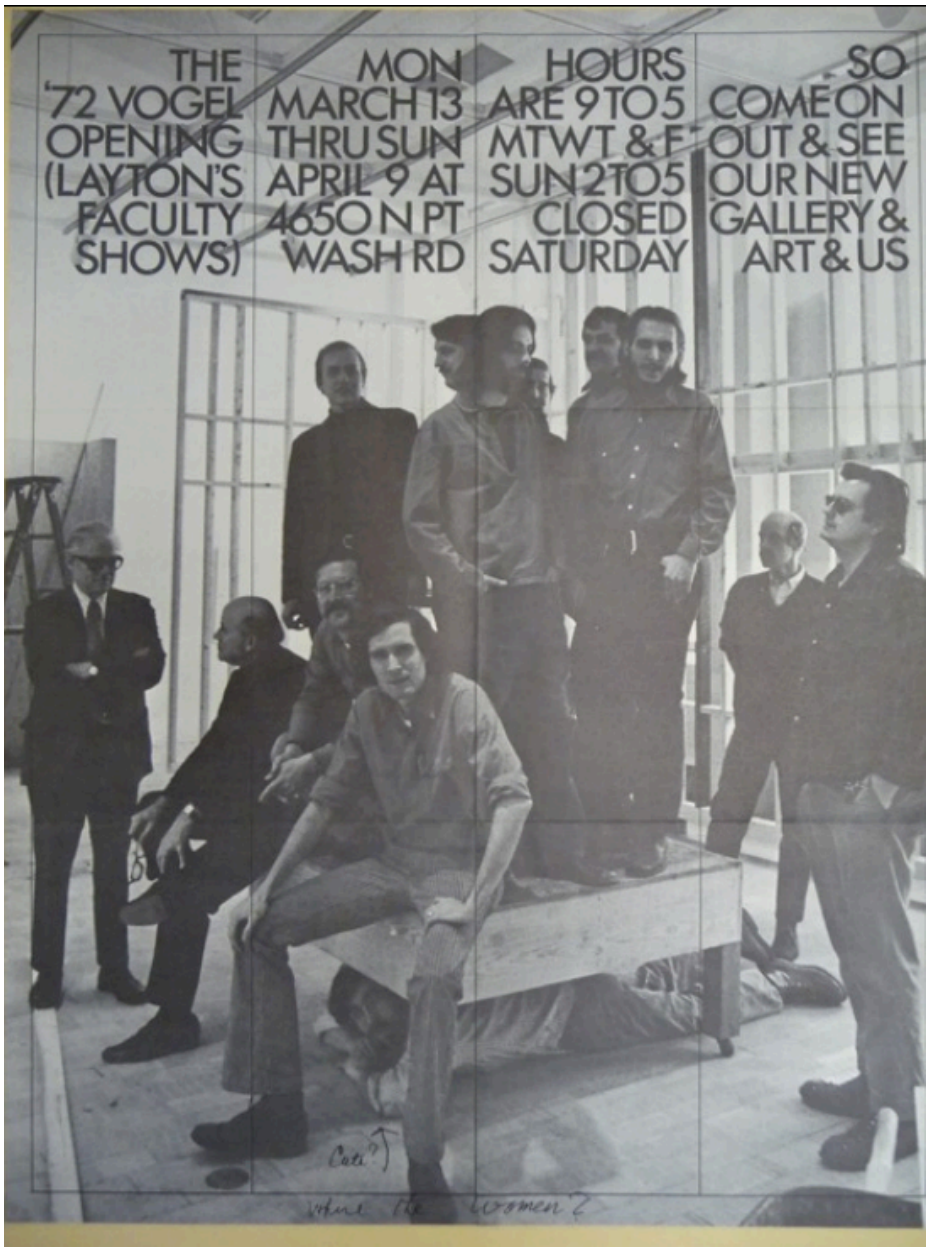
Beyond her work in art education and her take on vocational rehabilitation, Charlotte Partridge was deeply engaged in broader social reform movements that reflected her commitment to democratic participation and social equity of the nation and the Milwaukee community. She actively supported woman suffrage, the efforts to secure voting rights, to expand women's influence in civic life. Partridge viewed political participation as inseparable from education, believing that informed and engaged citizens.[32] Her reformist outlook also extended to issues of racial inequality and segregation. Within Milwaukee's cultural institutions, Partridge advocated for inclusive access to education and artistic spaces, challenging exclusionary practices that marginalized students and artists of color. Layton exemplified this by having its classes and community-based art programs open to all, regardless of race. While progress in desegregation was often constrained by the era's limits, Partridge's willingness to confront these issues placed her within a broader progressive tradition that sought to use education and culture as tools for social change. Taken together, her suffrage activism and desegregation efforts underscore how Partridge's educational work was part of a broader reform agenda—one that linked art, citizenship, and equality as reinforcing components of community activism.

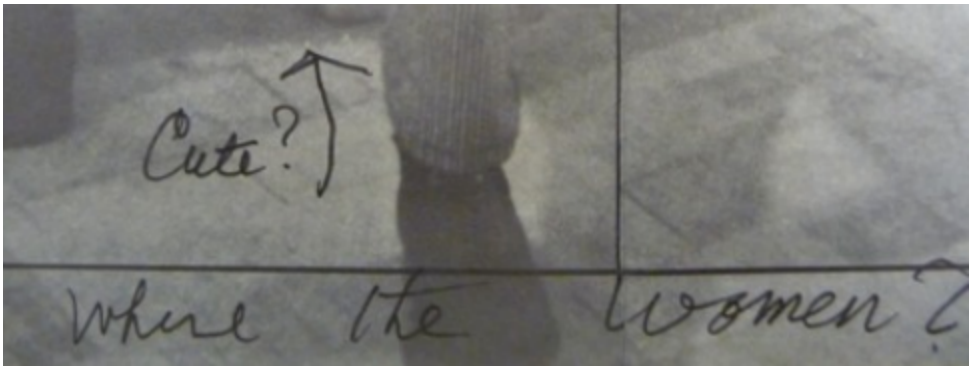
Charlotte Partridge and Miriam Frink were forced into retirement from the Layton School of Art in 1954, which marked a painful turning point in their long careers as two of Wisconsin's most influential arts educators. After decades of building the school into a nationally respected institution grounded in progressive arts teaching, both women were abruptly pressured by the Layton Art Board to step down. While the decision was

[32] Sen, "Charlotte Partridge, Layton School of Art and the Pedagogy of Social Engagement."

framed as a routine restructuring, Partridge and Frink argued it was based on their gender. The board's formal statement was that the work was too exhausting for a pair of senior women. Charlotte Partridge later disclosed that she was informed the board felt that the way Layton was expanding, an academic operation of this size should be run by a man.[33] On a 1972 Layton Faculty Show poster, the absence of women among the faculty is astounding. The distinct feminine handwriting at the bottom of the poster, possibly from Frink, draws additional attention to this shortage.

[33] “From the Archives,” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 1999, Wisconsin Historical Society.68


THE '72 VOGEL OPENING (LAYTON'S FACULTY SHOWS)
MON MARCH 13 THRU SUN APRIL 9 AT 4650 N PT WASH RD
HOURS ARE 9 TO 5 MTWT & F SUN 2 TO 5 CLOSED SATURDAY
SO COME ON OUT & SEE OUR NEW GALLERY & ART & US
Cute?
where the women?


Cute?
where the women?

Judith Mjaanes, a Wisconsin artist, parallels this phenomenon, noting that it occurred similarly at the University of Wisconsin–Madison's art department following the forced retirements of Partridge and Frink. She argues, drawing on archival evidence, that as the art department gained professional legitimacy, women faculty were forced out through isolation and overlooking local, qualified women to teach. In 1963, despite the department expanding to forty-six full-time and part-time faculty, there were twenty-one full-time professors, only one of whom was a woman. Whereas in 1923, the ratio of women to men was 50/50 within the art department.[34] For Partridge and Frink, who had dedicated more than forty years to expanding coeducational art training at Layton while building and founding a blossoming art school, the forced retirement echoed Mjaanes's observations. Lillian Faderman's argument on the social constructs of the time helps to explain both why Partridge and Frink could thrive for decades and why their partnership ultimately became vulnerable in their later years. As Faderman writes in her book, earlier generations of women could depend on public innocence about female relationships; society viewed female intimacy as harmless as long as it remained unspoken and non-threatening.[35] But by the mid-twentieth century, especially in America's Cold War climate, coupled with the Lavender Scare, same-sex partnerships came under greater scrutiny and public prosecution. Professional women living or working closely together were increasingly subjected to suspicion or institutional marginalization. This shift in ideology offers a powerful explanation for Partridge and Frink's forced retirement in 1954. Their independence from men, their authority within the Layton School, and their refusal to conform to traditional gendered leadership

[34] Marion J. Swoboda et al., *Wisconsin Women, Graduate School, and the Professions*, University Women, a Series of Essays, (University of Wisconsin System, Office of Women, 1980), 79
[35] Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 73

structures made them vulnerable to a board growing less and less tolerant of female power. In this sense, their removal from Layton aligns with what Faderman identifies as the mid-century backlash against women's autonomy and same-sex intimacy. Through Faderman's "educated spinster" framework, Partridge and Frink echo a much broader pattern of women whose personal and professional partnerships shaped American educational and vocational institutions.

Charlotte Partridge and Miriam Frink left a lasting imprint on Wisconsin's educational and cultural history by reimagining art education as a vehicle for social reform. Through their leadership at the Layton School of Art, they institutionalized coeducation, expanded access to professional artistic training, and embedded community engagement into the foundation of their curriculum. Partridge's work in vocational rehabilitation and therapeutic art programs for World War I and II veterans further demonstrated her belief that art could serve both individual healing and collective responsibility. Equally important was the partnership that sustained their efforts and enabled the pair to sidestep societal norms to create a lasting legacy. Together, Partridge and Frink modeled a form of shared leadership that challenged gendered expectations and enabled women to wield lasting institutional influence. Even in the face of resistance from academic leaders and their eventual forced retirement, their educational philosophy endured through the students, programs, and civic initiatives they inspired. All together, Partridge and Frink reshaped the role of women educators in early twentieth-century Wisconsin. They left behind a legacy defined by inclusion, innovation, and community-centered reform.