Rising From the Ashes

Financial problems, with roots as far back as the 1940s, plagued the three Merrill-Palmer presidents who served from 1967-1981. Presidents J. William Rioux (1967-73), Michael Usdan (1974-77) and Francis Palmer (1978-81) faced challenges – compounded by Detroit's social upheaval – that ultimately could not be overcome.

Each president took a different approach to survive: community programs, research, or starting Institute degree programs. By focusing on a singular approach, each president lost the connection among education, science and community that had defined Merrill-Palmer from the beginning. Nothing worked. To make matters worse, the Institute had been spending down the endowment while new donors and grants were insufficient to make up the shortfall.

Eleanor Clay Ford's death in 1976 served a final blow and ended an era. She had joined the Merrill-Palmer board in 1926 and served for 50 years, contributing her talent and philanthropic gifts. She began volunteering at the Franklin Settlement nursery in 1911 at the age of 15. This nursery served children from poor immigrant families and Mrs. Ford then brought her interest in impoverished Detroit neighborhoods to Merrill-Palmer. She was recognized for all her contributions in a 1976 resolution.



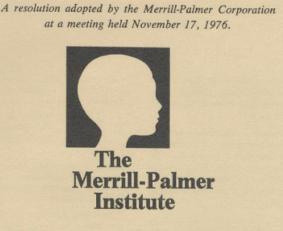
Eleanor Clay Ford (center) with unidentified reception attendees (c.1960).





Merrill-Palmer Gets Its First Male President BY SHARON NELTON Free Press Staff Writer Detroit's Merrill-Palmer In-stitute will get the first male president of its 47-year history this fall. He is former De-troiter Dr. J. William Rioux,





Eleanor Clay Ford 1896-1976

WHEREAS, Eleanor Clay Ford served this Institute for fifty years, And

WHEREAS, during that time, Merrill-Palmer evolved from School to Institute, from nurturer of young women in the arts of Home and Motherhood to grantor of formal recognition of high academic achievement in a broader context of Human Development, And

WHEREAS, between its founding and its present, Merrill-Palmer has enjoyed much preeminence and endured some mediocrity, And

WHEREAS, neither preeminence nor mediocrity in the short term distracted from her vision of Merrill-Palmer as the fulfillment of the ideal of its founder,

WHEREAS, her constancy, her sense of perspective, her gifts of self and devotion inspired her fellowmembers of this Corporation in their own support, Now, therefore.

Be it Resolved that Merrill-Palmer Corporation express its sense of gratefulness in her leadership, of warmth in her presence, and of loss in her leaving, And further

Be it Resolved that these resolutions be included in the permanent records of this Institute and that a copy of them be delivered to her sons and to her daughter in witness of the affection held for her by the members of this Corporation. November 17, 1976

"I thought (community involvement) was a change that needed to be made . . . Many people wanted to do what they had always done. Many people were not interested in changing."

– J. William Rioux Merrill-Palmer president, 1967-1973 (from 2019 oral history)

MERRILL-PALMER ALUMNI NEWS

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A message from Dr. Robert Bland

I thought you might be interested in a brief update of the events at Merrill-Palmer since my last message to you in the Alumni News in September. Discussions regarding the transfer of Merrill-Palmer Institute to Wayne State University continue to progress very well. The Board of Trustees and administration anticipate a full transfer of Merrill-Palmer to Wayne State by the end of August 1981.

You will be pleased to know that the Institute you have so loyally supported over the years will become Merrill-Palmer Institute of Wayne State University. The very important work of the Institute will continue, and thus, the important learning and research projects will be available to the broad community

In order to create a support base for Merrill-Palmer Institute at Wayne State, we are currently developing the structure for a Founder's Society and Advisory Group. These groups will consist of Corporation Members, Alumni, and friends of Merrill-Palmer. Hopefully, in the next issue of the Alumni News I will be able to more clearly define the specific structure for these groups.

The restoration of Freer House is well underway. The new cedar shingle roof is just about completed. This is the material that was originally used on the house. We will also be making some minor repairs to the interior of the Freer House as well as to the Skillman and Knapp Buildings before final transfer to Wayne State Univer-

I believe that these efforts will maintain many of the rich traditions of the Institute and perpetuate the important contributions that Merrill-Palmer has made

> Robert Bland, Ph.D. Acting President The Merrill-Palmer Institute

March 1981

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

A Merrill-Palmer Get-Together during the NAEYC Conference in Detroit, November 5-8, 1981, is in the planning stages. It will be hosted by our Alumni Association at 71 East Ferry Avenue. Mary McFarland Frew ('39) is our representative on the local committee. All former Merrill-Palmer students and staff are invited.

Images courtesy of the Walter P. Ruether Library



Three years after Mrs. Ford's death, the Merrill-Palmer Institute announced bankruptcy. Talks with Wayne State University (WSU) about acquiring the Institute began as early as 1977 with WSU President George Gullen, but Thomas Bonner (who succeeded Gullen in 1978) formally added the Institute in 1981. Robert Bland, acting president of Merrill-Palmer at the time, oversaw the dismantling of the independent Institute.

Part of the Merrill-Palmer Institute lived on in the founding of the Center for Humanistic Studies in 1980. Institute master's programs in Human Relations and in Humanistic Psychology, both begun in the 1970s, migrated to the Center, which was accredited as an independent graduate school in 1981. It continues today as the Michigan School of Psychology, offering a broad range of graduate degrees.

Clark Moustakas, a lonatime Merrill-Palme faculty member, served as the first president, and Cereta Perry as vice president, of the new Center for Humanistic Studies.