

A SOUTH AFRICAN CLASSICIST AT CORNELL

— JEFFREY MURRAY —

ABSTRACT

Barbara Isabella Buchanan (1854–1944), the first Chair of Classics at Huguenot College in Wellington in the Cape Colony, was the first South African-born woman to gain a Master’s degree. To date, historians of women’s education as well as classical education in South Africa have erroneously credited her with a doctoral degree from Cornell University. This article supplements lesser-known aspects of Buchanan’s biography, and in doing so, sheds light on her experiences in South Africa during the Second South African War of Independence (1899–1902).

KEYWORDS

Barbara I. Buchanan, Theodore Roosevelt, Charles E. Bennett, Benjamin I. Wheeler, Cornell University, Huguenot College, classical education, women’s education, Second South African War of Independence, concentration camp schools

In 2014, in an article that examined the history of classical scholarship and education at Huguenot College in Wellington, South Africa, I included in my survey Barbara Isabella Buchanan (1854–1944), the first Professor and Chair of Classics at that institution.¹ Following the research of Sylvia Vietzen, I claimed that Buchanan completed her doctoral degree at Cornell University and was the first South African woman to do so. Further archival research, however, has shed light on Buchanan’s experiences at Cornell, and revealed that in fact she was not the first South African woman to be admitted to the degree of Ph.D. Letters between Buchanan and several faculty members at Cornell, as well as Theodore Roosevelt, not only touch on the history of classical scholarship and education, particularly in relation to women’s education in South Africa, but also refer to significant figures involved in the Second South African War of Independence (1899–1902).²

¹ Murray 2014: 105–26.

² A large-scale history of the place of women in the history of classical scholarship is needed; however, it is beyond the scope of any single article. Excellent contributions have been made in recent years in the volume edited by Rosie Wyles and Edith Hall (2016), as well as by Judith Hallett (2021). All letters quoted in this article are, unless stated otherwise, found in Box 4, Barbara Buchanan, Cornell University Graduate School student records, 1891–2014, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections,

In her excellent examination of the history of education of White women in the Natal Colony, Sylvia Vietzen wrote the following regarding Buchanan:

Of a pioneer Pietermaritzburg family, having begun her education at Mrs. London's Hinton House Academy, Miss Buchanan obtained a Natal Government's Certificate in 1879. Under the influence of Miss Day, an American teacher at Adams College at Amanzimtoti, Miss Buchanan proceeded to Oberlin College and Cornell University in the U.S.A. and became the first South African woman to gain the M.A. and Ph.D. degrees. She did not apply her advanced training in Natal education on her return from the U.S.A. but taught classics in the pioneer post-school Huguenot College at Wellington.³

This error regarding her gaining of the doctoral degree was repeated by Vietzen in the entry that she wrote on Buchanan for the third volume of the *Dictionary of South African Biography*. There she writes,

While studying for her M.A. she taught Latin and Roman history at Oberlin. After holding the chair of Classics at a college in Texas for two years she went to Cornell University, there gaining a Ph.D., for which her thesis was 'The origin of the middle voice of Greek verbs as deduced from the Iliad and the Odyssey'. She refused an offer to be president of

Cornell University. In the transcriptions of archival material throughout, I have made several small editorial changes for the sake of consistency, corrected minor slips and errors, as well as excluded certain paratextual elements.

³ Vietzen 1980: 252. Vietzen's book, based upon her 1970 doctorate from the University of Natal, was first published in 1973. I have consulted the second edition, which remains unchanged, apart from the addition of several illustrations. Miss Laura Ann Day (1832–1908) was born in Essex, Vermont, and attended Oberlin College, graduating in 1866. In 1870, she went to Natal under the auspices of the American Mission Board and was involved in education at Inanda Seminary and the Amanzimtoti Institute (later named Adams College). She went back to the U.S. in 1889, because of ill-health and remained in the care of Barbara Buchanan while there. In 1897, she returned to South Africa with Buchanan, to Wellington in the Cape Colony, and stayed on with her after Buchanan's subsequent relocation to Pretoria, where she died; see Oberlin College's *Annual Reports of the President and Treasurer of Oberlin College from 1908–09* (Oberlin, 1909), 378–9; cf. also *The Oberlin Alumni Magazine* 5.1 (October 1908), 44–5. Buchanan's student file from Oberlin College indicates that she too taught at Adams College after passing the first teacher's examination in the Natal Colony in 1879, before she embarked on further studies abroad (Student File, Alumni & Development Records, Box 119, O.C.A., Oberlin College Archives).

a women's college in Indiana, in order to take the chair of Classics at the pioneer Huguenot College, Wellington, Cape.⁴

Vietzen herself had followed the entry on Buchanan in Thomas Lewis' *Women of South Africa*, published in 1913, but had partly misunderstood its contents.⁵

After her early education in Natal, and influenced by her cousin, Florence Nightingale, Buchanan proceeded to Oberlin College in Ohio, where she graduated BA in 1889 and MA in 1890.⁶ As a graduate student she also taught in the preparatory department at Oberlin, before proceeding to Daniel Baker College in Brownwood, Texas. It was from there, after spending three years teaching Latin and Greek, that she entered Cornell to pursue further graduate study. Cornell from its founding in 1856 had admitted women, albeit not without problems, particularly within the context of coeducational debates in the U.S. in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁷ Before returning to South Africa to take up the position of Professor of Classics at the newly formed Huguenot College in Wellington, she also held a professorship at Coates College, Terre Haute, Indiana in 1895–96.⁸

⁴ Vietzen 1977: 117–18.

⁵ Lewis 1913: 41: 'The first S.A. woman to take the degree M.A., and the only one to qualify for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy'. The slippage here of 'qualify for' and Vietzen's 'gaining' is where the error occurs.

⁶ In a letter written in 1931 to her former fellow Oberlin classmates, housed among the papers kept by Oberlin College with her student file, Buchanan writes, 'I remained in Oberlin for a year after graduation to receive M.A. I was the first student to take the degree there for graduate study, and Prof. Hall said jokingly that he and Prof. Frost were experimenting on me to find out how much work should in future be required for the degree. I, however, found no reason to complain. In place of a thesis I annotated, with their approval, the first book of *The Iliad*. During this year I taught a large Latin class — Mrs. Chas Nelson was a member — and a class in Roman History' (Student File, Alumni & Development Records, Box 119, O.C.A., Oberlin College Archives). For the academic year 1889–90, as is indicated in Buchanan's student file, she taught as a graduate student in Oberlin's preparatory department. It is tempting to surmise that she overlapped with another famous Natalian's time in the same department: John Dube, the first president of the South African National Native Congress (the forerunner of the African National Congress), enrolled as a student in the preparatory department in late 1888, and during his time there his studies included Classics, particularly Cicero, Ovid, and Vergil, see Hughes 2011: 50–1. Oberlin College admitted black students from 1835 and was the first to grant bachelor's degrees to women (beginning in 1841) in a coeducational program. On the early history of Oberlin, see Fletcher 1943.

⁷ See Conable 1977.

⁸ For details on her earlier classical education as well as the remainder of her career in South Africa, see Murray 2014: 107–9.

Buchanan's file in the Graduate School student records of Cornell University contains several letters and documents relevant to the story of her pursuit of, and ultimately failure to achieve, a doctorate in Classics. The earliest letter in the collection dated 17 July 1899 was written to George Prentiss Bristol, Professor of Greek at Cornell from 1888–1927.⁹ It reads as follows:

My dear Professor Bristol,

It was very pleasant to hear from you and to know that we and our little corner of the world can interest those in faraway America. Though, as you say, we are each year drawing nearer to each other with these wonderful geographical changes. We are perhaps excusable just now for feeling that 'the end of the earth's axis is in our little village'. The situation is so critical that we can think and talk of little else. It is impossible that the crying wrongs of the *Uitlanders*¹⁰ be any longer ignored. The wrong must be righted — but how? Many think that war is inevitable; others say that when war preparations have raised the price of all necessaries, and when Kruger¹¹ thinks he has made all the money that he can out of the situation he will 'climb down'. The inexcusable action of our Premier and his published letter opposing Sir Alfred Milner have made matters much worse.¹² Dissolution of Parliament will probably result. There is a widespread feeling that Mr Schreiner¹³ will find he has overshot the mark and that a general election will be disastrous to the *Bond*.¹⁴ This would do more than aught else to hasten Mr Kruger's descent. He is pinning his faith mainly to support from the *Bond* element. Fortunately, the ministry have seriously discredited themselves. A speech made by Mr Merriman¹⁵ a

⁹ George Prentiss Bristol (1856–1927) studied Classics at Hamilton, Johns Hopkins, and Heidelberg, and is cited as one of Cornell's best teachers: see the entry on him by Ward W. Briggs Jr. in the *Database of Classical Scholars* (<https://dbcs.rutgers.edu/>).

¹⁰ An 'uitlander' (Afrikaans: 'foreigner') denotes an immigrant who at the time was living in the Transvaal and was denied citizenship by the Boers for cultural and economic reasons.

¹¹ Paul Kruger (1825–1904), a South African politician, was president of the South African Republic at this time.

¹² William Schreiner was the Premier (see the next note). Alfred Milner (1854–1925) was High Commissioner for Southern Africa and Governor of Cape Colony.

¹³ William Philip Schreiner (1857–1919), the younger brother of the author, Olive Schreiner, was at this time Prime Minister of the Cape Colony.

¹⁴ The 'Afrikaner Bond' was a South African, anti-imperialist political party established in 1881, and very active in the Cape Parliament.

¹⁵ John Xavier Merriman (1841–1926) was the last Prime Minister of the Cape Colony before the formation of Union in South Africa in 1910.

few years ago has just been republished by his opponents. It is a bitter and virulent denunciation of the *Bond* and its disloyalty in supporting Kruger. Mr Schreiner too only about four years ago waged war against the Transvaal when Kruger attempted to close the drifts of the Vaal to Cape merchandise. Often members of the ministry have in a greater or less degree shown their ability to remodel their opinions on short notice. With very few exceptions the educated, thinking Dutch are strongly in favour of Sir Alfred Milner's policy and opposed to the *Bond*. The exceptions are those who have an axe to grind, or who favour the *Bond* because Mr Rhodes¹⁶ is a member of the opposition; and they are either jealous of Mr Rhodes or are under such great obligations to him that they are his enemies. He is one of the kindest, most generous men the world has ever seen; not only ready with sympathy and help for all in need, but he uses his great intellect to plan the minutest details which bear upon the welfare and happiness of others. His kindness is most genuine and unobtrusive, never seeking for acknowledgement or gratitude. He is expected to arrive tomorrow and great preparations are being made to do him honour. All parts of the Colony are vying with each other in the ardour of their addresses of welcome. As one said, 'He so loathes all display, the kindest thing would be to mail all the addresses to him and leave him in peace'. I should like to attend the reception tomorrow evening but my brother's position as judge obliges him to keep aloof from everything which has a political flavour. Miss Day and I are spending the vacation with my brother, who is especially glad to have us since his wife and children are in England. We have almost no social life in Wellington so we doubly enjoy all that we can pack into the vacation. The roads here too are capital for wheeling, and we have had beautiful, bright weather nearly all the time; a Natal rather than a Cape winter. I battled with influenza nearly all last time; a most unfortunate time to do so for the term closed with the University Examinations. Since none of the Colleges have power to grant degrees everything depends on the University Examinations. I fear my pupils will not make a very creditable show this year; the B.A. work was heavy, the *Sophistes*, *Electra*, and Thucydides Bk I for a year's work, in addition to seven other subjects, including psychology and philology.¹⁷ I had one class of ten who had had no Greek and who went up for an

¹⁶ Cecil John Rhodes (1853–1902), arch-imperialist in South Africa, was forced to resign his position as Prime Minister of the Cape Colony in 1896 in the aftermath of the failed Jameson Raid. He was a controversial figure even in his own day; see the biography of Maylam 2005, and for his interests in Classics: Hilton 2017: 74–100.

¹⁷ Plato's dialogue, the *Sophist*, is probably meant.

examination in the *Trapeziticus*, *Iliad* XVII, and prose composition.¹⁸ They have done the work in a year in addition to their other seven subjects, including trigonometry, so I cannot expect them to do more than pass. I have registered a very decided refusal ever again to undertake to prepare a class in less than the required time. The work is unsatisfactory and will ruin the reputation of the College for scholarship, but worse still it will prevent the students from becoming true scholars and getting scholarly ideas. There is much about my work that is very pleasant. I have specially enjoyed seeing a genuine enthusiasm for the Greek language and literature which my pupils have shown this year. If I can only help them to see the beauties of Greek so that they will love it and keep it up after they leave College. I shall feel I have not lived in vain. I am convinced that much of the indifference to and even dislike of Greek and Latin is largely if not altogether due to faulty methods of teaching, methods which do not make clear the fact that language is alive and is merely the dress of thought. I have been greatly gratified lately to hear several of my pupils say the *Iliad* is splendid, they must read it all. This is dreadfully shoppy but I believe you are sufficiently interested in the work to forgive the shop. Since the vacation began I have finished my thesis. I have finally included almost all the verbs of the *Iliad*. I am now sending Prof. Wheeler the introduction and conclusion to see if he approves them.¹⁹ Of course he has influence enough as the one under whom the major subject was taken, not only to carry the acceptance of the thesis, but also the conferring of the degree without further examination. This is very little to ask since I was twice ready to take the final examination and was both times arbitrarily refused without cause or reason. It is a matter of considerable importance for me to have the degree now. The University here has not power to confer the degree of Ph.D. but only to confirm it when granted elsewhere. I have protested till I am tired against being called “Dr Buchanan from Cornell”, but for the practical advantages of the degree the empty title does not avail. The degree will influence my being elected to the University Council when there is a vacancy and will here help to give our College fair representation in the Council which it will probably not obtain otherwise. Of course the examinations I took at Cornell and the marks as recorded by Mr Hoy are sufficient evidence

¹⁸ The *Trapeziticus*, or a ‘speech pertaining to a banker’, is an oration (XVII) by Isocrates.

¹⁹ Benjamin Ide Wheeler (1854–1927) having studied at Brown and Heidelberg was, at the time of this letter, Professor of Greek and Comparative Philology at Cornell, and Chair of the Greek Department. He was later President of the University of California from 1899–1919, see the entry by Ward W. Briggs Jr. in the *Database of Classical Scholars*.

of my ability to pass a final examination had it not been refused me.²⁰ I know you will favour the degree being granted and I hope Prof. Wheeler will see that I am simply asking for justice.

Last year the University recognised my Master's degree; this year it recognises Miss Stoneman's and Miss Veeder's degrees from Cornell; also the B.A. of Miss Kellogg of Wellesley and Miss Simmons of Vassar.²¹ The application for recognition from so many American Colleges has quite stirred up the Council on the subject of American colleges, and set them to examine registers, etc. Our work grows. We sent up two for B.A. last year, four this; eight for Intermediate last year nineteen this. The examination results will not be out till next week, so we do not yet know how our pupils have fared. We begin work again on Aug. 1st. Miss Stoneman has been very successful in her work. She won the government prize given to the school sending in the best herbarium of not less than 200 specimens; and one of her pupils won the prize given to a student for the best herbarium. Her pupils have done remarkably well in examinations. This land is paradise for botanists; the profusion and variety of wildflowers are marvellous; though in many respects the Cape Colony falls far short of Natal, the "Garden Colony" and the fairest spot on Earth. But I must not expatiate on Natal for my letter is already too long.

I find I shall not be able to send my thesis to Prof. Wheeler this week, but hope to send it next week.

Hoping you are keeping better than when I left Ithaca and that you are having a restful vacation.

Sincerely yours

Barbara I. Buchanan

Kind remembrances please to Dr Forman.²²

²⁰ David Fletcher Hoy, at the time of writing of this letter, was Cornell's Registrar; further, see below.

²¹ In 1899, the University of the Cape of Good Hope 'ratified' the degrees earned by these women in the U.S. Bertha Stoneman, D.Sc. from Cornell, became an authority in the field of botany in South Africa and later in 1921 was made principal of Huguenot College; Martha Veeder, Ph.B from Cornell, Professor of Mathematics; Flora Simmons, B.A. from Vassar, and Alice Kellogg, B.A. from Wellesley, were also teachers at Huguenot; see the *Report of the Council of the University of the Cape of Good Hope for the year 1899*: 4.

²² Lewis Leaming Forman (1857–1933) lectured in Greek at Cornell from 1894–1900. Somewhat bizarrely he moved to Europe when the First World War broke out; he returned to Cornell when Bennett died in 1921 (on whom, see below); he also refused the rank of professor; further, see the entry by Ward Briggs, Jr. in the *Database of Classical Scholars*.

The letter, written only a few months before the outbreak of the Second South African War of Independence, reveals Buchanan's support of British Imperialism and outlines the early stages of the issues involved with regard to her graduate studies at Cornell.²³ It also provides her comments on the role of the University of Cape of Good Hope in ratifying the work of the only women's college in South Africa at the time, and her expressed hope that she might find a place on its council.²⁴ Roughly a month later, on 15 August 1899, Buchanan wrote to Benjamin Ide Wheeler, the Professor of Greek and Comparative Philology at Cornell. In this letter, she further develops her account of her time there, as well as the position of some South Africans precipitating the war:

Dear Professor Wheeler,

I send with this the introduction and conclusion of my thesis. Will you kindly examine them and let me know if you have any corrections or suggestions. It hardly seems necessary to send you the whole thesis as you know so well the plan — since it is your own — of giving the statistics of each verb. The introduction I have not changed since you approved it, but I send it as you will wish to look at it again in connection with the conclusion. Since you last read the thesis, I have added to it the verbs used in both active and middle voice. The arrangement of the thesis is indicated in the summary of statistics given in the conclusion. You may remember that the last time you examined my thesis you wrote me that it was satisfactory except that the results were not summed up in such a way as to show the evidence from which the conclusion was drawn. And you closed your letter with the words 'it only remains for you now to do this and to enter into the reward of your labour'. I hope therefore that you will find I have done this satisfactorily. If you will kindly send me any corrections and suggestions you have to make, I can embody them and then have the thesis printed. As you have already expressed approval of the thesis except in the matter of summing up results, I trust there will be no changes needed of so radical a nature as to require the conclusion to be sent to you again before the thesis is printed. It is of very great importance both to me and to this College that I receive my degree so that it may be recognised by the Cape University. I am tired of explaining that the title is not mine, I am everywhere addressed and spoken of as 'Dr Buchanan' and

²³ Hilton (2014: 48–73) gives an excellent account of the context of the war, and a detailed discussion of the responses to it by several international classicists.

²⁴ At this time, the University of the Cape of Good Hope was a degree-conferring body only and provided no tuition — this was undertaken by the various colleges in South Africa, including the Huguenot University College, see further: Boucher 1973, esp. chapter 2.

Cornell has the credit or otherwise of my degree, but this is not the requisite official recognition by the Cape University, which, of course, I cannot claim. When I left Cornell, Prof. Bristol advised me to give only the non-completion of my thesis as the reason for not receiving my degree. I have acted on his advice as Prof. Bennett's unreasonable refusal to allow my examination is inexplicable.²⁵ He himself offered no explanation but simply repudiated the evidence of his own letter arranging my work. The first time he refused the examination (at the end of my second year at Cornell) he said I had not done enough work in his department, though he acknowledged that I had done all he prescribed and that my doing of it was 'eminently satisfactory'. I then obtained from him a written statement of further work he required. I remained at Cornell an extra year in order to do this work. During this year I consulted Prof. Bennett from time to time and he expressed his approval. This was the year you were in Greece. Prof. Dyer would not examine in philology, so I agreed to change my major subject to Homer (including the *Hymns*) and Hesiod.²⁶ I was prepared to take an examination in all this extra work and called on Prof. Bennett to arrange the final details when, to my astonishment, he declared that he would never consent to my being examined or receiving a degree from Cornell. He added that he had never prescribed any work for me, that I had never consulted him on the subject and that he did not even know I was in Ithaca. This, too, though only three weeks previously I had reported to him and he expressed approval of my work. I afterwards asked Mr Reynolds, who happened to be present when Prof. Bennett refused the examination, his opinion of the interview, he replied, 'He is determined you shan't take the exam. If you force it, he won't pass you even if you answer every question'.²⁷ I found that Prof. Bennett had announced to others in your office that he would never consent to my going up for examination, but he gave no reason for his extraordinary determination. I consulted several members of the faculty and everyone assured me that I could do nothing, that if I brought the case before the President or the faculty as a whole, it would simply be referred to Prof. Bennett as head of the department. The general opinion was that had you been at home you could and would have controlled the whole affair since my major subject and my thesis were with you. Of course, graduate students are not usually required to take term examinations,

²⁵ Charles Edwin Bennett (1858–1921) studied at Brown, Harvard, Leipzig, Berlin, and Heidelberg, and was Professor of Latin at Cornell from 1892–1921; see Gordon Kirkwood's entry on him in the *Database of Classical Scholars*.

²⁶ Louis Dyer (1851–1908), a graduate of Harvard and Oxford, was Acting Professor of Greek at Cornell for the academic year 1895–96.

²⁷ I have been unable to identify Mr. Reynolds.

but as it happened, I was asked to take them in all my work except Latin which was only seminary work and the papers I wrote for that Prof. Bennett commended highly at the time. Mr Hoy has sent me the marks handed in to him and I am not at all ashamed of them. They at any rate testify that I did creditably all the work Cornell could offer me in my three subjects. Since I have a stainless record as to conduct, a creditable record as to scholarship, since I faithfully performed all that was required of me even to unusual extra work, and since I twice presented myself for examination and was twice refused arbitrarily and for no reason, I do not see how Cornell can now refuse to do the fair and right thing and to grant my degree without further examination. I have gone over these facts at length not because you do not know them but that you may have them before you for reference. Had it not been for your absence my thesis could have been finished and approved before I left Ithaca. But since this could not be as you went to Greece directly after you decided to enlarge the original scope of my thesis subject and you had not returned when I left Ithaca, it did not seem advisable then to lay the whole matter before the Board of Trustees. I realised too that any investigation by them would involve the testimony of other professors for whom it might be unpleasant. Now you are at home and the thesis is finished your personal and official influence will, doubtless, be ample to carry the matter through without its going to the trustees. It is an open secret that your influence is very great and Prof. Bennett knowing this will, I think, when he finds you have taken up the matter, withdraw from his untenable position. Had I known before leaving Ithaca that I should be called out here so soon and so suddenly, I might have thought best to appeal to the trustees. Of course, Prof. Bennett's attitude rendered it impossible for me ever to take an examination under him but the trustees might have appointed some other examiner. That opportunity passed because I expected to remain awhile longer in America and thought that some time when Prof. Bennett was absent on leave I could go to Ithaca and take the examination. But I feel sure that your well-known integrity and sense of justice will ensure your securing for me justice — the degree I have fairly earned. As I have said it is of importance that I receive the degree, as my having it will influence the representation of this College on the University Council. I think you know that this is a young College, only two years old. It is the only women's college in South Africa. The University assigns work, conducts examinations and confers all degrees; all colleges being subject to the University. The two leading men's colleges are represented on the University Council, and it is very necessary for this college to secure representation. Last year we sent up our first class of two for B.A. both passed with honours, the standing in classics and philology deciding the honours. This year we sent up four, two in Science, two in Arts; the

latter two again took honours. As all four of these in Arts had studied philology under me only and I have been their only Greek and Latin teacher since they entered here, their success indicates some knowledge of these subjects on the part of their teacher. Our College is steadily growing. I enjoy my work though it is heavy. It is, of course, very pleasant to be near my own home and home friends.

The Transvaal crisis is, naturally, the absorbing theme here. There is a pretty general feeling that when English troops reach the border pass Kruger will 'climb down'. He has persistently for eighteen years done all in his power to arouse and foster race hatred and may now find that he has roused passions he cannot control, and that when he wishes to yield he cannot induce the people to obey him as they have blindly in the past. It is this contingency which most seriously threatens war. Meantime peaceable, law-abiding citizens, and helpless women, both English and American are suffering all sorts of horrible outrages by Transvaal officials and there is no redress from the Transvaal courts or government. We can but wait to see what the end will be and hope it may come soon.

I suppose your son has by this time ceased to talk pure Indo-European and uses plain United States instead. He must be growing quite a big boy. I hope he continues to be sturdy and that Mrs Wheeler is well. Please remember me to her, and believe me

Yours with kind regards
Barbara I. Buchanan

Chronologically, the next letter in the file is from Dr Thomas Walker, the President of Convocation at the University of the Cape of Good Hope. It is addressed to Prof. Wheeler and expresses the hope that should Buchanan's thesis meet with the approval of the faculty at Cornell, she would be allowed to graduate *in absentia*.²⁸

Early the following year, George Bristol wrote to the Dean of the Faculty (1888–1902), Horatio Stevens White.²⁹ In the letter, Bristol submits a statement made by Buchanan to the graduate committee for their consideration in granting the Ph.D. without examination. Furthermore, Bristol goes on to affirm the truthfulness of Buchanan's statements as far as the Department of Greek was concerned, acknowledges that her thesis had been accepted, but states that he cannot confirm her words in

²⁸ Walker to Wheeler, 15 August 1899. Walker states in the letter that 'Miss Buchanan has devoted herself with enthusiasm and success to her chosen subject, and she has already called out a responsive enthusiasm in her students. This bids fair to increase. The conferring of the degree at this time would, I believe, meet with approval in a wide circle here'.

²⁹ Bristol to White, 20 January 1900.

relation to her work in Latin. He ends the letter by reiterating Buchanan's character: 'I will add only this: that Miss Buchanan is a woman of mature age, that she is thoroughly honest in her belief as to the justness of her cause and that I do not believe she would intentionally make a mis-statement'. The accompanying statement by Buchanan is included in the file. It is worth quoting in full for the detail it provides in relation to her graduate curriculum:

When I entered Cornell I chose Classical Philosophy as my second minor, and attended one course of lectures by Prof. Hammond during the first year.³⁰ Then I was awarded the Graduate Scholarship in Greek and Latin, and Prof. Bennett insisted on changing my second minor to Latin, or he would oppose my holding the scholarship. I was very unwilling to change as I especially wanted the Philosophy; Prof. Hammond sympathized with me and expressed annoyance. I told Prof. Bennett that I had read all and taught most of the Latin read at Cornell so that it seemed a pity for me to spend the time in the Latin classes which could in my case, be spent more profitably in work I much needed. He was obdurate but said he would be quite satisfied with one year's work in the Seminary as sufficient work for a second minor. With this understanding I gave up Philosophy and entered the Latin Seminary. At the end of the year — my second at Cornell — my examination was arranged and published on the bulletin board. Three or four days before the date fixed Prof. Wheeler told me that Prof. Bennett objected to my examination and advised me to call and ask him about it. I called and Prof. Bennett gave as his reason that I had not done enough work. When I reminded him of his having said the Seminary would be enough work, he readily acknowledged that he had agreed to that, but said he had not expected me to take an examination after only two years' residence, though that was the required period very few students went up at the end of the second year. I asked if my work in the Seminary had been satisfactory, his reply was 'eminently satisfactory'. Though I failed utterly to see the validity of his objection, I could find no one who seemed to have authority superior to his in the matter; so perforce submitted. A student who was having a similar experience with Latin advised me to get from Prof. Bennett in writing a list of the work required. I did so and enclose a copy of the letter. After receiving it I called at Prof. Bennett's home and with his approval, decided upon Vergil and arranged all the details of the work. From time

³⁰ William Alexander Hammond (1861–1938) studied at Harvard and Leipzig and came to Cornell in 1891 as instructor in Philosophy, and was later named Sage Professor of Ancient Philosophy in 1908.

to time I reported progress and he advised me as to texts, critical notes, etc. He expressed satisfaction and our relations were always most cordial, so that I was utterly taken aback by the reception I met on the Saturday morning when I called to arrange for the date of my examination. Directly I stated my errand Prof. Bennett replied very angrily 'You shall never take an examination with my consent'. When I asked in what respect I had failed in the work he had assigned, he declared that he had never assigned me any work, that I had never consulted him and that he did not even know I was in Ithaca. When I attempted to speak of the letter giving the work, he interrupted insisting that he never wrote any such letter. He made some very sweeping remarks as to my inability to pass an examination because of my ignorance of the first principles of Latin. Remarks that I think he would hardly have made had he paused to consider that the Seminary work had been the consideration of the German theories of Case origin, so that he had had absolutely no opportunity of testing my knowledge of Latin.

With regard to the examination suggested I cannot think that the Dean and Faculty will require it when they have considered these facts:

1. While at Cornell I did a great deal of extra work:
 - a. Though a graduate student I took (at the request of the professors) a series of examinations; the results of which are on record in the Registrar's Office.
 - b. When I entered Cornell Sept. 1893, my subjects chosen in consultation with Profs. Wheeler, Bennett, and A. Emerson were: Major, Philology; Minors, Archaeology and Philosophy.³¹ In June 1894 Prof. Bennett insisted on the substitution of Latin for Philosophy; and since I had read all the Latin offered by Cornell, he agreed that the conditions of the change should be that he would require of me no work except that of one year in the Seminary.
 - c. In June 1895 Prof. Bennett, though acknowledging that he had agreed to demand only the one year's Seminary work, refused to examine me, and demanded that I prepare five works on Latin Literature, besides the complete works of a Latin author with MSS. and text criticism.
 - d. At the beginning of the Spring term of 1896 Prof. Dyer, since he was unwilling to examine in Philology, requested me to change my major subject to Epic Greek, including the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Homeric Hymns*, and Hesiod's works.

³¹ Alfred Emerson (1859–1943) received his doctorate from the University of Munich in 1880 and became Associate Professor of Classical Archaeology at Cornell University.

- e. The scope of my thesis was enlarged from the ‘Deponent verbs of the *Iliad*’, to ‘The Verbs of the *Iliad*’.
2. Though all this work was done faithfully and without complaint, Prof. Bennett refused to allow me to take the final examination as follows:
 - a. In June 1895, he refused on the ground that though he had agreed to require only the Seminary work, he now demanded more. The only reason he gave was that he did not suppose I would wish to be examined after a residence of only two years.
 - b. In June 1896 Prof. Bennett again refused to allow me to take the examination, and asserted repeatedly that he would never consent to my receiving the degree. He gave no reason for this determination. With regard to the extra work he had demanded from me, he asserted that he had made no such demand and that the subject had never been discussed between us; when confronted with his own letter assigning the work, he ignored its evidence and consented to an examination only on the basis that I was not entitled to it. But he did not even then retract his frequently reiterated statement that he would never consent to my degree being conferred.
3. The proposed examination is, presumably, to be partly conducted by Prof. Bennett, who has, so far as I know, not changed his attitude toward me, or his determination to withhold the degree.

You, who are familiar with the circumstances of my experience at Cornell, know there is much more which might be said, but I think that enough has been said to show the Dean and Faculty that; since my conduct and scholarship at Cornell were irreproachable, and since I there did a great deal of extra work, and since I twice presented myself for the final examination and was twice refused — the second time in such a way as to effectually debar me from an examination by Prof. Bennett at any time in the future — it is simple justice now to grant the degree without requiring any further work or an examination.

The statement provoked the following response from Charles Edwin Bennett, the Professor of Latin at Cornell from 1892–1921: ‘I have read Miss Buchanan’s statement. In every essential item, it is unqualifiedly false. Miss Buchanan, in my judgement, is either deliberately mendacious, or mentally unbalanced’.³² On 5 February 1900, in his capacity as

³² Bennett to White, 25 January 1900. In respect of his scholarship and his teaching, Professor Bennett appears to have been generally well-regarded, cf. McElwain 1922a: 189; McElwain 1922b: 23–5; Rolfe 1922: 279–80. It is worth noting also that Bennett was later to supervise the doctoral work of Elizabeth Hazelton Haight (1872–1964) at

chairman of the committee on graduate work, Dean White wrote to Buchanan informing her that her request for graduation without final examination had been denied, but offered her the opportunity to renew her candidacy for the degree.³³ Several months later Barbara Buchanan's brother, Sir Ebenezer John Buchanan (1844–1930), a judge in the Cape Supreme Court and member of council of the University of the Cape of Good Hope, wrote to the Dean informing him that he had advised his sister to renew her registration for the degree and relayed that he hoped the matter would be brought to a 'satisfactory conclusion' as it was of importance to his sister given the nature of her professional work in South Africa.³⁴

On 23 July 1900 Barbara Buchanan wrote to the Dean agreeing to take the examination, offering Professor Thomas Walker of Victoria College, Stellenbosch, and Chairman of Convocation of the University, to act as proctor.³⁵ She notes in the letter that,

Under date of May 9 Pres. Schurman wrote to Gov. Roosevelt that Prof. Bennett offered to submit the papers to the Professor of Latin in some sister university. To me this seems quite unnecessary. But if it will be any relief to Prof. Bennett I am willing to substitute Greek for Latin. If however he prefers to give the examination I suppose he will approve of examining in Vergil's *Aeneid*, *Georgics* and *Eclogues*, as that is the task he assigned me at Cornell. Should he prefer that Greek be substituted I suggest Sophocles or Aeschylus. There is no library here so my work must perforce be mainly in text books. Please let me know what ground the examination will cover.

The full exchange between Jacob Gould Schurman, President of Cornell, and Theodore Roosevelt, the future 26th President of the United States, here acting in his former role as Governor of the State of New York, seems

Cornell, whose thesis on *The Sea in Greek Poetry* was completed in 1909; like Buchanan, Haight came to Cornell from another university (in her case from Vassar), and also like Buchanan, Haight worked on Homer; see Lateiner 1996–1997: 153–66. One of the journal's anonymous readers has suggested that Bennett's actions raise the possibility of prejudice against women, and has alerted me to a letter he sent, with his colleagues at Cornell, to Harry Caplan regarding anti-Semitic prejudice in employment practices in higher education in the United States at this time. A transcription of the letter to Caplan is to be found in Coser 1984: 321–2 n. 7; see also the entry by Helen F. North on Harry Caplan in the *Database of Classical Scholars*. Without further evidence on Bennett, however, this must remain speculation.

³³ White to Buchanan, 5 February 1900.

³⁴ E. J. Buchanan to White, 30 June 1900.

³⁵ Buchanan to White, 23 July 1900.

not to have survived, but at least three letters are extant. On 1 May 1900, Roosevelt wrote to Schurman asking ‘Can anything be done for Miss Buchanan? It seems to me that under all the circumstances it might be worthwhile to give her the degree’.³⁶ On 9 May 1900, Schurman wrote to Roosevelt (the letter referred to by Buchanan above).³⁷ In the letter Schurman also states that, as far as he could tell, Buchanan’s allegations of unfair treatment at the hands of Cornell were unfounded, claiming that while she may have been ‘unofficially’ discouraged from sitting the examination, she was not officially refused the privilege. On 10 May 1900, Roosevelt wrote directly to Buchanan herself, and the letter was accompanied with President Schurman’s statement.³⁸

A response to Buchanan’s letter arrived from White indicating that the exam would cover the following subjects: in Latin, Virgil — MSS., editions, history of text, interpretation, with such incidental questions as may naturally suggest themselves; the work of the seminary for 1894/95, viz. the theory of the Latin cases with particular reference to the origin and development of the various constructions of the ‘Ablative’; History of Roman literature down to the time of Apuleius; in Greek, the Homeric poems as well as questions on the history of Greek literature; in Comparative Philology, questions of a general nature concerning the history of the science, its main principles and results; and secondly, specific questions concerning the comparative grammar of Sanskrit, Greek and Latin.³⁹

³⁶ Roosevelt to Schurman, 1 May 1900, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division. It appears that Roosevelt wrote to Schurman at the prompting of Buchanan’s brother, Ebenezer — one letter between him, in his role as Acting Chief Justice, and Roosevelt survives. In the correspondence, Roosevelt refers to an earlier letter from him from the previous month, and states ‘Of course, you understand I have no power in the matter beyond doing what I just did — that is, calling the matter to the attention of the faculty and sending on to your sister the papers they sent to me in response’. He ends the letter by claiming, ‘Wishing I could have been of more help’ (Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Roosevelt to E. J. Buchanan, 18 May 1900).

³⁷ Schurman to Roosevelt, 9 May 1900, Jacob Gould Schurman Papers, 1867–1942, [1986], Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University.

³⁸ Roosevelt to Buchanan, 10 May 1900, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division.

³⁹ White to Buchanan, 18 October 1900. Buchanan responded by asking for clarity on the time allocation of the examination (Buchanan to White, 11 December 1900); cf. Bristol to White, 17 December 1900: ‘As to the question of time allowance for the answering of them, I think she might be allowed as much as she wishes’; Bennett to White, 18 December 1900.

Earlier, White had asked both Bennett and Bristol to submit the scope of their examination questions to him so that he could satisfactorily answer Buchanan's questions. In a letter from Bennett to White, 5 October 1900, he wrote concerning Buchanan:

I ought to add that while I now am willing (as I have been for four years) to afford Miss Buchanan the opportunity of taking the Latin examination for the Ph.D. degree, I do so in the conviction that she was far from passing the necessary maturity for the degree at the time she ended her studies, and that, unless she has since carried on systematic advanced study under competent direction, she is still deficient in this maturity. She never had any of the spirit of the scholar, nor any conception of what the higher scholarship of the graduate student involves.

By the end of that year, Thomas Walker had received the examination papers.⁴⁰ White also wrote to Buchanan stating that, 'Your committee desires that you may have ample time for writing the papers and would suggest that you make your answers as explicit and extensive as you can. Our desire is not so much to secure brief replies to the inquiries, as to give you the opportunity to show the range of your own knowledge'.⁴¹ Walker replied that 'owing to the disturbed state of the country' Buchanan was currently absent from Wellington, and that there might be some delay in hearing from her.⁴² By February, however, Buchanan had returned and sat the papers which had been sent out.⁴³

The examination papers themselves survive in Buchanan's student file, but unfortunately not her answers. The first Latin paper on Virgil indicates a suggested examination time of 2.5 hours. It consists of 8 questions, including ones on the *Aeneid's* manuscript and edition history (for example, 'Given an account of the most important manuscripts of Virgil's *Aeneid* with their dates and their value for textual critics', 'When was the *editio princeps* issued?', 'What is the present standard critical

⁴⁰ White to Walker, 19 December 1900.

⁴¹ White to Buchanan, 19 December 1900.

⁴² Walker to White, 28 January 1901.

⁴³ Walker to White, 19 February 1901: 'I visited Wellington last Saturday, and gave the papers in my charge to the Vice-Principal of the Huguenot College (Miss Dudley, a graduate of Oberlin), along with your note of instructions. I believe myself to be speaking in the spirit of the commission entrusted to me in saying to Miss Dudley that you desire Miss Buchanan to have all the freedom in writing her papers there was consistent with the guarantee of the integrity of the examination. This guarantee was, I hold, in the interest both of Cornell Univ. and of the candidate herself.'

edition of Virgil? What other contributions to Latin scholarship has the author of this edition made?', 'Who was the most important ancient commentator on Virgil?'); textual criticism ('Classify Virgil's *Eclogues* on the basis of content'), translation (of *Aen.* 10.510–536), metre, and grammar. Next, a paper of 2 hours on the 'Latin Ablative' consisting of 10 questions (e.g. 'Describe the different theories that have obtained concerning the nature of the Latin cases in general. Mention five important works in which the subject has been considered. What theory do you yourself advocate?', 'Explain the elements which go to make up the so-called Latin "ablative". Describe the psychological and formal factors that facilitated the fusion') including example sentences with various ablative constructions needing explanation; a paper on 'Roman Literature', 2 hours for 10 questions, including, for example, 'Discuss the origin of the Prologues to Plautus' plays', 'Explain the sources of the poems that have come down to us under the name of Tibullus', 'Discuss the authorship of the *Aetna*', and 'Mention three important text editions of Horace and the three most important explanatory editions. Who was Porphyrio? Who was the Commentator Cruquianus?'. For Greek, only one paper of 15 questions. On the script the examiner is asked to provide the candidate with a text of the *Iliad* and *Isocrates*, upon which several translation questions are based. The opening question, dazzlingly vague, asks 'What is Greek?', but more specific questions follow, such as, 'Name the plays of Sophocles', 'What is the "Homeric Question"?', and 'Take any ten consecutive verses of Homer's *Iliad* and analyse them metrically'. The final exam, on 'Comparative Philology', is made up of 10 questions. Here the candidate is asked, 'What made a Science of Comparative Philology possible?', 'Define and illustrate "Grassmann's Law"', and 'What have been some of the theories as to the "Indo-European Home"?'.

On 26 February 1901, the Assistant Principal of Huguenot College, Ella Dudley, posted Buchanan's answers to Cornell and wrote to the Dean. In the letter, she states,

The candidate asks me to point out the fact that Latin was not the chief subject offered but one of the minors. From the large number of questions set within the field of Latin she fears this fact may have been overlooked and she respectfully asks that it be borne in mind in the general evaluation of her papers.⁴⁴

The disappointing outcome of Buchanan's examination was reported to the Dean on 22 May 1901 by Professor Bristol, who was the chairman of

⁴⁴ Dudley to White, 26 February 1901.

Buchanan's committee: 'I have to report in the matter of the examination of Miss B. I. Buchanan that she has failed to pass the examination for her degree'. It appears that Bristol also unofficially informed Buchanan of the outcome as she wrote to White on 5 November 1901 stating that she had had no formal notification of her results.⁴⁵ In the exchange, Buchanan asked the Dean for more information,

How many answers of the Latin papers were incorrect? Were the papers unsatisfactory because so many questions were answered as fully as time and physical endurance permitted instead of a few questions at greater length? If so, was the examiner informed that no intimation as to the number of answers desired was given with the questions? Was the examiner informed that the Latin was the second minor subject?

White, who had been away in Europe, replied on 9 December 1901, apologising for the oversight in notifying Buchanan of the results, but he remained firm on the outcome:

I have been informed that the Latin papers were sent to a competent examiner not connected with the University, and that the papers were marked strictly upon their merits. I do not believe that there is any cause to question the fairness of the test or the impartiality of the report.⁴⁶

Several years appear to have passed before Buchanan took up her complaint once more. In a long letter to David Fletcher Hoy, the registrar at Cornell, which was prompted it appears by the receipt of an alumni 'report blank' information form, Buchanan laid out what she believed was her unjust treatment once more:

You will see that I have marked the slip 'entitled to Ph.D.' for this is in my opinion, the truth; and I hope that this may reopen my case and obtain for me tardy justice ... papers were sent out to Dr Walker, Chairman of the Convocation of this University and he arranged for an examination. I took exception to these papers and at the close of the examination I lodged a complaint with Dr Walker which he forwarded to Cornell. My second minor subject was Latin and yet to Latin was given an overwhelming preponderance in the examination. The Latin papers were given first and consisted of two papers, 28 questions in all

⁴⁵ Buchanan to White, 5 November 1901.

⁴⁶ White to Buchanan, 9 December 1901.

many involving very long replies. I at once saw that if this proposition were fair I should have at least 8 hours of steady writing to complete the three subjects, I therefore answered as concisely as possible. After disposing of the Latin I was surprised to find the first minor paper had only 10 questions and the major paper 15. As I said Dr Walker forwarded my protest against this undue preponderance to Latin, which could not but seem invidious in the light of former experiences ... In view of these facts it is perhaps not unnatural that I should consider that I am entitled to the degree of Ph.D. on the ground that I have fairly earned it. Had I been in the United States I should have contested the matter to the bitter end but one cannot fight at this distance. However I have once more stated my case in the hope of justice at last, especially since my proficiency in Latin has never been doubted by any one, and the marked success of my pupils has borne ample testimony.⁴⁷

The latest dated document in Buchanan's file is a memorandum addressed to Edmund Ezra Day, president of Cornell from 1937–1949.⁴⁸ In the memorandum Floyd Karker Richtmyer, in his capacity as Dean of Graduate Studies at Cornell, writes,

I have gone through the rather voluminous records on file in our office concerning Miss Barbara Buchanan. So far as I can see, nothing can be done now to make any adjustment that will satisfy her. Speaking off the record and judging solely on the basis of the files it does seem as if one member of Miss Buchanan's committee may have been unduly prejudiced against her, but there is nothing in the files to indicate the other side of the case. There is one statement in one of the letters written by one faculty member to another that 'Miss Buchanan's statements are unqualifiedly false'.

This is apparently just one of those cases that just 'happens'. You may wish to acknowledge Miss Buchanan's letter and state your regrets over the incident, or you may wish to ignore the letter. I am rather inclined to advise the latter course.

Buchanan resigned from the Chair of Classics at Huguenot College in 1901, citing the distasteful atmosphere in Wellington caused by the tensions in the Cape Colony after the South African War. Her next posting was as Acting-Principal of one of the concentration camp schools established in Pretoria in the Transvaal for Afrikaner women and children in

⁴⁷ Buchanan to Hoy, 8 January 1908.

⁴⁸ Memorandum for President Day, 18 May 1939.

the last months of the War.⁴⁹ The several months that Buchanan spent there are worth recording because, as Eliza Riedi has pointed out, ‘the camp schools and their teachers are today almost unknown’.⁵⁰ In recounting her past experiences to her former fellow Oberlin classmates in a letter she wrote in 1931, she writes briefly that,

Mr. Sargent needed me to take the place of a principal who was ill. The school was one of those opened by the Government for the Boers, and so I made my first acquaintance with the genuine *back-velder*.⁵¹ There were more than 600 pupils of all ages, from the prisoner on parole down to the four-year-old. Although peace was not signed till several months later, the Boers were going back to their homes, so every day saw three or four dozen pupils leave for home and a like number enter school. The Government supplied all school material, and ordered that this was to be distributed without restriction or limit to every pupil that asked for it, and yet I had to keep all stores locked for they would rather take a thing than receive it as a gift.⁵²

While the full curriculum of Lord Milner’s ‘Anglicisation’ educational project of the Afrikaners in the camps is unknown, it appears to have included at least some Latin.⁵³

Buchanan’s later years in education in South Africa and her contributions to the field of Natal historiography are beyond the scope of this article, but as we have seen she appears to have remained convinced in later life of her unfair treatment regarding her attempts to gain a Ph.D. in Classics.⁵⁴ While the archival record has corrected previous points of fact in biographical scholarship on Buchanan, it has also revealed further aspects of her intellectual formation as a classical scholar and teacher, her place in the history of women’s education in South Africa, and her views

⁴⁹ Vietzen 1977: 117.

⁵⁰ Riedi 2005: 1316.

⁵¹ ‘*Back-velder*’ refers to a person from a rural area (the Afrikaans ‘veld’ translating ‘field’); hence, someone unsophisticated, or rough, and often used in a derogatory manner of a rural Afrikaans-speaking person.

⁵² Student File, Alumni & Development Records, Box 119, O.C.A., Oberlin College Archives.

⁵³ Riedi 2015: 1339: ‘A Bloemfontein teacher reported a more ambitious programme, including Euclid, algebra, Latin (‘Caesar, especially the “Invasion of Britain”’).

⁵⁴ See Buchanan 1923; Buchanan 1934; and Buchanan 1941.

on, and involvement in, significant events of the day such as the Second South African War of Independence.⁵⁵

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