

## **Darlings In Love: A History of Romance Between Women at Hollins University in the Early 20th Century.**

**Antonia Nagle, Hollins University '18.**

Abstract:

This paper and accompanying sources hope to provide a detailed examination of the world of Darlings at Hollins University between the years 1900 and 1921, using primary sources gathered from The Spinster, the university's yearbook. As a small, single-sex university established in 1843, Hollins has a unique history of romantic relationships between students. Students who participated in these relationships between the years of 1900 and 1921 were called Darlings. These same-sex relationships flourished at Hollins in the early 20th century, and were a well known and accepted part of life at Hollins. For this study, over a hundred primary sources were gathered from The Spinsters of this time period and used to create a unique picture of the culture and customs of Darlings. These sources are entirely student-composed, and include poems, short stories, play scripts, jokes, cartoons, senior pages, club pages, and portraits. This paper has drawn from the sources found in The Spinster to compose a comprehensive history of the Darlings and their world at Hollins.

From 1900 to 1920, Hollins University was abuzz with “Darlings”. The word appears in abundance in The Spinster, the Hollins yearbook composed entirely by students. It is used throughout these books in seriousness and in jest, in love poems and in comic strips and every context in between. Through reading The Spinster, it becomes clear that Darling was more than just a word at Hollins, but an entire subculture built around romantic relationships between students. Darlings begin to appear in the yearbook as early as 1898, become more prevalent around 1905, and then begin to disappear around 1917. Before a history of Darlings and their culture is given, it is important to establish an understanding that Darlings were not just young women in intense friendships, but true romantic attachments between students at Hollins University. Nowadays, Darling is used generally as a word of affection towards any person- a friend, a child, or a sibling. However, at Hollins in the early 20th century, a Darling was what we would today call a girlfriend, a crush, or even a lover.

It was rare for the students to provide any explicit definition of Darlings in their writings. Most authors assumed that their audience of fellow students would understand who the Darlings were, and they were correct in their assumptions. Fortunately for the readers 100 years later, some explanations of Darlings were provided. One such explanation is given in a section of The Spinster of 1904 entitled “Real Diary of a Real Girl,” which chronicles the life of a fictional Hollins girl in the format of a diary. An excerpt reads “Whenever one girl is crazy about another they call them darling.”<sup>1</sup> This is a clear affirmation that Darlings were not merely close friends, but carried in their relationship the added weight of romantic attraction.

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<sup>1</sup> The Spinster “Real Diary of a Real Girl” (Hollins Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1904), 176

A poem published in 1912 entitled “A Treatise On Darlingitis”<sup>2</sup> pokes fun at the difference between close friends and Darlings. It describes in each stanza a pair of students who spend time together alone, implying that their relationship is one of Darlings. However, each stanza ends with the pair of supposed Darlings denying their alleged romantic involvement: “Yet the refrain always ends / we’re not darlings, just good friends”<sup>3</sup> Almost the exact same language is used in a fictional article written for The Spinster three years later.

“The Delectable Darling Case” was an article published in a satirical newspaper featured in The Spinster of 1915. The premise of the article is that “there are two kinds of Darling cases—the openly acknowledged (Ed. and Va.) and the ‘just good friend’ (Virginia Milton and Helen McCoy)”<sup>4</sup> This article provides us with a significant amount of information about how Darlings were perceived and discussed in public, but the most important piece of information it provides us is the clear distinction brushed upon in “A Treatise on Darlingitis,” that Darlings were not friends, but students who had confessed romantic feelings and proceeded to act on them.

The script of a play entitled “As Others See Us” offers an entire subplot of Darlings that displays the romance of such a relationship. The main character, Betty, is the new girl at Hollins who upon her arrival has experiences with basketball teams, sororities, and her very own Darling.<sup>5</sup> Betty’s Darling is simply named “Darling” and described as “a girl of many loves.”<sup>6</sup> She is quite smitten with Betty, and sneaks off to a midnight feast in order to see her. Betty returns her affections, and they end up skipping the feast, because as Betty says: “Kisses are better than peanut-butter and much more digestible! Kidlet, do you know what? I’m beginning to

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<sup>2</sup> The Spinster “A Treatise On Darlingitis” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins College, 1912), 99-100.

<sup>3</sup> “A Treatise on Darlingitis” 99-100

<sup>4</sup> The Spinster, “The Delectable Darling Case” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins College, 1915), 186

<sup>5</sup> The Spinster “As Others See Us” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1905), 49-70

<sup>6</sup> “As Others See Us” p. 56

love you.”<sup>7</sup> The character named Darling is portrayed as a girl who is absolutely lovesick, the stereotypical “boy-crazy” teenage girl who is in this case, “girl-crazy.”

There are other mentions of Darlings which would seem to imply that this term was used more specifically to refer to the more effeminate of a pair. The partner who tended more towards the stereotypical acts of the woman in a heterosexual relationship would be referred to as a Darling, or the Darling, whereas the more masculine partners are sometimes called “Darling Grabbers.”<sup>8</sup> Where Darlings are described as lovesick students, Darling Grabbers are “Usually tall, aspiring to be dashing... affect, to the greatest possible extent mannish attire... highly efficient in the art of making advances.”<sup>9</sup> This distinction is subtle, not always detectable, but an important detail of the Darling culture.

The cultural phenomena of female students dressing up in “mannish attire” and “making advances” occurred at Hollins University during the era of the Cotillion Club. Cotillion Club was made up of a group of students who organized dances for the school, but would cross-dress and act as men for the event.<sup>10</sup> Members of Cotillion Club are pictured dressed as men in their club picture,<sup>11</sup> and the club remained active in every year of this investigation.

It certainly is not hard to draw connections between the subtextual homoeroticism of this club and the blatant homoeroticism of Darling culture, however no clear connection is ever referenced. There are no sources that would indicate that all Cotillion Club members had

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<sup>7</sup> “As Others See Us” p. 58

<sup>8</sup> The Spinster “Species of the Genus Hollins-Girl” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1909), 179

<sup>9</sup> “Species of the Genus Hollins-Girl” 179

<sup>10</sup> Joe W. Leedom, “History of Darlings at Hollins University” (Lecture given to the class Hollins and a History of Its Social Movements, Hollins, Virginia, January 14 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Examples: [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), and the list goes on well into [1919](#) and [1920](#), where the “engagements” between club members and the students they escorted to the dance are recorded.

Darlings, or that all Darlings were in Cotillion Club, with the exception of a few specific students who are named both as members of Cotillion Club and referenced in Darling culture.<sup>12</sup>

Not only do the Darlings exhibit romantic behaviors, they act on their feelings in physical ways. More pointedly, the relationships between Darlings were in no way entirely chaste. In a lighthearted piece in The Spinster of 1902 entitled “The Hollins Primer”<sup>13</sup> a day in the life of a Hollins girl is described through words and pictures. The last line of the primer reads: “When the girls go home, some are tired and ride in a buggy like this: [picture of a buggy being drawn by two ox] But the Darlings walk slowly in and [picture of a spoon]”<sup>14</sup> The physical expressions of affection moved beyond just cuddling. As Betty says in “As Others See Us,” Darlings often kissed each other, both in public and in private.<sup>15</sup>

A poem entitled “Darlings” written by F. Wait<sup>16</sup> and published in The Spinster of 1903, only to be re-published in The Spinster of 1914,<sup>17</sup> describes such physical acts between Darlings: “Listen! hark! / Corner dark. / Place to meet, / Oh, how sweet! / Look in face, / Fond embrace. / Clinging kiss, / Perfect bliss!”<sup>18</sup> A poem entitled “The Bridge” also describes a yearning for kisses between Darlings: “The hunger that I feel within / can vanish at your kiss / but if you’ll walk the bridge with me / I’ll live alone by this”<sup>19</sup> and another poem, entitled “An Apology for

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<sup>12</sup> Students such as Frances Wait, for example, who writes the poem “[Darlings](#)” and is pictured in [Cotillion Club in 1902](#). Louise Boyce Murphy is another such student, who is president of the Cotillion Club in [1907](#) and [1908](#) and is told to have “a long train of Darlings always following her lead” in her [Senior portrait](#). Anna Muckleroy writes the short story “[The Folly Of It](#)” which chronicles a friendship with homoromantic subtext and is in the Cotillion Club in [1911](#), [12](#), [13](#), and [14](#). [Sina Lee Harris](#) is another such student, who was “wooing” a fellow student in 1905, and also a member of [Cotillion Club](#).

<sup>13</sup> The Spinster “The Hollins Primer” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1902) 63

<sup>14</sup> “The Hollins Primer”

<sup>15</sup> “As Others See Us” p.58

<sup>16</sup> F. Wait. “Darlings” The Spinster (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1903) 54

<sup>17</sup> The fact that this is re-published 11 years later is a testimony to the endurance of Darling culture.

<sup>18</sup> Wait. “Darlings” 54

<sup>19</sup> Ben Johnston “The Bridge” The Spinster (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1907) 142

Darlings” by Brent Witt describes Darlings kissing: “We did but wish an August moon / to shine upon our little spoon / we thought perchance a kiss to share / To tell each other how much we ‘care.’”<sup>20</sup> The acts of physical affection that Witt and Wait describe did not just take place in dark corners and under moonlit nights; Darlings practiced free and open displays of physical affection at social events.

A feature section of *The Spinster* of 1910 called “Country Comments” gives us a description of how the Darlings can be seen at soirees “casting on each other melting glances, those whose eyes are full of love and are entwined in each other’s arms.”<sup>21</sup> Cartoons about student life include scenes of Darlings cuddling and kissing.<sup>22</sup> The scene of “As Others See Us” in which Betty and Darling leave the feast to kiss is accompanied by a cartoon image of two students kissing.<sup>23</sup> The images of Darlings drawn by students, in conjunction with the written descriptions of Darlings that they publish, indicate that it was a common practice for Darlings to be physically affectionate in both public and private spaces.

The extent to which Darling relationships developed in a sexual nature is impossible to discern with any certainty. In a publication such as *The Spinster*, there are no explicit references to sexual acts, which is to be expected. The best information we can gather are occasional allusions to Darlings being found alone together in dark corners and practice rooms. The “Country Comments” published in *The Spinster of* 1910 provide quite a few of these allusions. Serving as a gossip section of *The Spinster*, it is filled with short poems about the more secretive

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<sup>20</sup> Brent Witt, “An Apology For Darlings” *The Spinster* (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1905) [unnumbered page between 150-1]

<sup>21</sup> *The Spinster*, “Country Comments” (Hollins, Virginia: The Students of Hollins, 1910) 123

<sup>22</sup> *The Spinster*, “Polly the Procrastinator” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1914) 16 Other examples are [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

<sup>23</sup> “As Others See Us” 58

acts of Darlings. One reads “I know a quiet practice room / That underneath the chapel is / two Darlings here do meet and coo / but I’ll not tell you who ‘tis.”<sup>24</sup> Another section of the “Country Comments” gives advice on where to take your Darling: “But it was not wise for her to take her ‘new’ Darling to the YWCA room. It’s not exactly a place for honey spooners, since they find it impossible to escape the crowd... only occasionally is it a ‘Pleasant’<sup>25</sup> haunt”<sup>26</sup> The “Country Comments” also tell us that if you looked in “a downy stack of hay... you’d find two ‘Darlings’ fast asleep.”<sup>27</sup> Although it is now impossible for us to say what the Darlings were up to in their hay stacks and practice rooms, the “Country Comments” tell us that Darlings frequently sought time to be alone together for an unnamed purpose. Due to the frequency and similarity of these allusions, this unnamed purpose seemed to be universally understood by students at the time.

Other allusions to Darlings spending time alone together in corners and practice rooms are made in passing jokes; the “Hollins Dictionary” of 1905 defines Darlings as “a peculiar race, inhabiting dark corners, in pairs, obnoxious; opprobrious.”<sup>28</sup> The “Hollins Handbook for Verdant Freshman” published in 1906 names a location in which Darlings meet: “Darling’s Corner: Haunt of the temporarily insane. Accommodations for two only.”<sup>29</sup> A comic entry featured in the The Spinster of 1909 entitled “Species of the Genus Hollins-Girl” describe “Rushers” as girls who have the “unusual skill of finding secluded corners and the more obscure practice rooms... and a staunch belief in the motto: ‘two’s company, three’s a crowd.’”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> “Country Comments” 123

<sup>25</sup> “Pleasant” in quotation marks is a playful jest at the maiden name of Susanna Virginia Pleasants, the wife of Charles Lewis Cocke, founder of Hollins University.

<sup>26</sup> “Country Comments” 123

<sup>27</sup> “Country Comments” 123

<sup>28</sup> The Spinster, “Hollins Dictionary” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1905) 147

<sup>29</sup> The Spinster, “Hollins Handbook for Verdant Freshman” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1906) 125

<sup>30</sup> The Spinster, “Species of the Genus Hollins-Girl” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1909) 176

In “An Apology for Darlings,” published in 1903 and again in 1914, Brent Witt describes this alone time between Darlings with a slightly more serious tone, speaking of “short and sweet, ecstatic spoons” and Darlings who “long and lingeringly kissed.”<sup>31</sup> Frances Wait also refers to “Fond embrace / Clinging kiss.”<sup>32</sup> However we may choose to interpret these possible allusions to activities of a more sexual nature, it is indisputably established by the writing of students that Darlings did partake in acts of physical affection which included close embraces and kissing.

One picture, found in The Spinster of 1907 is a unique and surprisingly bold display of physical affection between two students. The picture is captioned: “ATHLETIC OFFICERS Wood-Lockhart.”<sup>33</sup> It is a full-body portrait of Wood and Lockhart, standing together in a position that is reminiscent of the traditional wedding-style portrait in which the husband holds his wife in front of him. They are both looking straight at the camera while maintaining their intimate pose. This picture is frustrating; we are left with nothing more than the last names of the students pictured joined by a hyphen, and the caption “Athletic Officers.” Yet, the body language of the subjects hints at a relationship that runs deeper than a shared leadership position. When we cross-reference this picture of the Athletic Officers against the portraits of Athletic Officers in years prior to and after 1907, the uniqueness of this picture is outstanding. There is no other portrait that depicts students touching each other so intimately. The picture of the Athletic Officers of 1906 is the only portrait that comes close to depicting a similar level of intimacy. Captioned “ATHLETIC OFFICERS Satterfield-Denman,”<sup>34</sup> it shows Satterfield and Denman with their arms resting on each others’ shoulders; and no other physical contact. In the rest of

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<sup>31</sup> Witt “An Apology for Darlings” [unnumbered page between 150-1]

<sup>32</sup> Wait “Darlings” 54

<sup>33</sup> The Spinster, “Athletic Officers” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1907) p.146

<sup>34</sup> The Spinster “Athletic Officers” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1906) p.130b



the yearbook, there is no explicit mention of Wood or Lockhart being Darlings. Lockhart is also pictured in the Cotillion Club of 1907,<sup>35</sup> but this is only a slight indication of homoerotic tendency, from which we can draw no conclusions about her sexual identity.

One of the most exceptional aspects of the Darlings is that in their time period, a homonormative culture thrived as dominant alternative to a heteronormative culture. This culture of young women pursuing romantic relationships with each other was an essential part of the social environment at Hollins University. Darlings were embraced by students and celebrated as a standard part of social life.

The Senior Class descriptions of 1907 tell us that May Collins, the president of her class, “finds time to amuse herself with Darlings.”<sup>36</sup> If a figure as prominent as a class president can “amuse herself with Darlings” freely and openly, it can be assumed that there was no shame around Darlings at this time in Hollins history. Other seniors are remembered for their participation in Darling relationships in their Senior descriptions, such as Sina Lee Harris, who carries the couplet “Still amorous, fond, and cooing / Sina and Hallie are wooing”<sup>37</sup> next to her senior portrait. In 1908, Louise Boyce Murphy is described to have a “long train of Darlings always following her lead. Her proficiency in acquiring ‘Darlings’ maybe partly due, perhaps, to the fact that she plays the hero in all theatricals given on the Hollins stage.”<sup>38</sup> In 1911, we are told that Laura Agnew might “grow to huge dimensions... if some of her Darlings she would drop.”<sup>39</sup> This description goes on to name a particular student with whom Laura never stops

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<sup>35</sup> The Spinster “Cotillion Club” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1907) p.92d

<sup>36</sup> The Spinster “Senior Class” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1907) p.41

<sup>37</sup> The Spinster “Senior Class” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1905) p.25

<sup>38</sup> The Spinster “AC Class Portraits” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1908) p.40

<sup>39</sup> The Spinster “Senior Portraits” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins College, 1911) p.32

“singing praises of ” who is called “precious Tucky.”<sup>40</sup> It is safe to assume that “Tucky” refers to another student named Laura Tucker, who is the only student listed with the last name Tucker for that year.<sup>41</sup> In the same year, senior Mary Lake’s transformation from “meek as she could be” to “a typical heart grabber<sup>42</sup>, if you please”<sup>43</sup> over her four years at Hollins is documented in her senior description.

In 1915, *The Spinster* published superlatives for the students of the 1914-15 school year. Generic categories such as “Most Athletic” or “Most Academic” are included alongside the categories “Most Attractive” and “Most Handsome.”<sup>44</sup> For “Most Attractive” of 1915, Kass Judkins wins; “for attraction she’s just like a magnet, and our poor hearts, alas!”<sup>45</sup> Kass also has not just one Darling, but a whole group who “follow her ‘round the campus.”<sup>46</sup> “Most Handsome” is Bess Monroe, an actress who “saunters onto the stage, and her face... the praises of all does engage.”<sup>47</sup> As well as being “Most Handsome” Bess is also professed to be “the schoolgirls’ darling... doubtless quite the rage.”<sup>48</sup> These superlatives such as “Most Attractive” and “Most Handsome” continue sporadically in *The Spinster* for a few more years, but never again include information about the category other than the winner’s name.

Common practices in the wooing of a Darling included gifts of flowers and the exchanging of love notes. In “Real Diary of a Real Girl” the author tells us that “when the girls

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<sup>40</sup> “Senior Portraits” p.32

<sup>41</sup> *The Spinster* (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins College, 1911) p.19

<sup>42</sup> Outside the context of Hollins University, one might assume that the hearts being grabbed by Mary Lake were the hearts of young men. However, due to the geographical isolation and inaccessibility of the Hollins campus during this time period, there was a near complete lack of men’s hearts for Mary to grab. It is therefore safe to assume that the hearts being referenced are the hearts of fellow students.

<sup>43</sup> “Senior Portraits” p.33

<sup>44</sup> *The Spinster* (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins College, 1915) p.163-4

<sup>45</sup> *The Spinster* 1915 p.164

<sup>46</sup> *The Spinster* 1915 p.164

<sup>47</sup> *The Spinster* 1915 p.163

<sup>48</sup> *The Spinster* 1915, p.163

have darlings they send them candy and flowers and things.”<sup>49</sup> The “Hollins Handbook” of 1906 jokes that “Expenses [are] entirely based on the victim’s allowance, number of Darlings, frat, appetite and cheek.”<sup>50</sup> Satire newspapers are abundant in joke ads for flowers and other favors. An advertisement in “The Spinster Home Journal” proclaims to its reader: “All ye who hope to find favor in the eyes of your darlings: Go to Radcliffe, The Florist. Cut Flowers and Potted Plants.... why not show your appreciation of the beauties of nature and your love for your darling at the same time?”<sup>51</sup> The act of giving fruits was also common; the poem “The Bridge” paints a scene of Darlings courting each other on a nighttime stroll: “Walk with me, darling, on the bridge / and I will love you true / place but one orange in my hand / and I’ll not ask for two.”<sup>52</sup> The giving of small gifts to express affection was common practice among Darlings.

The joke advertisements did not stop at flowers, but also sometimes extended into fake advertisements for Darlings themselves. In the “Hollins Magazine,” published in The Spinster of 1914, an advertisement reads: “GRAND BARGAIN: Darling Cases for Sale! Let us have a Darling Case on YOU.”<sup>53</sup> The advertisement goes on to offer three different kinds of cases; First Class, Second Class, and Third Class.<sup>54</sup> The Third Class is the smallest package, promising “sweet notes twice a week” but “no candy or flowers.” for two dollars and fifty cents a month.<sup>55</sup> The Second Class case will give you “Slushy notes daily. Poems, sentimental love lyrics, weekly.” for only five dollars a month.<sup>56</sup> The First Class case is the most elaborate, including

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<sup>49</sup> “Real Diary of a Real Girl” p.176

<sup>50</sup> “Hollins Handbook” p. 124

<sup>51</sup> The Spinster “The Spinster Home Journal” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1906) p.145

<sup>52</sup> Ben Johnston, p.142

<sup>53</sup> The Spinster “Hollins Magazine” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins College, 1914) p.26

<sup>54</sup> “Hollins Magazine” p.26

<sup>55</sup> “Hollins Magazine” p.26

<sup>56</sup> “Hollins Magazine” p.26

“Flowers and candy alternate weeks. Long notes once a day... occasional club sandwiches, and other flattering anonymous attentions,” all available for ten dollars a month.<sup>57</sup> The humor of this advertisement is in the exaggeration of the acts of affection, however it can be assumed that all of these practices were commonplace enough for the hyperbole to take affect.

Most of these actions mirror our modern-day, stereotypical dating practices. In fact, many facets of the Darling culture are similar to our contemporary ideas on dating. In addition to trying to express affection through gifts and notes, Darling culture often manifested in more dramatic ways. Stories of “Darling Grabbers” and students having more than one Darling at the same time can be found in The Spinster, often portrayed in a joking light. Some students are referenced in The Spinster as having a reputation for being popular with the other students, sometimes to a fault.

In the “Hollins Handbook” of 1906, there is a section entitled “Notables All Freshies Must Know”<sup>58</sup> in which students are listed with traits they are well known for, such as “harborer of unuttered opinions... Gossip and distributor of scandal tid-bits... would-be spit-fire.”<sup>59</sup> Some of these descriptions include explicit references to Darlings or possible implications. A student named Frances Kitten Ligon is called “The Hollins Fanciful Flirt.”<sup>60</sup> Another student named Mincing Bradford is called “the witty Darling grabber.”<sup>61</sup> It seems that “Darling grabber” was a term used to describe students who were popular enough to not only collect Darlings of their own, but motivate Darlings to leave their previous partners to pursue a relationship.

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<sup>57</sup> “Hollins Magazine” p.26

<sup>58</sup> “Hollins Handbook” p. 126

<sup>59</sup> “Hollins Handbook” p.126

<sup>60</sup> “Hollins Handbook” p.126

<sup>61</sup> “Hollins Handbook” p.126

“The Country Comments” provides us with some gossip about the Darlings and their relationships. One entry reads “Mary G. Smith had better keep her eyes on her mate, for mysterious Gottlieb makes herself so popular with the ladies of Hollins... that some of the former “darlings” have been thrown in the shade.”<sup>62</sup> A section in “The Country Comments” titled “Darling Cases” lists a series of relationships in a style similar to engagement announcements. From these we learn that “Henrietta Goptar Taylor announces her engagement to the *sweetest* girl in school- S. Horne” Another announcement reads: “Miss Stella Relentless Baldwin, divorcee of Languishing Simpson, to Debonaire Hill.”<sup>63</sup> Here lies an example of one Darling leaving her previous relationship and entering into a new one, and the use of the word “Languishing” implies that Simpson was quite torn up about the loss of her Darling. Another student is called “Love Harris, the unequalled Beau Brummel of the season.”<sup>64</sup> Gottlieb, the student who Mary G. Smith was warned of is mentioned again. This time, we get a closer look at the reputation Gottlieb has acquired: “Dear, cute little Mazie Purcell has succumbed to the amorous glances of Lord High Thrillum Gottlieb.”<sup>65</sup> From the way that Gottlieb is described, it is clear that the students believed she had quite a profound power over the Darlings of Hollins University.

A true saga of Darling drama is chronicled in The Spinster of 1905. Brent Witt is a senior student and a writer at Hollins in 1905. Her senior description reads: “Of all the arts in which Brent does excel / Writing’s the one which she thinks she does well.”<sup>66</sup> Her poem “An Apology For Darlings.” is published in The Spinster of 1905. In “An Apology For Darlings,” Brent Witt

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<sup>62</sup> “Country Comments” p.123

<sup>63</sup> “Country Comments” p.123

<sup>64</sup> “Country Comments” p.123

<sup>65</sup> “Country Comments” p.123

<sup>66</sup> The Spinster (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1905) p.29

reflects on the relationships she has had with Darlings, with a sorrowful tone that implies her once happy relationship deteriorated for unrevealed reasons.<sup>67</sup> The poem is passionate, speaking of long talks and lingering kisses, and ends with “To you who love not clear pale moons / And short and sweet ecstatic spoons / And ne’er have long and lingeringly kissed, / You have no idea what you’ve missed / And I think to you I’ve made it clear / We stand to back our points here / And mourn, fellow sufferers, mourn / Our banished peace, our laurels torn.”<sup>68</sup> The poem is sincere and serious in tone, and it is clear that Brent Witt has had a deeply emotional relationship on which she is reflecting.

In contrast, a poem entitled “The Ballad of the B.L.U.” included later in the yearbook begins its second stanza with: “Brentie is a maiden fair / ‘Twilight eyes’ and ‘sunny hair’ / But Brentie Witt could not act square / Brentie’s crushes were not rare.”<sup>69</sup> The poem becomes a teasing critique of Brent Witt and her multiple Darlings. It goes on to say “Brentie rushed each one with zest / Brentie ‘loved each one the best’ / So she told these maidens, lest / One should walk with fallen crest.”<sup>70</sup> The poem is direct, and identifies each one of Brent’s Darlings by name. According to the ballad, Brent had up to six Darlings at the same time, until “These maidens met in Rose’s cell. / And played the great game of truth / Discovered that each one forsooth / Was loved best by Brent, said Ruth / ‘We’ll make her suffer, nail and tooth.’”<sup>71</sup> The story does not end well for Brent, who “is shunned by all / no single girl comes at her call / they well remember Brentie’s fall / We know Brent Witt feels - just - so - small.”<sup>72</sup> The saga of Brent

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<sup>67</sup> Witt “An Apology for Darlings” [unnumbered page between 150-1]

<sup>68</sup> Witt “An Apology for Darlings” [unnumbered page between 150-1]

<sup>69</sup> The Spinster “The Ballad of B.L.U.” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1905) p.178

<sup>70</sup> “The Ballad of B.L.U.” p.178

<sup>71</sup> “The Ballad of B.L.U.” p.178

<sup>72</sup> “The Ballad of B.L.U.” p.178

Witt and her Darlings is handled in a light way despite its potentially serious nature. Affairs between Darlings were often discussed in such a casual manner, yet there are some instances in which the students write about Darlings with a serious tone.

A short story written by Anna Muckleroy entitled “The Folly of It” is an ironic tragedy with an autobiographical undertone. Published in 1913, the story is set at Hollins, in what we can assume would have been the present-day at the time it was written. The story is split up into three “views,” and tells the story of a girl named Alicia, who is coming to Hollins for the first time.<sup>73</sup> The first view is a scene of Alicia as she is leaving for school.<sup>74</sup> Her fiance, Robert, is dropping her off at the train along with her parents. It is clear that Robert will miss Alicia while she is at Hollins, and he even contemplates “taking her up and running off with her” so that they will not be separated.<sup>75</sup> As the train pulls away, Alicia and Robert exchange declarations of love and promise not to forget each other while she is away.<sup>76</sup>

In the second view, we see a scene of Robert out hunting with his friends while Alicia is at school. Robert tells his friends that he’s glad to be at the ranch with them, and “you couldn’t pay me to have a woman fussing around here.”<sup>77</sup> He later reveals to his friends that he no longer loves Alicia, but is going to continue their engagement because he does not want to break her heart.<sup>78</sup> View three brings the reader to Hollins, where Alicia is studying with her new friend Rose. They discuss how nice it was to stay and study with each other instead of going to the soiree. Alicia reveals that she’s been worried recently, and Rose immediately moves to comfort

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<sup>73</sup> Anna Muckleroy “The Folly of It” *The Spinster*, (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins College, 1913) p.142-7

<sup>74</sup> Muckleroy, “The Folly of It” p.142

<sup>75</sup> Muckleroy, “The Folly of It” p.142

<sup>76</sup> Muckleroy, “The Folly of It” p.143

<sup>77</sup> Muckleroy, “The Folly of It” p.144

<sup>78</sup> Muckleroy, “The Folly of It” p.145-6

her; saying “‘Why, you poor darling’ said Rose, as she came over and put her comforting arms around Alicia’s neck. ‘What’s the matter? Won’t you tell me? You know I love you better than anybody, and I can’t stand to have you worried.’”<sup>79</sup> Alicia reveals that “I can’t love Rob much... I never think of him... there are so many things to do here that are more fun than sitting up and thinking of some boy.”<sup>80</sup> Alicia goes on to say that she loves Rose “six times better” than she ever loved Rob and she loves Rose “best of anybody.”<sup>81</sup> Rose reacts to this by telling Alicia that she needs to come home with her after school is over and “stay a long time,” and that she needs to break off her engagement because she can’t get married to a man she doesn’t love.<sup>82</sup>

Last comes the tragic irony of the story; Alicia tells Rose that she cannot break up with Rob because she would break his heart. The reader realizes that Rob and Alicia are going to enter into a loveless marriage, each blinded by the belief that the other one will be devastated if they leave.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps even more tragic than the story are the autobiographical undertones; which prompt the reader to imagine this could have easily happened in the writer’s own life.

The ending of “The Folly of It” perfectly captures how fleeting the freedom of Darlings to express their love was in their time period. Although the culture of Hollins might have been accommodating to these homoromantic relationships, there was no room for the Darlings to continue acting on their feelings once they graduated from school. It was an extremely rare occurrence that the young women of Hollins would not move into marriage after their graduation, and common that they would leave school early in order to marry. Within the complexities of human sexuality, it is impossible to discern how serious all of these relationships

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<sup>79</sup> Muckleroy, “The Folly of It” p.146

<sup>80</sup> Muckleroy, “The Folly of It” p.147

<sup>81</sup> Muckleroy, “The Folly of It” p.147

<sup>82</sup> Muckleroy, “The Folly of It” p.147

<sup>83</sup> Muckleroy, “The Folly of It” p.147



were. Most of what we can find are pieces that tell us about the external lives of Darlings; the closest we can get to understanding the individual emotions of these young women is the poetry they wrote for each other.

Romantic poetry written by Hollins students about their peers can be found in *Spinsters* from 1902 all the way to 1917. Most of it is serious in nature, deep and romantic confessions of love for each other. One such poem is “To,” by Mary Hume, which is a poem in which the narrator describes seeing her lover in a dream and craving her presence when she awakes.<sup>84</sup> A poem entitled “!!!!” by an unknown author takes a serious tone when the poet suggests that she is being torn between her feelings for two different students: “Her eyes were soft and horny / Her straight hair waved in curls / And as she looked upon me / I thought of other girls. / As on my troubled brow / She roughly pressed a kiss / My soul rose up and hollered / ‘Why surely, this can’t be bliss!’”<sup>85</sup> Many more love poems written by Hollins students can be found in the *Hollins Quarterlies*, also called the *Semi-Annual*, which was a literary focused publication of the Hollins students.

The most intense declaration of intimacy between students that was found in The Spinster is a quote set in between two senior portraits in 1902. The portraits of Martha Williamson and Davie Jasper are connected by the words “Those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.”<sup>86</sup> There is no context for this sentence, which stands alone in between the portraits of these women. Yet the implications seem to be clear; they believe themselves to be joined in such an intimate way that no man could ever break apart their union. If we were to read this sentence outside of a Darling context, we might believe it to be reminiscent of a wedding vow; “Those

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<sup>84</sup> Mary Hume “To” *The Spinster* (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1902) p.61

<sup>85</sup> *The Spinster* “!!!!” *The Spinster* (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1903) p.106

<sup>86</sup> *The Spinster* (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1902) p.112

whom God hath joined together.”<sup>87</sup> These two women, faced with graduating from Hollins and leaving each other forever<sup>88</sup>, ensured that their relationship would be preserved in one of the only ways available to them.

There are more questions than answers when it comes to explaining how this culture of homoromanticism was able to flourish in its time period. We can never know the true causes, but factors such as the geographic isolation of Hollins and the lack of male students are some of our best guesses.<sup>89</sup> Hollins is situated outside of Roanoke, Virginia. Due to the limited transportation opportunities during the era of Darlings, Hollins was effectively a social and cultural bubble.<sup>90</sup> Until the dawn of the automobile, when students arrived at Hollins their contact with the outside world shrank to letters and the rare visitor.<sup>91</sup> With this kind of isolation, it could have been easy for students to fall into a social pattern that did not necessarily exist in the outside world.<sup>92</sup>

As Hollins began to come into the 1920s, the culture of Darlings took a sharp decline until it entirely disappeared. In The Spinster of 1920, a student named Mary Noble Smith has a cartoon of two students holding hands under her senior portrait.<sup>93</sup> Later in the yearbook there is a comedic short story in which the president of the senior class visits a psychic to guess at what her classmates will do after graduating.<sup>94</sup> When she describes Mary Smith, she calls her “Nut Smith” who will have on “mannish clothes” and be “stringing sissy females.”<sup>95</sup> This is not a flattering

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<sup>87</sup> The Spinster 1902 p.112

<sup>88</sup> Along with their portraits, their home states are also listed: Martha is from Virginia, and Davie is from Texas.

<sup>89</sup> Joe W. Leedom, “The History of Darlings at Hollins University” .

<sup>90</sup> Joe W. Leedom, “The History of Darlings at Hollins University”

<sup>91</sup> Joe W. Leedom, “The History of Darlings at Hollins University”

<sup>92</sup> Joe W. Leedom, “The History of Darlings at Hollins University”

<sup>93</sup> The Spinster (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins College, 1920) p.30

<sup>94</sup> Joe W. Leedom, “The History of Darlings at Hollins University”

<sup>95</sup> The Spinster 1920, p.30

description of Mary; we can infer that the Hollins students have become less willing to accept their peers engaging in relationships with each other.

The story goes on, and the psychic tells the class president what she sees in the future for Mary: “I do not see ze mannish frock on zis, zis- nut. She is- what you say? - very domestick.”<sup>96</sup> Clearly, the students are not supportive of Mary’s current social deviance, and imagine a future in which she has righted herself towards social norms.<sup>97</sup> Mary Smith is mentioned one last time in The Spinster, as the butt of a joke in “The Spinster’s Parrot.”<sup>98</sup> The joke is titled “The Reformation of ‘Nut’ Smith” and is a list of steps that Mary should take to be more socially acceptable. The steps of Mary’s reformation are the following: “I. Wear dainty ruffled organdies. II. Take mincing steps. III. Handle all only as a *lady* should. IV. Avoid all *sissy females* of the butterfly type. V. Beware of Roses.”<sup>99</sup> The last step could be an allusion to another student at Hollins at the time; Rosa Vaughn, who is “engaged” to Mary Smith on the Cotillion Club page.<sup>100</sup> It seems as if the slang terms for homoromantic relationships had begun to change in 1920; nowhere in The Spinster of 1920 do we find Darlings, only “sissy females” and “nuts.”<sup>101</sup> By the 1921 Spinster, the only lingering homoromanticism we can find is cross-dressing in the Cotillion Club picture.

Coincidentally, the year of mocking Mary Smith was also the first year that cars appeared in The Spinster. In a page called “Driving Through Our Hollins Land” there are pictures of the Hollins campus surrounding a cartoon of a car.<sup>102</sup> The arrival of cars had a profound impact on

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<sup>96</sup> The Spinster, 1920 p.30

<sup>97</sup> Joe W. Leedom, “The History of Darlings at Hollins University”

<sup>98</sup> The Spinster “The Spinster’s Parrot” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins College 1920) p.161

<sup>99</sup> “The Spinster’s Parrot” p.161

<sup>100</sup> The Spinster “The Cotillion Club” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins College, 1920) p.122

<sup>101</sup> “The Spinster’s Parrot” p.161

<sup>102</sup> The Spinster “Driving Through Our Hollins Land” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins College, 1920) p.60

Hollins University; effectively shattering the bubble of social isolation it had previously existed in.<sup>103</sup>

The social exclusion faced by Mary Smith and the rejection of Darling culture was foreshadowed by small comments found in The Spinster in the years leading up to 1920. The writing of students began to center more around men; particularly around the men of the University of Virginia and Washington and Lee University, two all male colleges in the surrounding area.<sup>104</sup>

In 1916, an advice column in The Spinster features questions asking for advice about dating men.<sup>105</sup> In The Spinster of 1917, students write a short set of poems about students “tripping away” to “W. & L. and U. Va.” only to be caught by Miss Matty, who puts a stop to their trips.<sup>106</sup> In the 1918 Spinster, students jokingly announce “University of Virginia men to attend Hollins dances” in a list of other improvements they want for the school.<sup>107</sup> As Hollins begins to move into the 1920s, the students begin to show an interest in pursuing relationships with men at the surrounding colleges.<sup>108</sup>

When the era of the Darlings begins to fade into the past, there were some small aspects that endured past 1920. There is conclusive evidence that points to a Darling relationship between Miss Matty Cocke and Miss Marian Bayne, two faculty members of Hollins University. Miss Matty became the presidential successor of her father, the founder of Hollins University in 1901, and her presidency ended in 1933. She was born and died at Hollins College, and never

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<sup>103</sup> Joe W. Leedom, “The History of Darlings at Hollins University”

<sup>104</sup> Joe W. Leedom, “The History of Darlings at Hollins University”

<sup>105</sup> The Spinster “The Melting Pot” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins College, 1916) p.61

<sup>106</sup> The Spinster “I Wonder Why” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins College, 1917) p.8

<sup>107</sup> The Spinster “The Rolling Stones” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins College, 1918) p.4

<sup>108</sup> Joe W. Leedom, “The History of Darlings at Hollins University”

married.<sup>109</sup> Miss Bayne also worked at Hollins for the duration of her adult life, and never married. This alone is not entirely indicative of any intimate relationship between these two women, though it is significant to consider a woman living unmarried and with her own job during the early 20th century.

It is in The Spinster that we find more concrete evidence that Miss Matty and Miss Marian could have been Darlings. In 1904, a poem entitled “To M.L.C. and M.S.B.” is published next to a portrait of Miss Matty and Miss Bayne standing shoulder to shoulder. The poem is a passionate ode dedicated to the friendship of Miss Matty and Miss Bayne, from childhood into adulthood.<sup>110</sup> Lines such as “Broad life and sorrow found / And women wise and pure; / Two friends together bound / By love that shall endure. / Past years and through their length / A friendship yet more strong / Tried hearts with love’s own strength / For sorrow or for song”<sup>111</sup> seem to border on expressing a kind of relationship more intense than friendship. A poem published nine years later pushes the suspicions of a romantic relationship into clear Darling territory. Published in The Spinster of 1913, a short poem tells the reader: “Of all the Darlings in our land, / the best here you can see; / Where’er Miss Matty chance to stand, / There Miss Marian is sure to be.”<sup>112</sup> Besides the poem is a picture of the two together; Miss Matty standing beside Miss Marian, who is sitting in a chair on Front Quad.

The last time Miss Matty and Miss Marian were featured together in The Spinster is in the year 1939; when they shared a two-page memorial spread.<sup>113</sup> They died just 13 days apart;

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<sup>109</sup> Cocke, Martha Louise, "Martha Louise "Miss Matty" Cocke" (1901). Hollins University Presidents. Paper 2. <http://digitalcommons.hollins.edu/presidents/2>

<sup>110</sup> The Spinster “To M.L.C. and M.S.B.” (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins Institute, 1904) p.2-3

<sup>111</sup> “To M.L.C. and M.S.B.” p.2-3

<sup>112</sup> The Spinster (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins College, 1913) p.29

<sup>113</sup> The Spinster (Hollins, Virginia: Hollins College, 1939)

Miss Matty on August 15th, and Miss Marian on August 28th. Although the culture of Darlings might have died out in the early 1920s, we can only hope that Miss Matty and Miss Marian were able to happily continue their relationship until their last days.

The students of Hollins University in the early 20th century were privileged women from wealthy families; living comfortable lives as members of the Southern elite. Yet perhaps what made the students of Hollins most lucky was their time spent at school. Living in an age when their options were severely limited by their sex, the chance to have four years free of obligations to men or children was a true blessing. The Darlings of Hollins are a truly amazing phenomena because they are an expression of romantic and sexual freedom that could not have existed for women anywhere else. For some of these students, the marriages they entered into after school might have been loving and satisfying. For others, marrying a man might have been something in which they would never find true love or happiness. In both cases, marrying a man was always something that would be motivated to some degree by obligation. When the young women of Hollins University conducted romantic relationships with each other, they were loving freely and out of choice. The Darlings of Hollins existed as a fleeting moment in the history of the college, but with an impact on the lives of the students that can be felt a century later.