

BECOMING A GEOLOGIST: FLORENCE BASCOM IN WISCONSIN, 1874–1887

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ABSTRACT

Florence Bascom (1862–1945) was a petrologist and field geologist at Bryn Mawr College who provided a basic description and interpretation of major areas of Pennsylvania and surrounding regions. This paper is the first of a two-part study that explores the question of how Bascom became a geologist. The initial phase of this process took place in Wisconsin, to which she moved at the age of twelve when her father became president of the University at Madison. Both of her parents supported women's education, rights, and suffrage.

Bascom graduated from the coeducational university in 1882 and, in a series of fits and starts in which scientific study alternated with social pleasures and non-scientific pursuits, she began to take a serious interest in geology. In 1883–84 she studied under two well known geologists there, Roland D. Irving and his student Charles R. Van Hise, obtaining a B.S. degree. Although she did not participate in field work, she conducted laboratory research on the gabbros of Lake Superior using the petrographic microscope and thin sections. She obtained a Master's degree from the University in 1887 on the basis of this investigation.

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Figure 1. Florence Bascom in the field while professor of geology at Bryn Mawr College. (Photograph courtesy Bryn Mawr College Archives.)