CONNECTED LIVES

PART ONE: ETHEL WEBB AND THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

Image courtesy of Ruth Diamond

RUTH DIAMOND

Citation: Diamond, R. Connected Lives Part One: Ethel Webb and the Alexander Technique. *The Alexander Journal*. 2024, 29, 59-69

DOI: 10.15763/issn.2998-3509.2024.29.59-69

Abstract

In 2017, when the American Center for the Alexander Technique (ACAT) closed after more than 50 years, I decided to write a book celebrating its history and accomplishments. As I started my research, it became clear to me that a chain of interconnected women—Ethel Webb, Margaret Naumburg, Irene Tasker, Alma Frank, Henriette Michelson, Debbie Caplan, and Judith Leibowitz—played significant roles in bringing the Alexander Technique to the United States and establishing it in New York City. This first article in the series, looks at the life and work of Ethel Webb.

Editor's note: This is the first in a series of articles exploring the lives of a small group of women who played pivotal roles in the events leading to the birth of the American Center for the Alexander Technique (ACAT). Subsequent parts focus on Margaret Naumburg (part 2) and Irene Tasker (part 3).

Ethel Webb and the Alexander Technique

In 2017, when the American Center for the Alexander Technique (ACAT) closed after more than 50 years, I decided to write a book celebrating its history and accomplishments. As I started my research, it became clear to me that a chain of interconnected women—Ethel Webb, Margaret Naumburg, Irene Tasker, Alma Frank, Henriette Michelson, Debbie Caplan, and Judith Leibowitz—played significant roles in bringing the Alexander Technique to the United States and establishing it in New York City.

One of the first things that caught my interest was the relationship between ACAT co-founder Debbie Caplan and Margaret Naumburg, who founded the progressive Walden School in New York City. This seemed significant since I knew that Naumburg had arranged F.M. Alexander's passage to the United States during World War I and was instrumental in introducing him to John Dewey.

Caplan and Naumburg were connected through Caplan's father, Waldo Frank, a novelist and left-wing political writer who reviewed *Man's Supreme Inheritance* in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1919

and promoted the Technique in some of his books. Naumburg, Waldo Frank's first wife, heard about the Technique from Ethel Webb, a first-generation teacher who worked side by side with Alexander for more than 40 years. Naumburg and Webb met in 1913 during the First International Montessori Training Course held in Rome. First generation teacher Irene Tasker also attended this course, so Tasker, Naumburg, and Webb were connected through their Montessori training.

Caplan's mother, Alma Frank, was Waldo Frank's second wife. She taught at the Walden School and learned about the Alexander Technique from Naumburg. When Alma Frank went on to train as a teacher with Alexander in London, her husband paid her tuition and training fees. After graduating in 1940, she taught in Manhattan, where her students included Debbie Caplan, Judy Leibowitz, and Henriette Michelson.

ACAT co-founder Judy Leibowitz learned about the Technique from her cousin's piano teacher, Henriette Michelson, who had taken lessons with Alma Frank and also with Alexander. Michelson taught piano at The Juilliard School, where she championed the Technique and encouraged her pupils to study it with Alma Frank or with the only other New York teacher, Lulie Westfeldt. When Michelson retired from Juilliard in 1949, she emigrated to Israel and taught at the Rubin Academy of Music in Jerusalem. At the academy, she met Shmuel Nelken and encouraged him to study with Patrick Macdonald in London. Nelken trained as an Alexander Technique teacher with Macdonald and later established Israel's first training program, so Michelson is indirectly responsible for bringing the Technique to Israel.

Each of these women was a pioneer. They understood the importance of Alexander's work and made connections between his ideas and complementary progressive theories and practices within their own fields of expertise—music, education, psychology, dance, science, and physical therapy. They preserved the integrity of Alexander's discovery while broadening and deepening the scope of his work.

As I saw how the strands of their lives were woven into the history of the Alexander Technique in the United States, I began to appreciate the significance of their personal histories, interests, education, and talents in the evolution of an American approach to teaching the Alexander Technique—and to the birth of the American Center for the Alexander Technique.

I decided to follow the connections among these women, from Ethel Webb to Judy Leibowitz. Since Webb is the first link in this chain of women, I shall begin with her. Future articles will focus on Irene Tasker, Margaret Naumburg, Alma Frank, Henriette Michelson, Debbie Caplan, and Judy Leibowitz.

Ethel Webb
1866–1952

Ethel Webb was the first person Alexander trained to teach the Technique after he arrived in London and the first non-family member to teach in his practice. Alexander acknowledged her extraordinary contribution to his success in the preface of his last book, *The Universal Constant in Living (UCL)*.

> I must record special thanks to Miss Ethel Webb, who has been intimately connected with the work since 1911, consistently rendering most valuable help and encouragement to all engaged in it at 16, Ashley Place, whether as pupils or students. I am particularly indebted to her for the patience and perseverance which has characterized her invaluable help in making the subject-matter as clear as possible—in fact, without her help I fear these pages would not be ready for the printers today. (Alexander 1942, viii-ix)

In the literature, she is often referred to as Alexander's secretary or assistant, although as Jean M.O. Fischer (2017) writes, "[T]he help and support she gave Alexander in establishing his teaching practice and interviewing and looking after his pupils—as secretary, teacher and friend—went far beyond ordinary secretarial duties." She helped edit his books and provided him with important professional connections in both London and the United States. Frank Pierce Jones (Jones 1997, 29) believed that she did more to establish Alexander in London than any other person.

There are few photos of her, and I found only one short description in Lulie Westfeldt's (1998, 24) memoir of her training. "She was a small, cosy, attractive-looking woman, with just the right amount of plumpness. She was called 'Pip' by her students and 'our dear Ethel' by Alexander." Quiet and self-effacing, she devoted her life to promoting Alexander's work.

Ethel Webb was born in 1866 into a wealthy mercantile family with strong ties to the Unitarian Church of England. Many years later, during World War I, the Webb family's connections in the international Unitarian community would be crucial to the establishment of the Alexander Technique community in America.

In 1862, Webb's father, George, formed a partnership with his brother-in-law to open the world-famous jewelers' and silversmiths' establishment Mappin & Webb in London. Her father's death in 1889 left his wife, Ann, alone to raise eight children aged four to seventeen; but he also left her with an estate of £117,000—approximately £14,000,000 ($17,406,270) in today's currency. Ann Webb's strong will, powerful connections, and financial independence made it possible for her to provide her five girls and three boys with fine educations. One of her younger daughters qualified to be one of England's first women doctors and another daughter, Elsie, attended the progressive Roedean School, where she was taught by Elizabeth Fry, a Quaker who devoted her life to reforming British prisons, hospitals, and schools (Evans 2001, 153).

At the time of her father's death, Ethel was fifteen and enrolled in boarding school, where she received a classical education, including literature, art, and music. She was a talented pianist, and after graduating in the mid-1880s, she moved to Berlin to pursue her interest in the piano at the conservatory there. Just one decade earlier, Berlin had become the capital of the newly unified German Empire. Visiting around the same time as Webb, Mark Twain (1892) called Berlin "the Chicago of Europe." "It is a new city; the newest I have ever seen. The main mass of the city looks as if it had been built last week." The vibrant, chaotic, new city described by Twain suited Webb well, and after graduating from the conservatory, she remained there, establishing her career as a concert pianist. However, in 1890, back problems put an end to her performing career (Jones 1997, 77). Unable to play professionally, Webb accepted an invitation to visit New York with her American friend Alice Fowler. The two young women moved to Greenwich Village and set up successful practices teaching piano to the children of the wealthy and fashionable Washington Square set. The Village was an exciting place to live and work. By 1880, it had become a center of social reform, feminism, and the labor movement. Italian, German, and Irish immigrants were moving into crowded tenements, working in factories, and shopping in stores and stalls that had replaced elegant old town houses. It was becoming known as "Little Bohemia." Working-class residents mingled in seedy bars with avant-garde writers and artists. It was the age of ragtime music, Freudian psychology, and American pragmatism.

In the 1890s, upper- and middle-class women were shedding their corsets and stepping out into the wider world. Webb was not a suffragette, marching or staging hunger strikes, but in her quiet way she was, as she told Frank Pierce Jones (1977, 3) many years later, an "emancipated woman." She considered herself to be a feminist and had wide-ranging interests, a fine intellect, and an adventurous nature.

Webb and Fowler were part of a group of upper-class women active in social reform and the universal education movement. The focus of the progressive universal education movement was experiential learning. Empiricists were looking for ways to engage children through whole-body

experiences. In this light, Webb understood the importance of her role as a piano teacher and studied the writings of John Dewey, Friedrich Froebel, and other educational theorists. Many years later, her grasp of educational theory would prove useful as she worked with Irene Tasker to edit Alexander's books.

One of her piano students, Mary Potter Bush, brought Webb into a social circle that included the leaders of the progressive education movement. Bush's husband, Wendell T. Bush, was a wealthy Midwestern philosopher who had studied under William James and was at that time teaching in the Philosophy Department at Columbia University, while John Dewey was the dean of its Teacher's College. Like James and Dewey, Bush was an empiricist who believed that sensory experience is the source of all knowledge and that experiential learning must precede or accompany written explanations (Hutchinson 2015).

Ethel Webb made friends in Potter's circle, attended classes at Columbia, and studied the works of William James, learning about his groundbreaking innovations in the field of experimental psychology. Considered by many to be the greatest American mind of the late nineteenth century, James integrated ideas from psychology and philosophy into educational theory. Like Alexander, James knew from personal experience how impossible it is to separate mind from body, and he incorporated his insights into his theories.

Before James, scientists believed that a stimulus triggered a physiological response, which was then expressed as an action. James (1950, 449-50) maintained that it is impossible to isolate the components of experience. "Our natural way of thinking about these coarser emotions is that the mental perception of some fact excites the mental affection called the emotion, and that this latter state of mind gives rise to the bodily expression. My thesis on the contrary is *that the bodily changes follow directly the* PERCEPTION *of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion*."

Another way to express this might be: My anger does not cause me to yell; The triggering event, the adrenalin rush, the flush of my cheeks, and my loud voice are interconnected aspects of one unified experience. James called this connection *stream of consciousness*. (James 1950, 233). He was attempting to describe a non-dualistic reality that Alexander later called *the self*.

James's ideas radically influenced literature, art, education, and philosophy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Webb would encounter his ideas again in 1913, when she enrolled in Maria Montessori's first international teacher training class in Rome.

Interested in experiential learning and friendly with the social set that included Dewey and the Bushes, Webb knew about philanthropist Grace Hoadley Dodge's Kitchen Garden Association, which provided vocational training to poor immigrant women and their children. Dodge's work attracted the attention of serious thinkers within the fields of psychology, social reform, philosophy, and education who recognized the need for new pedagogical methods to engage children in learning (New York Times 1914). In 1887, Dodge funded the New York College for the Training of Teachers, which was designed to prepare professional teachers for the classroom. In 1892, with the help of Columbia University philosopher Nicholas Butler and philanthropists including George Vanderbilt, Dodge's school evolved into Teacher's College. In 1898, Teacher's College moved uptown and became affiliated with Columbia University. At the suggestion of Wendell T. Bush, John Dewey was hired as its first president. (Columbia University, n.d.)

Webb had created a richly fulfilling life in New York, but her mother was not pleased. A career in the arts or professions was permissible, but teaching in other people's homes, even rich people's homes, was unthinkable. Ann Webb wanted her daughter to return home. When Ethel resisted all of her arguments, her mother sent a telegram saying she was very ill. Ethel immediately sailed back to London. Upon discovering that her mother was feigning illness, however, she returned to New York. Around 1900, Ethel finally gave in to her mother's demands and returned to England to stay.

Back in London without a career to occupy her, Ethel moved in with her mother and tried to

keep up her piano playing. She had many friends in the arts, including the poet John Masefield, and she performed house concerts for them, but ongoing problems with her back and arms made playing increasingly difficult. She and her younger sister Elsie toured Europe, visiting music festivals, but when her sister married in 1907, their trips together ended (Evans 2001, 154).

In 1910, when Ethel Webb came across a review of Alexander's first book, *Man's Supreme Inheritance* [*MSI*] in *The Morning Leader*, she was 39 years old and unemployed. The review was written by William Archer, a popular Scottish writer and theatre critic best known for his translations and theater productions of Henrik Ibsen's plays. The piece drew positive attention to Alexander, although the critique was not really a book review. After calling *MSI* "able and interesting," Archer (1910) launched into a lengthy discourse on open-mindedness versus gullibility, apparently sparked by Alexander's chapter on habits of thoughts and body. Alexander understood the value of the publicity provided by the review and included it in the second edition of *MSI*, published in 1918.

The review motivated Webb to read the book and sign up for a course of lessons, which dramatically improved her health. Before long, she was working as Alexander's receptionist and assistant, an arrangement that made sense for both of them. Alexander needed an assistant and Webb needed a new passion. She became involved in every part of his practice. By 1914, Alexander had trained her to teach the Technique. Her gentle disposition and easy manner were, by all accounts, extremely helpful to Alexander's practice. His pupils loved her, but Alexander's wife Edith was not happy with the new arrangement. As Webb's duties expanded to include editing, publicity, and teaching, Edith grew increasingly jealous—and her jealousy was not completely irrational, since Alexander had a reputation for being a lady's man and Webb was openly infatuated with him, although there is no evidence that Alexander and Webb were ever romantically involved (Bloch 2004, 95).

While working full-time for Alexander, Ethel stayed abreast of developments in progressive education. In 1909, just one year before Webb's first lesson with Alexander, Maria Montessori (Montessori 2013, 260) had published a groundbreaking book describing a revolutionary new teaching method that she had developed in one of Rome's poorest neighborhoods, a method centered on providing children with activities and materials to stimulate their senses. Montessori was convinced that the senses were the "foundation of the entire intellectual organism," such that "there can be neither ideas nor imagination, nor any intellectual construction, if we do not presuppose an activity of the senses."She believed that all children have innate patterns of developmental learning built into their systems, and, if provided with properly structured activities, they will teach themselves what they want to learn.

When Maria Montessori offered her First International Training Course in Rome in 1913, Ethel Webb was one of just 93 teachers from around the world attending the program. She struck up a friendship with two young women attending the training, Irene Tasker and Margaret Naumburg, and she gave her new friends copies of Alexander's second book *Conscious Control* to read (Bloch 2004, 95).

Irene Tasker later wrote of reading this book for the first time:

> I still remember the excitement that I felt when I first read [in *Conscious Control*] that we are responsible ourselves for defects and inefficiencies which come from "continuing to perform wrong and detrimental actions" and then in the next paragraph to find that in the necessary reeducation "in every case the means rather than the end must be held in mind."
>
> I had already seen this principle at work in the Montessori school in which I had been an observer. Here the material for the children's occupations was designed by Dr. Montessori in such a way that no piece of work done was an end in itself, but a

> means to another end. For example the children learned to write not by writing but by preparing the means for writing in other occupations. (Tasker 1978, 6)

After the Montessori training, Tasker and Naumburg followed Webb back to London to take lessons with Alexander, and when Naumburg returned to New York to start Walden, an experimental school based on Montessori principles, she hired Tasker as a teacher.

Webb was very excited by what she had learned in Rome. She may have been the first to make a connection between modern progressive education and the Alexander Technique and to envision the role the Technique could play in elementary school education.

By 1914, Alexander had trained Webb to teach the Technique. The timing was auspicious as Alexander's newly-married sister, Amy, had left the practice to start a family. Little is known about Alexander's method of training teachers at that time and we have no documentation or first-hand accounts. Alexander's younger brother A.R. boasted that it took him just six lessons to learn how to teach. Their niece, Marjory Barlow, recalls the younger Alexander saying that he had never had a hands-on lesson from his brother, but these comments might be chalked up to sibling rivalry (Bloch 2004, 44). According It seems likely that Alexander trained his assistant teachers Ethel Webb and later Irene Tasker by giving them lessons, having them observe lessons, and then gradually allowing them to take over parts of lessons.

During World War I, the steady exodus of civilians fleeing the German bombing decimated Alexander's teaching practice. He had often expressed a desire to see America and so when Naumburg invited him to teach in New York in 1914, he accepted. Alexander sailed on September 12, leaving A.R. and Webb behind to manage his London practice. Naumburg arranged passage and accommodations, found him a teaching space in the Essex Hotel, and lined up influential students for him (Bloch 2004, 95). The practice thrived, and in December 1914, Alexander asked Webb to join him in New York as resident teacher to a crippled 10-year-old child. Before long, Webb was assisting in his practice and recruiting new students from her extensive contacts in the city, including her friends Mary Potter and Wendell T. Bush.

Bush was connected to some of the richest and most influential people in the city through his industrialist father, Rufus, and to the top scholars in the country through his own Columbia University professorship. Thanks to these connections, Alexander's roster of pupils included bankers, industrialists, writers, artists, and East Coast intellectuals, including Richard Morse Hodge (1918), a professor of English and Biblical Studies at Columbia. When the second edition of *MSI* was published, Alexander's new pupil Hodge wrote a full-page review in the New York Times. Hodge's review is detailed and substantive, and like William Archer before him, he saw the book through the lens of his own expertise, using the Bible as his reference point. "And rigidity of body induces rigidity of mind. A 'stiff necked people,' is a designation which occurs more than once in the writings of the ancient Hebrews and points to the accurate observation in ancient times of the habitual posture of the most obstinate individual."

In 1916, Wendell Bush introduced Alexander to John Dewey at a Columbia University faculty party. Malcolm Williamson (2017, 22) writes that "neither man knew anything of the other prior to their meeting in 1916" and that "John Dewey (1859–1952) was an established Columbia professor destined for a long and distinguished career as America's foremost philosopher while F. Matthias Alexander (1869–1955) was relatively unknown, his first book Man's Supreme Inheritance having had little impact in America." Williamson thinks that "both men must have recognised [sic] a certain straightforward honesty in each other."Dewey found that Alexander Technique lessons improved his health, and for the next eight years, he took lessons whenever Alexander was in the United States. The two men remained friends for the rest of their lives, and Dewey wrote introductions to three of Alexander's books.

Webb also introduced Irene Tasker to Dewey. Tasker, who attended Dewey's classes at Co-

lumbia, formed a close, lifelong friendship with Dewey and his wife, Alice, traveling by train with them across the United States. After that journey, Tasker returned to London. By 1917, Alexander had trained her to teach and she was assisting in his practice. Webb and Tasker were already working together to edit and consolidate Alexander's first two books, Man's Supreme Inheritance and Conscious Control, into a single volume. They consulted with Dewey as well as with Alexander to clarify the texts. "Although there were long deliberations possible," between Dewey and Alexander "even more must have taken place with Misses Webb and Tasker as between them they worked out the most precise wording for Alexander's books" (Williamson 2017, 23).

In the same article, Williamson describes significant changes in Alexander's thinking as expressed in his writing after he became friends with Dewey and after Webb and Tasker started editing his books. Williamson does an excellent job of tracing the way many of Dewey's ideas gradually worked their way into Alexander's theory, and he explains that this shift was not just the result of Alexander's direct encounters with Dewey but also reflected the influence of theories in progressive education as understood by Webb and Tasker. Perhaps the most dramatic ideas Williamson (2017, 36) cites are the introduction of the concept of the means whereby and the emphasis on having the proper attitude to learning.

From 1914 to 1924, Alexander spent the winters teaching in New York and the summers in London. Webb remained in New York while he was in London, but she returned to the UK permanently in 1920. The war was over and Alexander's thriving London practice once again needed her assistance. In addition, Webb's nine-year-old niece Erika Schumann had recently been diagnosed with scoliosis and she was then able to give her regular lessons. The closest we come to having an explanation of Webb's understanding of the Technique and of her teaching style are her niece's memories of these lessons. "I had lying down turns on the floor with the simplest of directions, suited to a child. One of them was think of your back spreading like strawberry jam on the floor. …That early simplicity has remained with me all my life" (Fertman, 2012). The lessons made a deep impression on the child, and eleven year later, she joined Alexander's first training class—she would become first generation teacher Erika Whittaker.

Webb's most effective lessons were short, friendly reminders to "keep her length" when practicing piano or writing. Whittaker believed that the power of those early lessons came from learning to attend to her own use while she was doing things she wanted to do, and from her aunt's skillful ability to keep the reminders so friendly and non-critical that the young girl looked forward to hearing them.

A wonderful video on YouTube shows Whittaker (2011) explaining her Aunt Ethel's style of teaching. "She said, 'Keep your length, dear.' Now the dear is very important because it makes it friendly. And she showed me. She took my head forward and up and lengthened me and showed me how to keep that going when I was writing or painting or playing the piano. Or if she caught me slumping around somewhere, she said, 'You are coming down, dear,' and up you came. It was as simple as that because my length was then part of what I was doing, not separated out, and it was my responsibility."

In the same video, Whittaker goes on to describe her aunt's approach to the Technique as much gentler than Alexander's, at least in his early years of teaching. Whittaker says that Alexander's teaching was "fierce" in those days. Someone told Whittaker that Tasker reported breaking out in "a cold sweat" during lessons. Whittaker says that he became much gentler and easier to work with later on, after his hands-on skill increased, but that her aunt knew how to engage students gently, without activating fear responses, even as a very new teacher.

Whittaker's recollections highlight Webb's use of brief interventions in the midst of activities, followed by time for pupils to integrate the new awareness by themselves, at their own pace. This approach anticipated Marjorie Barstow's teaching style by decades, and in fact years later,

Barstow acknowledged the influence of Webb and Tasker on her teaching style (Hunter 1988).

Erika Whittaker's memories of those lessons served as a reference point for reflections upon her experiences in Alexander's first training course, starting in 1931. In conversations with Hunter, excerpts of which were published on his blog, Whittaker explained that the first class was divided into two distinct groups that tended to work separately. She said that Patrick Macdonald, Lulie Westfeldt, Kitty Merrick, and Marjory Barlow were dissatisfied because "they were not being taught how to teach …[and] they began to observe what Alexander was doing and tried to recreate it themselves by working on each other." (Hunter 1998).

The trainees in the second group, including George Trevelyan, Erika Whittaker, Gurney Mac-Innes, and Irene Stewart thought that Alexander wanted them to find their own ways of working with his concepts, and they experimented with attending to their use while in activity. Whittaker said that this kind of experimentation seemed like a continuation of what she had experienced in her lessons with her aunt in 1919 and had seen practiced at Ashley Place in 1929 while helping her aunt with administrative work and assisting at the Little School, which Tasker had started in 1924 as a way to combine the Technique and Montessori-based elementary education. She found that the work her group did together developed the same skills her aunt had taught her for "keeping her length" while doing the things she loved or needed to do (Hunter 1998).

Marjorie Barstow, who did not belong to either clique of trainees, also traced her application work back to Ethel Webb and Irene Tasker. Barstow's approach was characterized by application work that "encourages observation, attention to process, decision making and what Marj called 'constructive thinking'" (Hunter 1988).

Webb's busy schedule assisting on the training course, teaching private pupils, managing the practice, and editing manuscripts continued until the outbreak of World War II, when her contacts in the Unitarian and Quaker networks in America once again proved extremely valuable.

The German bombing made conditions unsafe for the children boarding at the Little School in Kent. In July 1939, Alexander sailed to Halifax, Canada, with ten children, the mother and nanny of four of the children, Webb, and two newly trained teachers, Irene Stewart and Margaret Goldie. Alexander and Webb were able to obtain visas and enter the United States in August, but the rest of the group had to stay in Canada until they were granted visas in December. The two teachers waited in Maine, living in the summer house of Webb's good friend Alice Fowler.

During the months in Maine, Webb edited the manuscript of Alexander's new book, The Universal Constant in Living, incorporating changes made by Alexander in consultation with John Dewey. Evidently, the time in Canada and Maine exacted a toll on Webb's health; she was reported to have lost weight and become noticeably frailer.

In December 1940, the children and their guardians entered the United States; and in January 1941, the Unitarian Association of America offered Alexander and the children the use of the Whitney Homestead in Stow, Massachusetts. This offer may have been facilitated by the Webb family's Unitarian connections. The children's school was set up in a large, rambling, Victorian house on the estate. Webb, Irene Stewart, and Margaret Goldie taught the children. Alexander maintained a teaching practice in New York but visited the school regularly.

In 1941, the first American training course opened at Stow, with Frank Pierce Jones as the only student. Ethel Webb assisted on the training. Drawn together by common intellectual interests, she and Jones became close friends, spending time together in lessons and in conversations outside of the training. Jones (1950, 18) admired Webb greatly, calling her "a woman of character and breeding with a good education in literature and music."

Jones, a classical scholar, was teaching Greek at Brown University in Rhode Island when he started training. In his book, Freedom To Change, he recalled spending much of his first training year writing an article on the role of the classics in the emancipation of women in 19th century England. He lauded Miss Webb as "an unexpected aid… [who] remember[ed] the excitement . .

. in 1887 when Agnata Francis Ramsey alone in her class had won the honors in the [C]lassic[al] [T]ripos [exams] at Cambridge, a distinction that no male students ever obtained" (Jones 1950, 18).

Jones developed an Alexander Technique teaching style that focused on working with a pupil's thinking in the midst of activity, in order to help the pupil re-educate his or her own sensory register. In this way of working, he can trace his heritage to Webb and other first-generation teachers. Jones (1950, 153) wrote, "The aim of teaching, as I conceive it, is to bring a pupil to the point of self-discovery that F.M. reached when he was able to translate what he saw in the mirrors into kinaesthetic terms and to apply his new knowledge to the solutions of his own problem and become, in effect, his own expert in the use of himself."

After the Unitarians sold the Whitney estate in the summer of 1942, the children's school was forced to close, and A.R. Alexander moved the training course to the Braemore Hotel in Boston. In 1943, one of his pupils, Esther Duke, invited his brother and the other teachers to teach at a Quaker school in Media, Pennsylvania, but the older Alexander had become tired of living in America and was anxious to return home. However, Irene Stewart and Margaret Goldie taught in Pennsylvania briefly. In 1943, F.M. Alexander, Webb, Stewart, and Goldie returned to England. At that point, A.R. Alexander had already relocated the training course to Pennsylvania, but he suffered a debilitating stroke in 1945 and at that point returned to London. The Media school ultimately became the Alexander Foundation School; its history is recounted by Ruth Rootberg (2012, 29-33) in her article "The Alexander Foundation School: An Experiment in Education."

In the late 1940s, Webb was weakened by a series of strokes and could no longer teach. She managed Alexander's administrative work as long as possible, but her health continued to deteriorate. In December 1951, Alexander (2020, 289-290) wrote a letter to friends saying, "I am sorry to tell you that our dear Ethel Webb has suffered another stroke and if the details of the report I have received are even nearly accurate it is doubtful if she can go on very long. She has been so valuable a worker in all that has happened in and come out of 16 Ashley Place that she will be more than missed." She died in 1952, only a few years before Alexander's death.

Ethel Webb never married, and from the time she took her first lessons with Alexander in 1911 until her death in 1952, she devoted herself wholeheartedly to supporting Alexander and promoting the Technique. For forty years, she gave Alexander the benefit of her family and personal connections, her fine mind, broad education, and ceaseless hard work. Like A.R. Alexander, Margaret Goldie, and Irene Tasker, she became a teacher before there was a training course, and therefore depended less on formal training than on personal experimentation in learning how to teach the Technique. Her experiences teaching piano and studying pedagogical theory drove her belief in the importance of including the Technique in early childhood education. Her innate skill as a teacher and her gentle, creative approach to pupils served as a model for many of the first-generation teachers and acted as a counterbalance to more formal approaches to teaching.

It is impossible to separate Webb's devotion to the Technique from her devotion to Alexander. Because she was content to stay in the background, it is easy to underestimate her importance in the history of the Technique in England and in the United States. And it is hard to know exactly how much influence she had on the content of his four books.

Her work as an educator was instrumental in moving the Technique out of the medical model and into the world of education. Her interest in Montessori and her experiences in progressive education circles in New York City led Alexander to Dewey. Without her, Alexander would not have met Irene Tasker, and there would have been no Little School.

We cannot know how different the history of the Technique would have been if Webb had not happened upon Archer's review of MSI in 1910, but we can gratefully echo Alexander's (1942, viii) tribute to her in Universal Constant in Living and record special thanks to Ethel Webb for "consistently rendering most valuable help and encouragement" to all who were engaged in the Technique whether as pupils or students." As American Alexander Technique teachers, we owe

Webb a particular debt of gratitude. Without her, Margaret Naumburg might not have learned about the Alexander Technique, nor invited Alexander to New York City during World War I, thus introducing the Technique in the United States and eventually leading to the establishment of the American Center for the Alexander Technique, a uniquely American training program.

Future articles in this series will feature the contributions of Margaret Naumburg, Irene Tasker, Alma Frank, Henriette Michelson, Debbie Caplan, and Judy Leibowitz.

List of Abbreviations of F.M Alexander's Books Cited in This Article
MSI Man's Supreme Inheritance
UCL Universal Constant in Living

References

Alexander, F. Mathias. 1942. *The Universal Constant in Living*. London: Chaterson.
Alexander, F. Mathias. 2020. *F. Matthais Alexander Letters* Vol 2. Edited by Missy Vineyard and Jean M. O. Fischer. London: Mouritz.
Archer, William. "The Open Mind." *The Morning Ledger*, December 17, 1910.
Bloch, Michael. 2004. *The Life of Frederick Matthias Alexander: Founder of the Alexander Technique*. London: Little Brown.
Evans, Jackie . 2001. *Frederick Mathias Alexander: A Family History*. Chichester West Suffolk: Phillimore.
Fertman, Bruce. "Conversations with Erika Whittaker." *Studying with Bruce Fertman* (blog). May 25, 2012. https://peacefulbodyschool.com/2012/05/25/conversations-with-erika-whittaker/.
Fischer, Jean M. O. "Ethel Webb," December 30, 2017. https://mouritz.org/?article=ethel-webb.
Hodge, Richard Morse. 1918. "What is Man's Supreme Inheritance?" *The New York Times*, May 5, 1918. NOTE: Subscribers to The New York Times Time Machine can view this article at https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1918/05/05/98263334.html.
Hutchinson, Elizabeth. (n.d.). "The Bush Collection." Columbia University in the City of New York (website). Accessed April 2, 2020. https://edblogs.columbia.edu/AHISG4862_001_2015_1/sample-page/the-bush-collection/.
Hunter, John. "Marj Barstow #2, Moving Up, London 1988." *Marjorie Barstow: Master Teacher of the Alexander Technique* (blog by Robert Rickover). https://www.marjoriebarstow. com/articles/hunter2/.
Hunter, John. "The First Training Course in 1931: A Different Perspective." *Upward Thought* (blog). https://upward-thought.com/tag/irene-tasker/.
James, Willliam, 1950. *The Principles or Psychology.* New York: Dover Publications. https://psychclassics.yorku.ca/James/emotion.htm
Jones, Frank Pierce. 1997. *Freedom to Change.* London: Mouritz.
Montessori, Maria. 2013. *The 1913 Rome Lectures: First International Training Course.* Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company.
New York Times. 1914. "Grace Dodge Dead." New York Times. December 28, 1914. Note: Subscribers to The New York Times TimeMachine can view this article at https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1914/12/28/100129483.html?pageNumber=9+. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ww/9780199540884.013.u167176
Rootberg, Ruth. 2012. "The Alexander Foundation School." *AmSAT Journal*, no. 1, Spring 2012.
Tasker Irene. 1978. *Connecting Links*. London: The Sheildrake Press.
Teachers College: Columbia University. 2018. "A History of Anticipating—and Shaping—the Future." April 26, 2018. https://www.tc.columbia.edu/about/history/.

Twain, Mark. 1892. “The German Chicago.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 3, 1892.
Westfeldt, Lulie. 1998. *The Man and His Work*. London: Mouritz.
Whittaker, Ethel. “Alexander Technique Talk by Erika Whittaker,” 9:02. September 14, 2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQ8orz5h0lk.
Williamson, Malcolm. 2017. “Dewey’s Influence on Alexander.” *The Alexander Journal*, no. 26, Spring 2017.