Christine Ladd-Franklin was a noted logician and psychologist who added to the literature in both fields during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She proposed the antilogism, a major contribution to the field of logic, and contributed to psychological research. She was denied a research position at American University because of her sex. Her work was considered important enough that she was offered a teaching position in Germany where her husband was pursuing mathematical research.

Christine Ladd-Franklin was born in Clinton, Connecticut, on December 1, 1847. Her parents came from cultured New England families. Her mother, Maria Mitchell, who became a mentor to Ladd-Franklin, was a noted astronomer and the first American woman admitted to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1847. Her father, William Ladd, was a noted author and professor of rhetoric.

Ladd-Franklin attended Vassar College for nine years. Ladd-Franklin qualified for a PhD in 1882 but was denied the degree because she was a woman. The university eventually granted her degree in 1926, when she was nearly 80 years old.

While studying mathematics at Johns Hopkins, Ladd-Franklin became interested in logic because of her work on color theory. She was denied a research position at American University in 1887 because she was female. The university eventually granted her degree in 1926, when she was nearly 80 years old.

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Appointment, Ladd-Franklin lectured on psychology at Columbia University, although she drew no salary and was not considered faculty. She remained at Columbia until 1927.

Shunned by Male Scientists

One of her greatest disappointments was exclusion from an elite group of experimental psychologists known as the Experimentalists. Cornell University psychologist E.B. Titchener began the club in 1904 and invited the heads of psychological laboratories and up-and-coming junior faculty and graduate students to attend the informal meetings. Titchener specified that no woman would be allowed to participate. Ladd-Franklin had known Titchener, who was 20 years younger than she, for many years and was incensed at her exclusion. When the group met at Columbia in 1914, Ladd-Franklin told Titchener that not inviting her to the meeting at her own university represented a medieval attitude and that his policy was “so unconscientious, so immoral, — worse than that — so unscientific.” (78) Ladd-Franklin was permitted to attend one session but was never invited back. She continued to protest the group’s men-only policy, but the group continued to exclude women until long after Ladd-Franklin’s and Titchener’s deaths.

During the final years of her career, Ladd-Franklin studied “blue arcs,” which she believed showed that active nerve fibers emit a faint light. Ladd-Franklin published Colour and Colour Theories in 1929. It was comprised of her major works on vision.

Ladd-Franklin died of pneumonia in New York City on March 5, 1930. She was 82 years old. Although she had made many contributions in the fields of logic and vision, she was never fully accepted in the male-dominated scientific community.

Books


Periodicals