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Jane Lathrop at the time of her 1850 marriage to Leland Stanford.
The tenacious and courageous

Jane L. Stanford

by Roxanne Nilan

In 1893, Jane Lathrop Stanford became the administrator of a $30 million estate that included a major interest in one of the country’s important railroads and sole financial responsibility for a newly created California university. Known primarily as the quiet, pious, and devoted wife of Leland Stanford—U.S. senator, former California governor, and president of the Southern Pacific Railroad—Jane Stanford was to surprise even close friends with her broad grasp of the financial operation of the Stanford estate, her courage during financial crisis, and her tenacity of purpose.

Leland and Jane Stanford founded the Leland Stanford Junior University in 1885 in memory of their only child, Leland Stanford Jr., who had died the previous year at the age of 15.

The Founding Grant, which defined the scope and organization of the University and provided for its endowment, represented their mutual interests and participation. The Stanfords first address to the new Board of Trustees gathered at their San Francisco residence was presented by Senator Stanford on behalf of them both. Although few documents survive, it is clear that Mrs. Stanford took an active role in planning the University and in some areas, particularly the museum and the church, took the lead. Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard at the time of the Stanfords’ visit to Cambridge in 1884, later wrote:

...Mr. Stanford really had two objects in view. He wanted to build a monument to his dead boy; but he wanted to do something which would interest his wife for the rest of her life, and give her solid satisfaction. The latter motive seemed to me the strongest in him. I thought, too, that she had done much more thinking on the subject than he."

Although the University opened in 1891 with a proposed endowment of more than $20 million, 465 students, and a bright future, Senator Stanford’s death in 1893 left it financially and legally insecure and organizationally incomplete.

The grant contained two unusual provisions. The Stanfords reserved the right to exercise all of the functions, powers, and duties of the provisional Board of Trustees. They also reserved the right to alter or amend the nature, object, and purposes of the University and the powers and duties of the trustees. As surviving gran-

An 1873 photograph of Jane Stanford and her son, Leland Jr., taken by Bradley & Rulofson of San Francisco
Following the death of her husband, Mrs. Stanford, who had found happiness and fulfillment in her role as wife and mother, acquired a position of financial independence and potential power eagerly sought by feminists throughout the United States. She now had a clear choice of roles — to exert her influence as businesswoman and sole financial backer of Stanford University, or to relinquish control of the estate to business managers and instead return to domestic life. The 65-year-old Mrs. Stanford accepted the new responsibilities without hesitation.

Leland Stanford had stated upon creating the University that “the children of California shall be our children” and Mrs. Stanford assumed this role with great solemnity. “Mother of the University” in her own mind, she soon became such in the minds of all other “Stanford people.” The operation of Stanford University — for the next 12 years — would be a domestic affair.

I

The financial security of the University seemingly had been assured by the Founding Grant of 1885. The grant stated that the Gridley Farm (19,000 acres in Butte County), the Stanford Vina Ranch (55,000 acres in Tehama County), and the Palo Alto Stock Farm (8,800 acres in Santa Clara County), with “all other property, real or personal, which we, or either of us, may hereafter convey or devise to the trustees ... shall constitute the foundation and endowment of the University herein provided.”

Estimates of the Stanford estate ran as high as $30 million. The University was to receive more than two-thirds of that estate upon the death of both founders. This endowment would exceed that of any of the major universities in the United States.

Until the deaths of both Leland and Jane Stanford, however, the University in its own right possessed little more than its buildings and approximately 90,000 acres of marginal land. The fabulous endowment was provided in the Founding Grant — no gift of money was given to the University to be controlled independently by a University business office or treasurer. Instead, funds were allocated to President David Starr Jordan by the Stanford Business Office in San Francisco when he submitted specific requests.

Funds for construction were handled directly between the San Francisco office and the contractors and architects. Jordan was satisfied, however, for his budgets were “limited only by Mr. Stanford’s statement that he should have all the money that could be wisely used, and that a modest beginning was expected and desired.” As the size of the student body and the faculty grew, optimism in the Stanford campus community abounded. “No shadow larger than a man’s hand could be discerned anywhere on the horizon, except perhaps in the extreme reluctance with which the Business Office in San Francisco conceded even the modest scale of expenditure,” wrote University Registrar Orrin L. Elliott.

But the bright picture changed rapidly with Senator Stanford’s death two years after the University opened. Jane Stanford, now the administrator of the Stanford estate and surviving grantor to the University, was faced with an economic depression affecting her major investments, uncooperative business associates in the Southern Pacific Railroad and the Pacific Improvement Company, and legatees demanding their share of the Leland Stanford fortune.

To add to her problems, the estate was indebted to the Pacific Improvement Company for loans withdrawn by the senator with consent of his three partners for construction of University buildings. There was also a stockholders’ liability of $7 million, Stanford’s share of the $28 million debt of the Southern Pacific Railroad. The estate was immediately tied up by the probate court, and income to the University stopped.

Advised to close the University until the financial situation improved, Mrs. Stanford isolated herself for two weeks of prayer and meditation. She emerged to announce that the University would remain open as long as there was any chance for its survival. Herbert C. Nash, Senator Stanford’s secretary, gave Mrs. Stanford’s first message to a San Francisco Examiner reporter:

“Mrs. Stanford says that it will be her solemn duty to carry out the great work which had been so successfully inaugurated. She told me to state further that she was thoroughly conversant with the details of the Senator’s plans and was familiar with all his wishes. Her life will be devoted to completing the task which was left unfinished. She will endeavor to do just what the Senator would have done had he lived.”

Mrs. Stanford would expend much effort to make the University financially and legally secure and to carry out her pledge.

Her first worry — and President Jordan’s — was to find immediate income for the University until its share of the legacy was released. A beginning was made when the probate judge fixed her household allowance at $10,000 a month (her normal monthly expenditure up to this time) and ruled that the professors of the University were technically her servants. Mrs. Stanford reduced her staff from 17 to three and her own expenses to $350 a month. The balance was sent to President Jordan for salaries. In order to pay for equipment and other needs, Jordan shaved salaries 10 percent.

This monthly sum was not a gift of the probate court but a sum derived from estate earnings. Unable to collect dividends from railroad stock or to sell stocks and bonds from the estate, Mrs. Stanford turned to the Vina Ranch, a viticultural experiment in Tehama County which was costing the estate $500 a day to operate. The $500,000 inventory of brandy immediately was sold; 150 employees were laid off and the salaries of most of the rest reduced. Although the wine and brandy operations were continued, acreage also was leased to farmers for one-third of the profit derived from crops. By 1895, Vina was finally paying its own way; eventually it began to show a profit.

In May 1894, the U.S. government filed a contingent claim against the Stanford estate for the amount of $15,237,000, Leland Stanford’s share, with interest, of
the government's construction loans made previously to the Central Pacific Railroad. These loans were not yet due and, according to California law, the stockholders of the corporation were no longer personally liable for the debt, but the legal outcome could not be presumed.

The possibility of a long, complex lawsuit threatened great expense to the estate and probable closure of the University. While the suit was pending, distribution of the estate to other legal claimants under the probate proceedings could not continue.

Again advised to close the University, Mrs. Stanford's response was characteristic: "Up to the present time I have kept the University going, and I expect to keep right on the same as I have done." The lawsuit not only placed further financial burden on the University, but was regarded by Mrs. Stanford as a personal attack upon the honor of her husband. His name, and the name of the University, must be vindicated.

The suit continued through the California Circuit Court and the Circuit Court of Appeals, each handing down decisions in Mrs. Stanford's favor, to the U.S. Supreme Court. When a favorable decision was finally received from the Supreme Court in March 1896, pandemonium broke out on campus.

In a letter read to a crowd of students and faculty gathered in the Quad, Mrs. Stanford thanked them for their sympathy and loyalty, and President Jordan told them that they could do anything but "tear down the buildings or paint the professors." The campus Post Office was promptly painted Stanford red (greatly improving its appearance, President Jordan said). Upon settlement of the court case, Mrs. Stanford proceeded with payment of all debts and legacies, and the estate was discharged by the probate court by the end of 1898.

The future again looked bright. Jordan, thinking of temporary retrenchment, had promised in 1893 to operate the University on whatever funds Mrs. Stanford could supply. Now, obligations long delayed had to be met. "The University was presumably ready to take a long breath, fill up gaps in its faculty, bring salaries to normal, correct inequalities, provide long needed equipment, and begin to realize the brilliant future Dr. Jordan had preached so persuasively in season and out." Mrs. Stanford, however, had different ideas about the next steps to be taken, and as surviving founder, she retained control of the funds now available to the estate. President Jordan had administered the University efficiently and, without foreseeing the consequences, had consistently assured Mrs. Stanford that the University was doing well. It appeared prosperous and was respected throughout the country.

Mrs. Stanford concluded that Jordan could continue in this manner and should not attempt any unnecessary expansion; there were enough students and faculty for the present. She now intended to carry out Senator Stanford's plans for the completion of the University buildings which they had discussed before his death. This she saw as her own cherished task; if left to the trustees, fruition would come too late.

Mrs. Stanford had already stated her intentions regarding use of money from the estate in her address to the trustees in 1897:

"We should not be ambitious to increase the present number of students — eleven hundred — for some years. If our Heavenly Father spares me to become the actual possessor of the property it was intended should be mine, it would afford me great satisfaction to add some necessary buildings — the chapel, library building, chemical building, and two additions to the museum."

President Jordan also saw the need for buildings, but after "six long years," as he phrased it, he had anticipated relief for faculty salaries and the purchase of needed equipment as well as funds for the expansion of certain departments and introduction of others. For the next five years, Mrs. Stanford and President Jordan
spared over Jordan’s annual budget proposals, in which he carefully explained each expenditure, each increase in costs or salaries. Mrs. Stanford had the obvious advantage, but Jordan satisfied himself with the knowledge that while she kept a strict hand on the finances, her frequent trips abroad after 1898 to take various “cures” kept her at a distance from the daily operation of the University.

Salaries were raised to a competitive level, new professors hired, and needed equipment and books purchased. Each year Mrs. Stanford cautioned against unnecessary expansion and waste:

“I have thought much on these lines, feeling assured I would be pleasing the dear one gone to go slowly and not expend money for an additional number of students, professors or teachers... the running expenses must be kept where they are until I feel thoroughly justified in further expanding and enlarging. ... I would greatly appreciate taking a little ease after the hard struggle and many personal deprivations for six and a half years, and I cannot but feel in a sense appalled at the big sums you quote.”

Reports (usually from Charles Lathrop, Mrs. Stanford’s brother and business manager) of “extravagance” at the University distressed her. She reprimanded Jordan when he hired new professors or assistants or bought new equipment without having previously discussed the matter with her. She became particularly critical of his outlay of money for additional new salaries. In May 1903, she wrote to him, “I have always felt that I should be consulted in regard to the making of all appointments, particularly when such appointments would call upon me for a larger outlay of money.”

With regard to funding, Stanford University had a particularly domestic arrangement. Mrs. Stanford, opposed to seeking other financial support (although some other gifts were accepted from family and close friends, such as Thomas Welton Stanford and Timothy Hopkins), provided more than 90 percent of the University’s operating funds.

Leland Stanford had believed (as had everyone else) that the proposed endowment of the University would be more than sufficient to provide income for the first quarter century. Beyond those 25 years, he felt the University would have gained friends who would interest themselves in its progress and contribute to its support. At no time were the students to be asked to contribute more than a nominal registration fee, nor were the trustees of the institution to be approached.

Unfortunately, Senator Stanford’s plans could not be carried out easily due to the financial crisis following his death. Mrs. Stanford, determined to follow her husband’s intentions, refused to consider an alternative source of funds while the Stanford estate was restricted by lawsuits. She refused to consider President Jordan’s suggestion of raising the registration fee above $10 and was distressed to learn her friends and members of the Board of Trustees had been approached by Stanford professors for contributions for specific needs.

In 1895, when funds were particularly tight, the Hildebrand Library of about 4,000 volumes and 1,000 pamphlets was offered for sale to the University. Mrs. Stanford decided she could not afford the purchase and considered the matter settled. Members of the faculty then tried another source. Mrs. Stanford responded to President Jordan:

“It has pained me very much that the Professors think they have the liberty to apply to any of the Trustees for money. These Trustees were not appointed with the idea that they would ever be called upon to aid in supporting or helping the University in a financial way. When they were solicited to aid in purchasing the library which Professor Flugel (sic) was so anxious to secure for the University, I did all I could to prevent it, although I knew full well what an advantage it would be to the University to secure it. It was deeply mortifying to me that I was not able to purchase it myself but it was far more mortifying to me that the Trustees were solicited and did come forward, and with the aid of the Professors, made the purchase.”

The University kept the library, but Mrs. Stanford insisted that the trustees be repaid.

Mrs. Stanford objected strongly to such solicitation of funds not only in view of her husband’s opposition, but also because she found it an intimation that she could not adequately provide for the University:

“Imagine my surprise when Dr. Gardner a few days ago applied to me for permission to collect money from the congregation to be present at the Baccalaureate Sermon for the purpose of defraying the expenses of the Guild. It struck me as peculiarly officious that anyone connected with the University could consider for a moment that they had a right to collect money from anyone. I took it as a reproach upon the memory of my husband and upon me that money should be solicited for any purpose connected with the University, and there is something radically wrong when such instances will occur, and I am made unhappy and miserable...”

After years of dealing with President Jordan’s budget requests and ideas of expansion, she stated her position bluntly in 1903:

“Instead of allowing you a ‘free hand’ and to use your best discretion for the salary roll, I think it is absolutely necessary for me to use my best discretion, as probably I know better what I can afford than anyone else, and I alone am responsible for the payment of obligations. ... The fact is entirely lost sight of that the Leland Stanford Junior University is a charity institution and supported entirely by one person.”

The public soon gained the impression that Mrs. Stanford refused all offers of help for the University and enjoyed the role of “Lady Bountiful.” It is true that she was used to the role of benefactress and gave, unasked, generously and graciously to many charities, particularly those involving children. She disliked being solicited for money, however, and “begging letters” were rarely answered. It is not surprising that she disliked appearing in what she considered a begging role.

“President Wheeler of the (University of California) is making himself and the Institution of which he is the honored head, a perfect burden, a byword, because it is really a begging institution. All sorts of artifices are employed to extract from the people larger and larger sums for its support, and our institution and my work here must never be disgraced by becoming a begging institution.”
As Mrs. Stanford intended, the University gained the reputation of a wealthy school requiring no outside financial help. This did little harm during its first years when she was able to meet its needs. When control of its supposedly astounding endowment was finally received by the University, however, it was substantially below many other American universities in financial backing and could not expand beyond its position as a good local college without additional income. Several years after Mrs. Stanford’s death (and in contrast to her policy), the University would have to solicit funds beyond the Stanford community as well as impose a tuition charge.

Mrs. Stanford’s relationship with President Jordan suffered periodic setbacks, usually over budgetary matters. It was seriously marred, however, by the “Ross Affair.” In the late 1890s, sociology professor Edward A. Ross gained notoriety following several years of political activism in favor of the free silver movement, municipal ownership of utilities (including the railroads), and Japanese exclusion. While Mrs. Stanford found his opinions personally objectionable, her main concern was the reputation of the University, which she felt would be damaged by hasty espousal of political and social fads. The founders had intended the University to be free from the pressures of political partisanship; the apolitical nature of the University was now endangered by Ross’s activities.

Publicly, Mrs. Stanford affirmed President Jordan’s power as defined in the Founding Grant to “remove professors and teachers at will,” giving him full responsibility for clearing up the matter; privately, she pressed for Ross’s dismissal. She disagreed with Ross’s economic theories and thought his views were critical of positions taken by her late husband. She was indignant about the idea of municipal ownership of railroads, but she was particularly shocked by his anti-Japanese stand. Mrs. Stanford identified such attitudes with the earlier anti-Chinese movement instigated by Dennis Kearny and the resulting terror that had pervaded San Francisco. Ross, she felt, was a racist.

Mrs. Stanford wished Ross to go quietly, as a gentleman; President Jordan surmised accurately that the activist had little intention of doing so. A man whose administrative style had strongly impressed the academic community, Jordan now vacillated between pleasing Mrs. Stanford and upholding his image. After several confused attempts at compromise that engendered misunderstandings among Jordan, Mrs. Stanford, and Ross regarding the latter’s reappointment to the faculty, Jordan finally asked Ross to resign in November 1900.

To ensure public sympathy, Ross promptly issued his version of the dismissal to the press on November 14, 1900. He had been dismissed arbitrarily by Mrs. Stanford, he declared, over the opposition of President Jordan. The actual roots of dissension were immediately blurred by extreme public reaction to the touted issue of academic freedom.

The entire matter proved to be greatly embarrassing to the University, particularly to its president. Mrs. Stanford was disturbed by the notoriety the University received from the incident. Having assumed that in her absence (she was again traveling in Europe) Jordan would handle the situation discreetly and with dispatch, she did not realize that Jordan had no control over Ross’s continuing press statements. Her trust in Jordan was shaken; following the incident, she increasingly questioned his actions in the areas of salaries, hiring, planned growth of the academic program, and faculty control of student conduct.

In response to a request by Jordan in 1903 for development of a university, rather than college, program, Mrs. Stanford indignantly proposed to the Board of Trustees complete reorganization of the academic program and questioned Jordan’s original selection of the faculty. In a confidential letter to the trustees in 1904, she suggested specifically which departments and faculty members could be eliminated, implying that Stanford University appeared to be an extension campus of Indiana and Cornell universities, with which Jordan had been affiliated before coming to California and from which he drew many of the Stanford faculty.

Mrs. Stanford began indicating privately that she was thinking of taking a more direct role in the operation of the University. George Crothers, a prominent San Francisco lawyer who was a Stanford alumnus, secretary of the Board of Trustees, and a confidant of Mrs. Stanford’s, was aware of at least three addresses written by Mrs.
Stanford designed to force the resignation of President Jordan and certain others. Crothers convinced her that under the circumstances she would not be able to secure an appropriate replacement for Jordan and implied that the trustees would have more success. "Her resignation (of her powers to the trustees in 1903) was doubtless largely motivated by her conclusion that her ideas in this and other matters would make more rapid progress if she resigned and let the Trustees act. Before she resigned she said she had pledged a majority of Trustees to retire Dr. Jordan."

Rumors abounded that Mrs. Stanford planned to replace Jordan with Crothers. She valued Crothers' friendship and guidance because of his service to her in repairing legal discrepancies in the University's Founding Grant and perhaps because he resembled young Leland Stanford Jr. Years later, Crothers said he declined Mrs. Stanford's request that he groom himself for the presidency.

II

Leland and Jane Stanford both believed that it was their personal responsibility to supervise the construction of all necessary University buildings before their deaths. In this aspect of the early growth of the University, the influence of Mrs. Stanford is most clearly seen, for it is here that she deviated most drastically from the original architectural plans of her husband.

While employing landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted to create the master campus plan and the eminent Boston architectural firm of Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge (successors to H. H. Richardson) to design the buildings, Senator Stanford personally had insisted on a number of major design elements and had maintained strict on-site control of construction. The master plan devised by Stanford and his architects consisted primarily of a series of laterally connected quadrangles, providing for orderly future expansion. Arcades with rounded arches would connect buildings within the quadrangle and provide a link between quadrangles.

Stanford wanted a distinctly Californian style of architecture, reflecting California colors and suited to California weather. While the influence of H. H. Richardson is obvious, the University's architectural style is reminiscent of the romanticized view of California missions with arcaded courtyards, red tile roofs, and rounded arches.

The association with Olmsted and with Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge had been dissolving slowly since 1889 and essentially was broken before the Senator's death in 1893. Little work was done from 1891 to 1893. All construction stopped with the beginning of probate. Much remained to be completed when funds again became available, and Mrs. Stanford was determined that the physical plant — her personal responsibility — would be finished before her death.

Accordingly, the period President Jordan was to name
the Stanford "stone age" began. Mrs. Stanford directed the bulk of her energy and funds to construction. Local architects and builders were hired and Charles Lathrop was to see that Mrs. Stanford’s wishes were carried out while she was away from the University.

The main quadrangle was finished in accordance with the original plan, but the design of the Memorial Church, prominently placed in the inner quadrangle, was subject to striking alterations, the most obvious of which was changing the facade from plain stone to Venetian mosaics inspired by San Marco Cathedral.

To those who argued belatedly in favor of placing the library at the focal point of the quadrangle, Mrs. Stanford maintained that the influence of the church upon the students’ development was crucial. The church stood not for a particular doctrine, but for moral conscience:

"Don’t think that I believe that any particular creed or that even the church itself is capable of making saints of some folks. Such things are not matters of creed; . . . I mean that men and women should be sound at the core, whatever their doctrines may be."

Adhering to the original plan, Mrs. Stanford placed the non-denominational Memorial Church at the heart of the University.

But she deviated from the master plan by constructing four buildings near Palm Drive and ignoring the quadrangle expansion scheme. She also introduced a style completely foreign to the campus — neo-classicism. The Museum, designed prior to the Senator’s death and considered to be Mrs. Stanford’s project from the beginning, reflects her architectural preferences. Some form of museum at first was intended for the quadrangle, but a plan for a larger, more ambitious museum suggested a location away from the Quad.

A separate architectural firm, Percy and Hamilton of San Francisco, drew up plans based on the design of the Leland Stanford Junior Museum, below left, was built on campus by Jane Stanford in 1891 to house antiquities her son had begun collecting as a teenager. The side wings and central dome fell in the 1906 earthquake and were not rebuilt. On trips abroad following Leland Jr.’s death, Mrs. Stanford continued collecting artifacts for the museum. In 1904 she traveled to Egypt (below right, seated on camel in foreground). A trip to India with Bertha Berner (below center; Mrs. Stanford on right) probably was part of the same journey.
National Museum of Athens, which Leland Stanford Jr. and Mrs. Stanford had both admired. The main building was constructed of reinforced concrete by engineer Ernest Ransome and was completed by October 1891.

Mrs. Stanford showed little interest in Ransome's innovative use of concrete, but it was much cheaper than the sandstone masonry of the quadrangle—a great asset in the eyes of business manager Charles Lathrop. She was pleased with the sharp look of concrete and authorized its use again in the construction of the new library, gymnasium, and two wings added to the Museum. The Ransome method of reinforcement was not used, however; a cheaper method of construction was substituted. The new library and new gymnasium originally had been planned for the quadrangle, but Mrs. Stanford relocated them along Palm Drive to balance the chemistry building and the Museum and again selected the neo-classical style for their design.

The quality and method of construction of the newer buildings was soon tested. On April 18, 1906, just 13 months after Mrs. Stanford's death, an earthquake shook the San Francisco Bay region. Buildings constructed under Senator Stanford's supervision fared reasonably well; the later buildings suffered great damage.

III

For Senator and Mrs. Stanford, the students of Stanford University were the reason for its existence, an attitude they clearly expressed at the opening day ceremonies, October 1, 1891:

"You, students, are the most important factor in the University. It is for your benefit that it has been established. To you our hearts go out especially, and in each individual student we feel a parental interest."21

The Stanfords demanded a University policy of no tuition in order to provide an excellent college education for the serious student regardless of economic background. And serious those students must be. Mrs. Stanford had no intention of encouraging those "bound to infest the institution as the country grows older, who wish to acquire a university degree or fashionable educational veneer for the mere ornamentation of idle and purposeless lives."22

The Stanford "boys and girls" were both a delight and an immense worry to Jane Stanford. She enjoyed their freshness and vitality and was greatly pleased when the students recognized her or went out of their way to entertain her. In response to an invitation and two tickets from Esther Keefer, student manager of Stanford's women's basketball team, to the team's first game, Mrs. Stanford wrote:

"I have the usual weaknesses of human nature to highly appreciate all tender, kind attentions from the young. I sometimes feel that all I have left to me and all that I can claim in Earth life are the love and prayers of the students of Stanford University."23

She was particularly concerned with the students' moral education, hoping that Stanford graduates would go on to live honorable and productive lives while contributing to the welfare of the community. Mrs. Stanford had a strong sense of propriety and expected from the University, as had her husband, a parental type of supervision of student activities. Her original picture of the University, long before plans were formally drawn up, consisted of a series of cottages, each with about 20 students, whose personal habits, manners, and activities would be supervised by the teacher in charge:

"Every care will be taken to make these cottages homes in the real sense of the word... where the day begins and ends in prayer, and where each individual is brought under refined discipline. Those cottages intended for boys will be about a mile distant from those occupied by girls. I think it will be a splendid opportunity for boys and girls to learn how to conduct themselves toward each other in a refined and decorous manner."24

Though the students were ultimately housed in dormitories and some boarding houses, Mrs. Stanford still expected them to behave as proper ladies and gentlemen. Concerned especially about the female students, she personally hired and fired the mistresses of Roble Hall, the women's dormitory. She heartily approved of musical, social, and athletic events, but she frowned upon disorderly conduct at such events just as she disapproved disorder in any person or assembly.

Objecting only to those college pranks that involved the rights of the public or moral turpitude, Mrs. Stanford envisioned a set of precise, orderly written regulations; here she differed with Dr. Jordan, who also believed in a strong code of ethics but felt that the University could not assume a parental role.

"If your college assume (sic) to stand in loco parentis, with rod in hand and spy glasses on its nose, it will not do much in the way of moral training. The fear of punishment will not make young men moral or religious—least of all a punishment so easily evaded as the discipline of a college... A college can not take the place of a parent. To claim that it does is mere pretense. You may win by inspiration, not by fear."25

Jordan firmly insisted that no written rules govern the students. Describing Stanford's system in 1897, he wrote:

"The institution has no rules to be broken. Nothing allowed by the laws of California is forbidden by the faculty. Hence, in general, no punishments are threatened or administered. A student is fit to stay in the University or he is not."26

In place of rules, the students were expected to abide by a Fundamental Standard of student conduct:

"Students are expected to show both within and without the university such respect for order, morality, personal honor, and the rights of others as is demanded of good citizens. Failure to do this will be sufficient cause for removal from the University."27

Though hoping for some sort of written regulations, Mrs. Stanford initially accepted Jordan's experiment at discipline. During the years of financial difficulty, few problems arose. A sense of pioneering, enthusiasm, sympathy for Mrs. Stanford and Dr. Jordan's predilection, and common goals prevailed.

The situation began to change as the student body
grew and the sense of pioneering and struggle under a common hardship faded. Discipline under Jordan's system had proven to be somewhat arbitrary, and Mrs. Stanford sympathized with students who, in the absence of any written regulations, were unexpectedly dismissed or suspended by the faculty Student Affairs Committee. Bypassing Jordan, in an address to the trustees in 1902, Mrs. Stanford began to press for some sort of written code that would be incorporated as an amendment to the Founding Grant: "It shall be the duty of the Board of Trustees to make general laws providing for the government of the University, and to provide for just and equitable rules of discipline."  

A year later, the board tried to circumvent responsibility by passing a resolution that the president should be requested to make and to enforce rules of discipline governing the conduct of students. Given Dr. Jordan's disposition against rule-making, nothing came of the resolution until the next spring. In early 1904, when adopting the original Articles of Organization of the Faculty, the Board of Trustees provided that the president of the University "shall be primarily responsible for the enforcement of discipline in the University," and that "all general University regulations, statutes and rules ... shall be initiated in and passed by the Academic Council."  

Jordan agreed to ask the Advisory Board to consider the question of a code of rules, and the issue came to a head in late 1904. Mrs. Stanford, increasingly worried about the reputation of the female students, had expressed concern to George Crothers. In a letter to Horace Davis, vice-president of the Board of Trustees during Mrs. Stanford's presidency, Crothers wrote: "Before Mrs. Stanford left for New York, she made a vigorous protest to me against the laxity of student discipline, especially as to the girls, and expressed herself very radically as to the whole system of coeducation."  

Cautioned by Crothers that coeducation at Stanford might be at stake, Jordan agreed to certain changes. Jordan reported to Judge Samuel F. Lieb, chairman of the University Committee of the Board, outlining arrangements, such as placement of housemothers in all of the sororities, but went on to insist that:

"As a matter of fact the girls of the University form, the part of the institution most careful as to their behavior, most self-respectful and most trustworthy in essential matters. In spite of the idle talk of gossips of all degrees, it is rarely that any young woman on the Campus puts herself in a position where one would not like to see his daughter."  

Even Crothers, who toyed with the idea of hiring a professional detective to work with the Student Affairs Committee, had to admit to Mrs. Stanford that "in view of almost total absence of restraint, the conduct of the students in general is exceptionally good."  

In February 1905, the Advisory Board adopted the recommendation made by the Student Affairs Committee that it was undesirable to adopt specific rules, that rules would undermine the attitude of cooperation on the part of the women students with the presidency and Student Affairs Committee, and that "such regulations would be difficult to form, and very much more difficult to enforce, and their mere existence would probably exert an influence whose moral and intellectual effect would be undesirable."  

Whether Mrs. Stanford would challenge this conclusion soon became a moot point. On February 28, 1905, she unexpectedly died while on holiday in Honolulu.

IV

Mrs. Stanford's concern for the discipline of the women students and the doubt she developed in her last years regarding the effects of coeducation on serious study have since colored the public's view of the founders' original intentions. Leland and Jane Stanford were firmly convinced of the value of coeducation. His address to the trustees on the founding of the University expressed their general view of women's rights:

"We deem it of first importance that the education of both sexes shall be equally full and complete, varied only as nature dictates. The rights of one sex, political and otherwise, are the same as those of the other sex, and this equality of rights ought to be fully recognized."
While Mrs. Stanford originally envisioned a boys' school at Palo Alto to memorialize her son, the decision was made for coeducation and Mrs. Stanford stood by it firmly. When construction slowed on the women's dormitory, threatening delayed admission of women, she insisted that if women were to enter the University, they must enter at the same time and on equal footing with the men and she pushed the dormitory to timely completion. She ignored later criticism of coeducation from Harvard and Yale businessmen and pressure from a Catholic group hoping to establish a separate girls' school at Menlo Park under Stanford auspices.  

Mrs. Stanford had a strong rationale for coeducation:

“I want in this school that one sex shall have equal advantage with the other and I want particularly that females have open to them every employment (sic) opportunity suitable to their sex. I believe by so educating them they will be made stronger physically and mentally and better fitted for wives and mothers, and I believe that if the vocations of life are thrown open to them, without their engaging in anything unsuitable to their sex, they can add another twenty-five percent to the power of production of the country, and this will go far toward realizing the possibility of giving comfort and elegance to every person.”

By 1898, after experiences in administering the Stanford estate and problems with her husband’s business associates, she became keenly aware of the need for women to have a voice in the protection and management of their property. Correspondence with Susan B. Anthony, begun in 1888 with a donation of $200 to the campaign for women's suffrage, developed into a long and sympathetic friendship. In her correspondence with Miss Anthony, Jane Stanford showed an ever increasing awareness of the inferior political and economic status of women of all backgrounds.

Although asked several times to take part in the campaign in California for the amendment to grant women the vote, there is no evidence that Jane Stanford appeared in public to speak on the issue. Had the women's rights movement taken on a less political and public overtone, and had her interest been awakened in a more financially secure decade, Mrs. Stanford's support probably would have been more constructive. She had been a strong supporter, for example, of the kindergarten movement in the West since the 1880s and established a day care center for the children of working women on the site of her deceased parents' home in Albany, New York, in 1899.

As the mother of a university she felt she could not take a public political stand. She also had another concern: while the campaign for the California amendment was being conducted, Mrs. Stanford's mind and energies were devoted to the financial survival of the University. Her support of the campaign was apologetically reduced to private encouragement.

Reflecting the preferences of her time, Mrs. Stanford never swerved from her belief “that of all the walks of life a woman may be destined to tread, there is none higher, or more beautiful, or influential, than that of a loving, intelligent wife and mother.” Thus, while accepting and, in fact, becoming a “new woman” working outside the home, Mrs. Stanford maintained the belief that a woman could have a career or marriage and a family, but could not have both.

In light of expressed support for the education of women, Jane Stanford shocked everyone in 1899 by limiting the number of women who could register at one time at Stanford University to 500. The limitation, set as a condition to her gift of more than $10 million worth of property to the University, could hardly be ignored by a stunned President Jordan. The action brought much criticism both from inside and outside the University as equal rights for women had become a popular issue among liberal thinkers. She won the support of two of her strongest critics, President Jordan and University Registrar Orrin Elliott, by insisting that her action did not stem from prejudice against women as students and by emphasizing her belief in the refining influence of women both at the University and in the world in general.

Her rationale, expressed in her 1899 address to the trustees upon the presentation of her gift, was a fear that the increasing percentage of women students (up to 40 percent in 1899 from 25 percent in 1891) would lead eventually to a majority of women. Stanford would gain the reputation of a women's school, word that was already being circulated, and such a reputation was unacceptable for a memorial to a young man.

Mrs. Stanford neither anticipated nor favored any major increase in the size of the student body; in fact, the limitation of 500 fixed the percentage of women at Stanford at 35-40 percent until after World War I. As enrollments climbed during the 1920s, however, the trustees were faced with a growing dilemma: Stanford University, founded firmly on the belief in equal education for both sexes, was becoming a men's school. In 1933, with the ratio of women to men down to 14 percent, the trustees repealed Mrs. Stanford's limitation.

V

Reared during the 1830s and 1840s when social ideals narrowly defined feminine behavior, Jane Stanford, along with many American women late in the century, faced a difficult choice of roles. She refused to jeopardize the position of respect and honor she had gained as wife and mother and she redefined her sphere to domesticate the University. In a difficult position between role and reality, Mrs. Stanford implemented policies regarding the operation of the University which were at times confusing, at times contradictory. The complex financial needs, ambitions, and growing diversity of the Stanford University community could not be administered as one would administer the needs of a household nor did she have, much to her regret, a formal education of her own; as a result, some of her policies proved shortsighted in later decades and were amended or reversed by the Board of Trustees.

Yet an important result of Mrs. Stanford's approach to governing the University was the spirit that bound Stanford students and faculty to the University for many years. Graduates still return to the University to give
financial support, to teach, to administer, to guide. While a similar attitude exists at many colleges, Stanford's spirit is particularly couched in terms of family loyalty and responsibility.

Mrs. Stanford's relationship with President Jordan is also of special significance, for if Mrs. Stanford was the mother of the University, then Jordan was its stepfather. Between them, they operated the University, promoted its idealism, and educated thousands of students. Their relationship was one of compromise — albeit most often on Jordan's part — and one of sincere mutual support. Regardless of their many disagreements, Mrs. Stanford continued to depend upon, and express gratitude for, President Jordan's sympathy and understanding of the burdens he shared in part with her. While Mrs. Stanford began privately to express strong opposition to Jordan's methods and threatened to remove him, she took no final action and continued to express her support publicly.

Many of the disagreements between President Jordan and Mrs. Stanford can be traced to the complaints and fears of others. Jordan, a highly idealistic and ambitious administrator, made enemies at the University who gave voice to their enmity in strongly worded correspondence with the anxious Mrs. Stanford who, in turn, never hesitated to speak her mind honestly to the president. Jordan ultimately chose to ignore his many differences with Mrs. Stanford and after her untimely death praised her devotion to the University, her loyalty to the original founding plans, and her business ability. His praise set a pattern: Mrs. Stanford has rightfully retained her position as Mother of the University to the present day, and the University reflects that pride and faith shared by Jane Stanford and David Starr Jordan.

NOTES

5. Ibid., pp.50, 252.
6. Ibid., p.86.
7. San Francisco Examiner, 23 June 1893.
8. San Francisco Examiner, 6 June 1894.

15. Letter, Jane L. Stanford to David Starr Jordan, 15 April 1896, Jane Lathrop Stanford Papers. This 1895 letter was misdated. The effort to acquire the library was encouraged by Dr. Julius Goebel, Professor of Germanic Philology and Literature.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
24. Quoted in Elliott, Stanford University, p.454.
29. Stanford University Board of Trustees, Report of the Organization Committee upon the Organization of the Faculty and Articles of Organization of the Faculty of the University as Adopted . . . (Stanford: Stanford University, 1904), chapter II, sec.3 and chapter IV, sec.6.
30. Letter, George E. Crothers to Horace Davis, 22 November 1904, Horace Davis Papers, Stanford University Archives.
32. Letter, George E. Crothers to Jane L. Stanford, 4 June 1904, Horace Davis Papers.
33. Report, Committee on Student Affairs to Advisory Board, 2 February 1905, and Advisory Board to David Starr Jordan, 10 February 1905, Committee Actions, vol.1, Student Affairs Committee Records, Stanford University Archives.
34. Elliott, Stanford University,p.132.