This summer, I researched Katharine Dexter McCormick, a 20th century women’s rights activist and philanthropist. Katharine McCormick is unique as her involvement in philanthropy and activism spanned across time, issues, and fields. I investigated how her background, her other interests, and her education informed and influenced her philanthropy and activism, including research for the birth control pill. Despite her extensive involvement in the Pill’s development, she has not received significant attention in scholarly accounts. My research this summer consisted of visits to libraries and archives of original works, analysis of primary and secondary materials, and electronic browsing of online collections.

This summer I gained general research skills, honing both my archival skills and my understanding of historical methodologies. I also gained experience in using microfilm machines to read the microfilm reels, relying on the accompanying guides to speed up the process. Reading through Katharine McCormick’s personal correspondence and papers provided me with greater insight into her character and motivations. These insights are simply unavailable in the existing scholarly literature.

This research project contributed to my educational experience by allowing me to independently research and expand upon a historical footnote that I initially encountered in class and felt warranted further exploration. I believe that my educational experience would not have been complete without an independent research project, which allowed me to further develop my research skills and possibly prepare myself for graduate level academic work.