

Muncy Female Seminary and its famous teacher, Rose Elizabeth Cleveland

Williamsport Women

by MARY SIEMINSKI, JANET HURLBERT

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Sun-Gazette Correspondent

The Muncy Female Seminary was chartered in 1840 “for the education of Female Youth in arts, sciences, and useful literature.” The school attracted young women from Muncy and boarding students from as far away as Baltimore and New York state.

The Female Seminary, similar to a private high school today, was noted not only for its alumnae — young women from the Wallis, Petrikin, Montgomery, Ellis and Rankin families, among others — but also for its most famous faculty member, Rose Elizabeth Cleveland. The youngest sister of President Grover Cleveland, she was hired in 1869 to teach Greek and Latin. In 1885, she was chosen by her newly elected, but unmarried, brother to serve as his First Lady.

The seminary opened with about 25 students and grew quickly. At one time there were 200 students, according to Katherine Yurchak (“Where Wigwags Stood,” 1994). Prior to the opening of the school, young girls in Muncy were edu-

school was taken over by the new Presbyterian minister, Rev. William Life, and his wife, Susan Lamont Life. “With the design of giving a thorough education and elevating and refining the character, both mentally and morally, and fitting the pupils as far as possible with a high degree of usefulness,” they rented the seminary building at the corner of Main and Pepper Streets and recruited students and teachers (Now and Then, v. 5, 1936).

The Muncy Female Seminary prospered. Susan Life, the principal, was committed to giving young women a solid education. According to Eugene P. Bertin, “like other intellectual leaders of her sex, she was struggling against tradition in a effort to give women a more generous place in the sun” (“Now and Then,” v. 6, 1930). She hired the “highest type of teachers, to be had in music, art, elocution, literature and Latin, French, Italian, and German.” A French Mademoiselle conducted classes in French, and an Italian Signorina taught classes in voice (Now and Then, v. 5, 1936).



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Pictured above is a 1870s postcard of the Muncy Female Seminary, located at the corner of Main and Pepper streets in Muncy. The classroom building is on the left and a boarding home for students is on the left. Pictured at right, a pencil sketch of Rose Cleveland in 1869, when she was a teacher at the Muncy Female Seminary. Artist is unknown. Both images are

