

Williamsport schools for young ladies

Williamsport Women



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"Where did she go to school?" is a question I often puzzle over when researching individual 19th-century Williamsport Women. Information is scarce. Artist Dewing Woodward was said to have attended the Hattie Hall Seminary for Young Ladies; suffragist Henrietta Baldy Lyon attended Miss Wilson's School.

Scattered bits and pieces of information about Hall's and Wilson's and other schools for young ladies are found in newspaper announcements and city directory listings. In 1836, M. A. Heylman and P. Hall issued a prospectus for a seminary for young ladies. Lib S. Lowe opened a school for girls at 310 W. Third St. in 1884, and Jessie M. Kline had a Private Day School for Young Ladies and Children at 205 W. Fourth St. in 1898. Since schools were not



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Pictured is a plaque dedicated to Sophia and Jane Wilson, which was erected by the Alumnae Association of the Wilson School.

required to register with the state, there were most likely others that went unrecorded.

Many public schools were established in Lycoming County toward the end of the 18th century. Both boys and girls attended the first school in Williamsport, a log structure built on Court House Alley in

1796. The first teacher was the English-born Apollos Woodward, Dewing Woodward's grandfather.

Williamsport Academy, the precursor to Lycoming College, was established in 1812. The first students were male; the academy

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began admitting females in the 1830s.

A special school for girls was founded in 1808, when the total population of Williamsport was only about 125. That school, according to a newspaper advertisement placed by Sally McEwen in the Lycoming Gazette for March 2, 1808, and quoted by John F. Piper Jr. in his book "Lycoming College, 1812-2012: On the Frontiers of American Education (2012)," reads:

"The subscriber informs the inhabitants of the borough of Williamsport and its vicinity, that she will open a School for Young Ladies, on Monday, the 14th inst and will teach reading, writing, embroidering, tambouring, sampler work, weaving fringe and plain sewing and will also provide every material necessary for the accommodation of those who may think it proper to attend."

FEMALE SEMINARIES

Private schools for young ladies gained popularity in the mid 19th-century, likely as a result of the growing number of wealthy families who sought more prestigious educational opportunities

for their daughters. Often called seminaries, academies or select schools, many of these institutions were founded and run by women and gave girls and women the chance to discover their intelligence and experience life in a community of women. In 1840 there were 33 seminaries for young ladies registered in Pennsylvania. Many provided the option of a day school or boarding, either at the school or with local families. According to state records, the average tuition was \$16.78 for a school year. For boarding students, fees averaged \$124.18 a year, including room and board.

HATTIE HALL SEMINARY FOR YOUNG LADIES

Hattie (Harriet) Hall (1833-1910) established a "female boarding and day school for girls" in 1858, in association with Gertrude and Virginia Moore. The Moores were sisters of Rev. Richard Channing Moore, who was rector of Christ Episcopal Church on East Fourth Street from 1855 to 1865. According to Edward Henry Eckel's *Chronicles of Christ Church Parish, Williamsport, 1840-1896* (1910), the school was

first located on Basin Street, near East Third Street, and then moved to a building on the property of another of the sisters' brothers, G. Bedell Moore, on the northwest corner of West Third and Center streets.

I could find no information on the course of study at Hattie Hall's, but her obituary stated, "her death is sincerely felt by the former pupils here ... Daughters of the White, Hepburn, Anthony, Maynard and other families prominent in the early development of Williamsport came under the careful tutelage of Miss Hall" (Williamsport Sun-Gazette, May 11, 1910).

MISS WILSON'S SCHOOL

Miss Wilson's School was another private school for young ladies that was known for its alumnae. "The young ladies holding certificates from Miss Wilson's" were received by the woman's colleges without examination" read the obituary of head teacher Jane Wilson (1834-1911) in the Williamsport Sun-Gazette (Dec. 7, 1911).

The young ladies who attended Miss Wilson's School came from "Williamsport's finest families, and included girls with last names like Lyon, Crocker, Stearns, Coryell, Beeber, Culler, McCormick, Foresman, Klump, Laird and Bowman," according to an article by Lou

Hunsinger Jr. in the Webb Weekly (Jan. 21, 2009). Among the alumnae were not only Dewing Woodward but also Bella Herdic McCormick.

Miss Wilson's was located at 470 Pine St., where the Rialto Theatre later stood. S. E. (Sophie) Wilson was the principal; Evelyn L. Barbour, teacher of mathematics and Latin; and J. M. (Jane) Wilson, teacher of painting.

Meeting in the Park Hotel in 1911, school alumnae formed an association. They compiled a list of alumnae, held a reunion and erected a plaque in honor of Jane and Sophie Wilson in Covenant Central Presbyterian Church.

Another seminary, the Muncy Female Seminary, will be featured in an article of its own. Its claim to fame is not only that its students were prestigious, but also that its teacher of Latin and Greek was Rose Cleveland, sister of president Grover Cleveland and "first lady" for the first 15 months of his presidency.

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