

short version



THE ALBANY ACADEMIES

Archives and Collections
135 and 140 Academy Road
Albany, New York 12208



January 25, 2010

200 years at Albany Academy for Girls

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Introduction

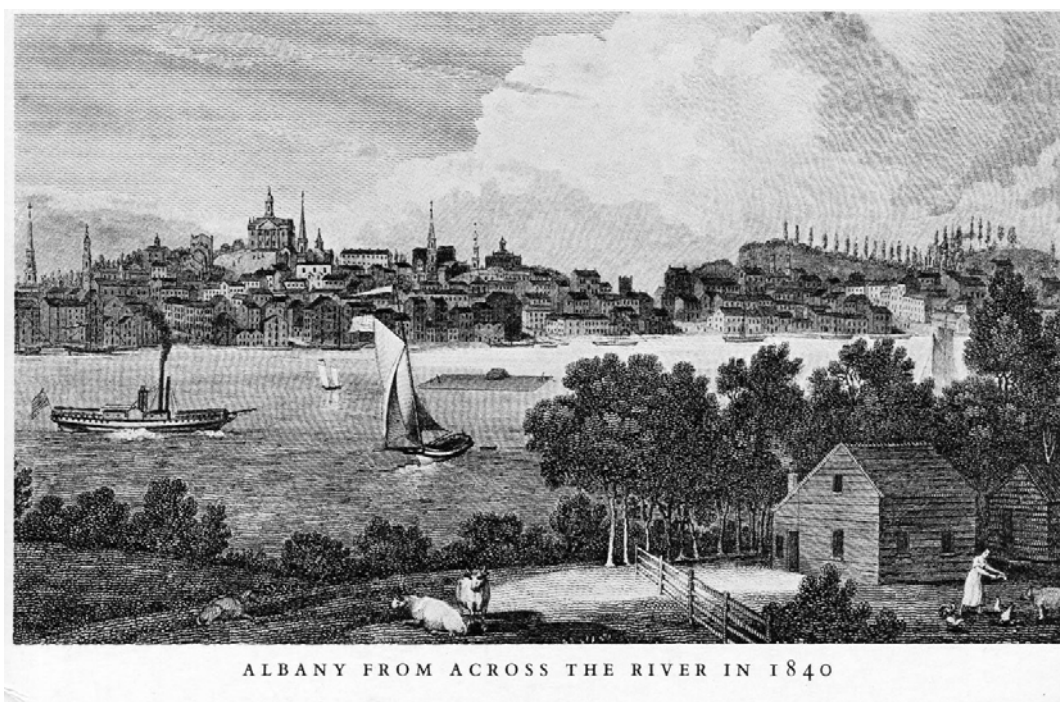
This is a chronicle of the major events and persons connected to Albany Academy for Girls. A longer, more detailed work, with more analysis, biographical treatment, footnotes, and references is in preparation for the upcoming bicentennial. Your suggestions as to fact, omission, or emphasis are welcome. To denote an attendee's class year, graduates and other attendees alike, the convention "cy" is used throughout. [Hyperlinks](#) in on-line copies open supplementary material from an attached file.



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Early Albany, nurtured by trade, was embraced by the huge van Rensselaer domain extending on both sides of the Hudson. Its Dutch and New England inhabitants developed a business acumen that would encourage and supply the explosion in resettlement that occurred after the American Revolution.

Adventurous and enterprising newcomers from New England joined Albany's established aristocratic families, tradesmen, and outlying farmers. They came to the Hudson River Valley to facilitate financial exchange, survey the land, build the infrastructure and write the contracts of a new era: bankers, lawyers, engineers, school masters, printers. After 1797, when Albany became the capital, state officials added to the growing social complexity of the old river town.



Little schools had ebbed and flowed throughout the pre- and post-revolutionary period. None became permanently rooted in Albany until the national academy movement coincided with the burst of Albany's commercial and civic development and its new status as gateway to the west. Albany citizens, leading in position and prosperity, organized themselves to create two academies. They did this to give sons the knowledge to serve the professions and run the businesses and to give daughters an education akin to that for husbands and future sons. This history is concerned with the one devoted to female education.

Founding

Here is how it began:

We, the subscribers, agree to send to Union School in Montgomery street, under the tuition of Horace Goodrich, the number of female scholars affixed to our

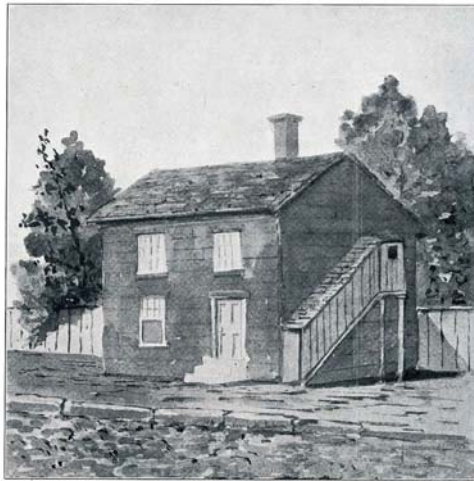
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names for the space of one year, from the first day of May next, and we agree to pay to Ebenezer Foot twenty-four dollars for each scholar, in four equal quarterly payments, the first payment to be on the first day of August next.

February 24th, 1814

John Ely	1	Ab. Van Vechten	1
Moses Allen	2	Benj. Knower	1
James Seymour	1	Harmon Ten Eyck	1
T. & J. Russell	4	James Kent	1
Edward Brown	1	John V. Henry	3
G. Stewart	1	John Reid	1
Matthew Gill	2	Isaac Hutton	1
Uriah Marvin	2	Asa H. Center	1
Thomas Gould	1	James Clark [paper torn]	
Solomon Allen	1	John Stearns	
William Fowler	1	Roorb[ach]	
Nicholas Bleecker	1		

The signers are all men, as would be expected in that era. Most were prominent merchants and professionals, members of the middle class and new aristocracy. A letter from Lebbeus Booth, the principal of the school from 1815 to 1824, states:



THE ORIGINAL BUILDING, 1814

“Ebenezer Foot, a lawyer of eminence residing in Montgomery Street, Albany, was the prime mover in establishing the school. He associated with him Chancellor Kent, John V. Henry, Isaac Hutton, Thomas Gould, Dr. Stearns, Dr. Ely, Thomas and Joseph Russell, Asa H. Center, Nathaniel Davis, and others. They leased a lot in Montgomery street north of the Third Presbyterian Church, and erected a cheap one story building. They employed Horace Goodrich as their first teacher, a graduate of Union College, son of Col. Goodrich, of Milton, Saratoga County. He commenced school on the first of May, 1814.”

Montgomery Street--known as “quality row” in the period--was one block east of Market Street (Broadway), north of State Street, and was a residential area in these pre-canal, pre-railroad days, “unusually pleasant and retired from the ordinary confusion and noise of the city.” Union school was a great success. It opened with 35 girls, but in just two years, a second floor (shown in the picture above) was added to the building to accommodate 70 students.

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The successors to the Union School have a tradition that Betsey Foot, Ebenezer's wife, played the major role in its founding. The account of this role expanded with each of the school's anniversary publications, starting in 1864, and usually cited Betsey's bargaining chip as her husband's desire to invest in a theater: that she would support the theater, once he and his associates had established a school for girls. Moreover, the tradition also arose that the school was the oldest in the nation for the higher education of women. These issues are fully discussed in the long version of this study.

principal	Horace Goodrich, A.M.	1814-1815
	Lebbeus Booth, A.M.	1815-1817
	Rev. Edwin James, A.M.	1817-1818
	Lebbeus Booth, A.M.	1818-1824
president	Hon. James Kent, LL.D.	1821-1824
treasurer	Asa H. Center	1821-1827

Horace Goodrich was a young man, just out of Union. His intended profession was not education, but law. At the same time he started at Union School, he began reading law in Ebenezer Foot's office. According to the semi-centennial account by Eben Stearns, he also lived with the Foot family. Sadly, Goodrich's constitution was not up to the stresses of both occupations and he died of consumption in 1815. Lebbeus Booth was then appointed.



Booth's family had come from Danbury, Connecticut, to Ballston Spa, New York. Booth attended the academy there. He went to Union and, upon graduation, succeeded Goodrich in May, 1815. Booth's goal was the ministry and in 1817 he enrolled in Princeton Theological Seminary. The Reverend Dr. Edwin James thus became the third or, one could say, an interim principal, for his leadership "lacked some of the essentials of his office" and Booth was prevailed upon to return.

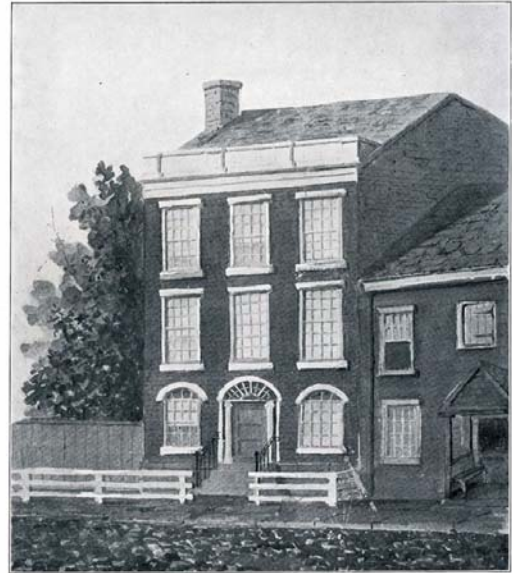
The Union School was founded at the time when it was not fashionable to be a "learned" woman. In the early days of the Republic, before 1800, the basis for a woman's education was reading, writing, arithmetic, and needlework. Some skill such as pianoforte or singing added refinement. At most, a girl might gain some knowledge of history, geography, and English literature. But these latter were for a young lady "ornamental subjects." Above all, "her accomplishments carefully skirted the traditional male domain of the learned languages, higher mathematics, and natural sciences."

The second building was built at 11 Montgomery Street in 1821. The lot cost \$1200 and the building, with furnishings, \$3000.96. This is how the Semi-Centennial publication described its opening:



Lucretia Foot

“The cornerstone was laid on the morning of June 25, 1821, the Trustees, teachers and school going in procession to the spot. Mr. Booth, by appointment of the Trustees, made an address suited to the occasion, and Rev. Dr. Chester offered prayer. Beneath the stone were deposited the papers of the day....” The complete text of the cornerstone document is in the Semi-Centennial. In 1828, increasing enrollment requiring it, an additional building was constructed behind this second home of the school, and connected with it by corridors.



THE SECOND BUILDING, 1821

Organization

Also in **1821**, the school was incorporated by the state legislature as “Albany Female Academy.” Gideon Hawley, Secretary of the Board of Regents, drew up the legislation, the Hon. Charles E. Dudley, State Senator, supported it, and Governor Dewitt Clinton signed it.



James Kent

James Kent was named president of the board of trustees. He was then former chief justice of the Supreme Court of New York and current chancellor of the state, then the highest judicial office. Other trustees included John V. Henry (lawyer and recent comptroller), Hawley, and Rev. John Chester (pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church), Joseph Russell (paints, oils, and dyes), Asa Center (printer), Peter Boyd (merchant), William Fowler (fur buyer, leather manufacturer, merchant), and Tunis Van Vechten (lawyer).

The inaugural board recorded that the course of studies would be in the lower department: Orthography, Reading, Writing, English Grammar, Arithmetic, Geography, and Plain Sewing. The highest department continued the basic studies, adding, however, sacred and ecclesiastical history, Blair's Lectures on rhetoric and belles lettres, "such parts of Paley's Moral Philosophy as are suited to the character and condition of females," Lord Kames' Elements of Criticism, and a partial view of natural philosophy and astronomy. This was already beyond the typical model for female education and was a reflection, if still a pale one, of the curriculum of a male academy, as shown by the deliberate choice of the new name.

Modifications in the curriculum of the Albany Female Academy were made in the 1820's. In 1824, the school introduced Alexander Tytler's Elements of General History, Ancient and Modern. By May, 1825, French was added. "The trustees have the pleasure to state that they have secured the services of Professor Molinard of the West Point Military Academy, as professor of French in this institution, and that arrangements have been made for receiving young ladies as boarders in his family, where the French language will be exclusively spoken." Radically, the Minutes of November 5, 1825, reveal (italics original): "The subject of the introduction of Latin being under consideration—after a good deal of conversation, Resolved, that the trustees *permit* it to be taught."

Little by little, from this time, the curriculum of the girl's school became more technical, more thorough, more like that of the boy's school. In 1827, philosophical and chemical apparatus were purchased with funds (\$1,650) donated by twenty-six gentlemen. In 1828, a successful subscription drive was arranged for the purchase of a library. By 1829, the same chemistry text used in the Albany Academy was read at Albany Female Academy. Dr. Philip Ten Eyck, Joseph Henry's associate and successor at Albany Academy, taught eight years at Albany Female Academy. The girls read Wilkin's Astronomy; Arnott's Natural Philosophy; Eaton's Manual of Botany, a formidable encyclopedia of facts, and Isaac Watts, Improvement of the Mind, a mental science text that discussed attention, memory, and prejudice. Its partial contents are:

CHAPTER IV.	Of Reading and Books, with directions relating thereto	57
CHAPTER V.	The judgment of Books, both approbation and censure	72
CHAPTER VI.	Of living Instructions and Lectures, of Teachers and Learners	88
CHAPTER VII.	Of learning a Language, particularly the Latin	93
CHAPTER VIII.	Of enquiring into the sense and meaning of any writer or speaker, whether human or divine	105
CHAPTER IX.	Of Conversation and profiting by it, and of persons fit or unfit for free converse	110
CHAPTER X.	Of Disputes, and general rules relating to them	130
CHAPTER XI.	Of Socratical disputation, by question and answer	145

Dr. Lewis C. Beck was an occasional lecturer in chemistry at AFA. He was one of the four brothers of T. Romeyn Beck of the Albany Academy. Lewis Beck graduated from Union in 1817; he had expertise in botany, chemistry, and geology, and published books on all these subjects. He held professorships at Vermont Academy of Medicine, Rutgers College, Albany Medical College, and University of the City of New York. In 1831, he published A Manual of Chemistry, intended for medical schools, colleges, and academies.

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principal	Frederick Matthews, A.M.	1824-1826
	Alonzo Crittenden, A.M.	1826-1845
president	Rev. John Chester, D.D.	1824-1829
	Rev. Isaac Ferris, D.D., LL.D.	1829-1831
	Rev. John Ludlow, D.D., LL.D.	1831-1834
	Rev. Isaac Ferris, D.D., LL.D.	1834-1836
	Rev. John N. Campbell, D.D., LL.D.	1836-1843
	Hon. Greene C. Bronson, LL.D.	1843-1850
treasurer	Richard M. Meigs	1827-1839
	Israel Smith	1839-1842
	Alonzo Crittenden, A.M.	1842-1846

1827 The Regents of the University of the State of New York accepted visitation to Albany Female Academy, the first girl's school in the State to submit to their control. Education by 1830 was a rigorous affair. Moreover, it was innovative:

Being fully sensible that the grand object of education is not so much to store the memory with what others have written, as to strengthen and expand the mind of the pupil, and prepare it for future, higher attainments, it is the steady aim of the teachers in these several departments, to address the understanding of the scholar, and let the several lessons of the text book, as far as circumstances will permit, furnish merely matter for the illustration of the subjects pursued....[The school avoids] a superficial acquaintance with mere text books, to prepare [students] for future usefulness, and to teach them how to investigate for themselves.

This was a far cry from the curriculum of 1814. The young women and their teachers had, in the first two decades of their school, broken the mold of limited academic study imposed upon their sex.



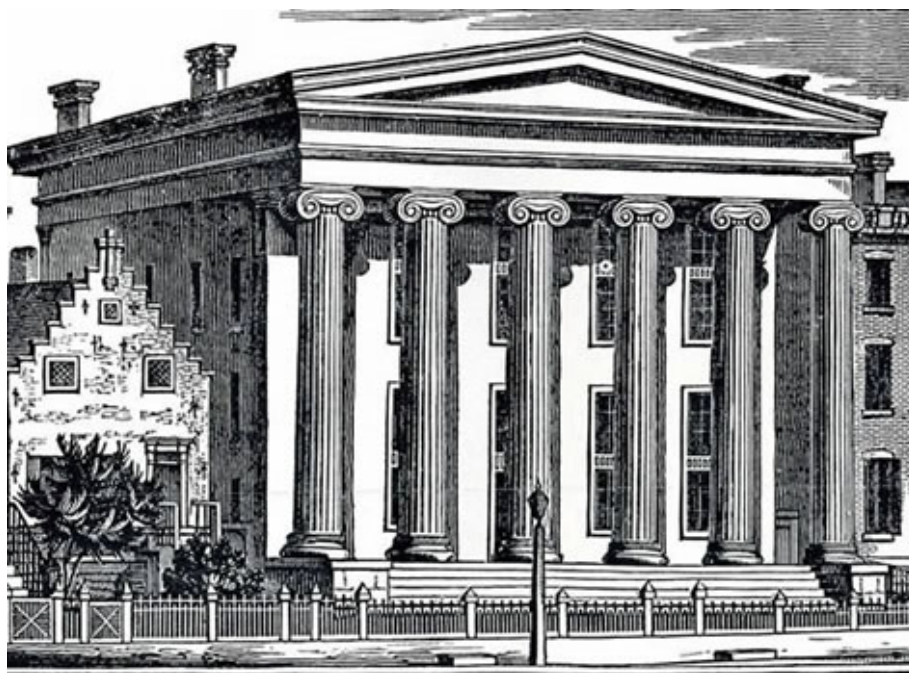
Alonzo Crittenden was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Union College in 1824 (in the presidency of Eliphalet Nott). He was first a teacher at Albany Female Academy, then, in August, 1926, appointed principal, a post he held for nineteen years. Crittenden “at once commenced an administration which, for vigor and skill, has never been excelled.” “Dr. Crittenden’s large sympathies and wonderful discernment of character gave him a magnetic influence over his pupils.” He introduced public examinations, a hallmark of rigorous academies. Students were expected to prepare essays or presentations that reflected their academic accomplishments. These were declaimed in public assemblies before outside

judges, usually men of prominence in the city. Gold medals were awarded to students that excelled. One young lady, Miss Margaret Robinson (cy 1842), performed unusually well in the written part of the exams. A teacher recalled, “The unusual excellence of some of

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the compositions, particularly Miss R's, having excited some misgivings as to their originality, the authors were put to the test of writing upon given subjects, within a limited time, in the presence of a committee. The subjects were three or four in number. Miss R. ingeniously grouped them together in some sprightly verses, closing with a humorous attack upon the committee, which completely disarmed suspicion." Margaret was later a president of the alumnae association and wrote the alumnae song "For an angel's work is woman's part" and continued to write prose and poetry. She later took charge of a Friends' school in Philadelphia.

Classical Apogee: Higher Education, Teachers, Great Women



AFA's Third Building, opened on North Pearl Street, 1834

Crittenden embraced the move to a spacious new building on North Pearl Street, the design of which stated magnificently the dedication of the school to learning and its perfection, as embodied by the finest minds and creative efforts of the ancient Greeks. The building was begun in 1833, was dedicated on May, 12, 1834, and was occupied at the beginning of the 1834-35 academic term. It cost \$33,295.

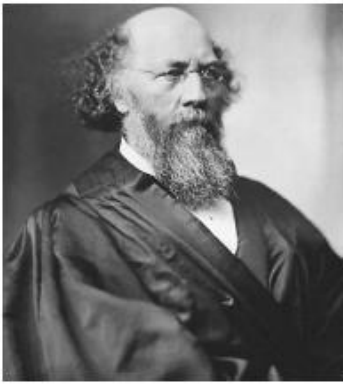
Thomas Worth Olcott, a prominent Albany banker, had a particular affection for Albany Female Academy. He served as a trustee from 1834 to 1880. Eschewing the position of president, he was, nevertheless, the most important and generous trustee throughout this period. A separate paper on the Archives web site describes the outstanding contributions of the Olcott family.

In the American colonies, there were only nine institutions operating as colleges. One, King's College [Columbia University], founded in 1754, was in New York. Two more colleges appeared in New York in the early post-revolutionary period, Union College

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(1795) and Hamilton College (1812). Albany Academy was founded in 1813 with a curriculum much like Union's, but did not evolve into a college. For women, the picture was quite different. In distant Ohio, Oberlin College was the first to admit women in 1833, becoming coeducational. Mary Lyon founded Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in Massachusetts in 1837, but it was not until 1865 that Vassar opened as a college in Poughkeepsie, addressing on a scale not heretofore seen the needs of women for a full collegiate experience. In this light, the development of Albany Female Academy (founded 1814, chartered 1821) and of Troy Female Seminary (founded 1821, chartered 1837) are all the more remarkable. They, too, did not evolve into colleges, but they served young women with an academic rigor that few colleges today can boast.

Even by mid-century in the whole country there were less than a handful of women's colleges or academies offering an education superior to that in Albany. At Albany Female Academy, enrollment peaked at the North Pearl Street building in 1848 at 558 students. In the three decades from 1830 to 1860 there were boarders from eighteen states (of the 24 to 32 states in that period). As the school prospered, so did the renown of its faculty. We have already introduced AFA teachers, like Beck, Molinard, and Crittenden.



Hon. Stephen J. Field taught at the Academy while reading law with Harmanus Bleecker (about 1829 to 1834). Field graduated as valedictorian from Williams in 1837, practiced law with his brother, David Dudley Field, in New York City and left for California in the Gold Rush in 1848. There he practiced law, was elected to the State Assembly, and became Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court. In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln appointed Field an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court (to a newly created tenth seat). He served until 1897. Field sat for a portrait by an Academy teacher, nationally recognized artist Asa

Twitchell. The Archives has this portrait. Field's other two brothers were Cyrus, millionaire investor and layer of the Atlantic Cable, and Henry Martyn, clergyman and writer. His sister was Mary E. Field (cy 1840), a brilliant AFA student, who won a first prize in composition; her writings appeared in local journals and magazines.

William Hart, pictured at right, taught at the Academy. He was a painter in the Hudson River School (as was his brother James). The Archives has a landscape with cattle by James Hart.



Amos Dean was a lecturer in history at the school. He was the author of History of Civilization and a founder of the Young Men's Association in Albany.

1841 marks the founding of the Alumnae Association of the Albany Female Academy, the first such association of female graduates in the world. "It grew out of a desire on the part of the graduating class of that

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year to guard against the sundering of old associations and the abandonment of intellectual pursuits which are always foreboded by school friends about to separate, and too frequently realized.” Miss Jeannette M. Hall (cy 1841) was the first President and Miss Mary L'Hommedieu Gardiner (cy 1841), the first poet designate. Mary later published Indian Legends and Other Poems.



An Academy teacher, Eben N. Horsford, coined the terms “alumna” and “alumnae.” They had never been needed in all of the previous history of women, but with the forming of history’s first association of female graduates, they were used at his suggestion for the first time. Horsford and President Campbell of the trustees drew up a constitution and by-laws. The first President elected under the constitution was Miss Margaret Robinson (cy 1842). At that annual meeting, Governor William H. Seward addressed the association.

As a means of advancing the cause of female education (a goal in the preamble), the association decided to award four gold medals annually for the best contributions in essay writing in English and French, “story writing and poetry.” The alumnae began publishing their own annual report, often combined with current school information, and included many prize essays. Judges of the competitions were nationally known writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Alfred B. Street (poet and New York State Librarian), Elizabeth P. Peabody (friend to Emerson, Horace Mann, and Hawthorne, writer and pioneering educator), and Lydia H. Sigourney (potent writer in many fields, the best known woman poet in America in mid-century and advocate of women’s education and Native American rights; a gift book from her is in Archives).

Eben Horsford was professor of natural sciences and mathematics in the top two departments from 1840 to 1844. He had witnessed the building of the Erie Canal, was a graduate of R.P.I., and was a member of the corps of geologists on the state survey. Eben and Mary Gardiner, an AFA student (cy 1841), fell in love and the couple sought permission to marry from her father. Horsford was just six years her senior so the objection fell on his social status. Undaunted, the suitor allayed his rejection by building his career. He left Albany to study in Hessen-Darmstadt with a famous German organic chemist, Justus Liebig, from 1844 to 1846. Upon his return to the States, he obtained an appointment at Harvard as professor of applied science. His position thus elevated in the father’s eyes, Eben married Mary in August, 1847.

Horsford remained at Harvard sixteen years. He was a successful industrialist in food technology and made a fortune in a patented baking powder and improved condensed milk, largely from army contracts during the Civil War. He devised compressed rations for soldiers on the march. General Grant ordered half a million units. He was a great benefactor for Wellesley College for the endowment of the library, science laboratories,

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the publication of scientific papers, and for faculty sabbaticals. After Mary's death in 1855, Horsford married Phoebe Dayton Gardiner (cy 1843), Mary's sister. In retirement, Horsford studied Native American languages and Viking settlements in North America. He discovered the landfall of Leif Ericson, and the ancient city of Norumbaga.

Mary Gardiner was just one of the many prominent Academy women of the 1840s. Another is Jane Eliza Lathrop. Born in 1825, she attended Albany Female Academy when she was 15. Her attendance from 1840 to 1841, a total of one and one-half years, is cited by Clelia Duel Mosher (cy 1881), who assembled a documentary of Jane's life. Her father was one of the founders of Albany Orphan Asylum. Leland Stanford of Watervliet was primarily home-schooled. His father was a supporter of the Erie Canal. Leland read law in Albany and was admitted to the bar in 1848.

In 1850, Jane and Leland married. They briefly lived in Port Washington, Wisconsin, where Leland set up a law practice. When fire destroyed it, they returned to Albany. Leland set off for California; Jane remained behind for three years. Leland made a great deal of money with his brother in the fantastic Gold Rush business environment. He became governor of California (1861-1863) and, while governor, joined others in creating the Central Pacific Railroad. He was its president from 1863 to 1893 and was present at Promontory Point for the joining of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific tracks. (Yes, he helped set the Golden Spike.)



In all these and other businesses, the Stanford fortune grew. Their only child, Leland Stanford, Jr., born late to the marriage, died in 1884 on a European tour at age fifteen. Jane led her grieving husband into the greatest philanthropic act to that time in American history, founding in 1885 on their horse farm in Palo Alto, a coeducational university, Leland Stanford, Jr. University. It opened in 1891. Leland, Sr. died in 1893, threatening the financial status of the university.

On paper, Jane was the richest woman in the U.S., but she had to struggle to keep the university going in the midst of contested assets and liens. She attempted to sell her jewels in London and personally asked President Grover Cleveland and the Attorney General to intervene for her in the courts. Finally, when all was resolved, she contributed over thirteen millions to the university. Jane formed a board of trustees in 1903 (until then she was the only trustee). Dr. David Starr Jordan, President of Stanford, said of her:

No one outside of the University can understand the difficulties in her way in the final establishment of the University, and her patient deeds of self-sacrifice can only be known to those who saw them from day to day. Some day the world may understand a part of this. It will then know her for the wisest, as well as the most

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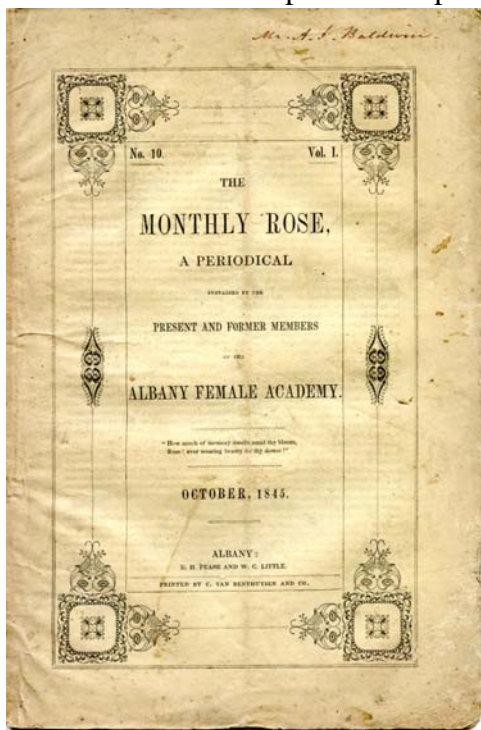
generous friend of learning in our time. What she did was always the best she could do. Wise, devoted, steadfast, prudent, patient and just – every good word we can use was hers by right.

Jane was poisoned twice, the first time in her Nob Hill mansion in San Francisco on January 14, 1905. She recovered but went to Honolulu to recuperate and avoid the damp winter. On February 28th, she was poisoned again with a strychnine-laced bicarbonate of soda prepared by her maid, Bertha Berner. This time she did not survive. Berner was the only one present on both poisoning occasions, but there were no criminal inquiries and the matter is still one of interest to historians.

Emily S. Brown Oakey's (cy 1850) course in school was "brilliant and successful." Emily became a faculty member at Albany Female Academy for twenty four years (1854-1879), teaching for many years English rhetoric and composition, literature and Latin. Later on, she added logic, German, and French. "Many of the most refined and cultured Albany women owe the best of their mental traits to the training of Miss Oakey."

Emily was blessed with a deep sense of trustfulness and warmly encouraged her students to write from their hearts, but thoroughly and correctly. The influence of her careful instruction can be seen in the finished products of her scholars at the annual examinations. She was much loved through her whole life by her former students.

Some of Oakey's writings were published for schools as Dialogues and Conversations. A book of her collected poems was produced as she lay suffering in Albany Hospital, still a young woman, and was published on the day of her funeral. Its title is At the Foot of Parnassus, and the Archives has several copies. Within it one can feel her sensitivity to nature and her closeness to the sources of her faith.



Oakey described Mary M. Chase (cy 1844), winner of the English composition medal as a student and of three additional medals from the association. She was considered the most brilliant of the most talented class. She, with Miss Abby Dwight Woodbridge, edited the Monthly Rose. Mary had a "rare gift of humor" and was a clever observer of the little funny things of everyday life. She was a gifted teacher as well as poet and went to Brooklyn to assist Prof. Crittenden, who, after AFA, took charge of Packer Institute.

Mary Mather (cy 1845) was one of the school's most loved and esteemed teachers and was cut

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short by an untimely death. Emily Oakey described Mary as one who excelled in every department and received medals in composition and mathematics. Quoting another well-known writer, Oakey said:

Miss Mather's intellect was one of the most truly original I have ever met—original both in conception and combination....A consequence of this originality was, of course, great novelty and freshness of thought, as well as a self-reliant will. In her conversation on the high philosophies of life, the theories of social organization and education, she startled and charmed by her unexpected groupings and deductions; and the embellishments of fancy and imagination.... Who that has ever listened to her in those moments of inspiration, can forget the simile and quick contrast, the narration, the description, and the logic that flowed and flashed along, and the language, like a sunbeam, revealing a hundred objects at a glance.

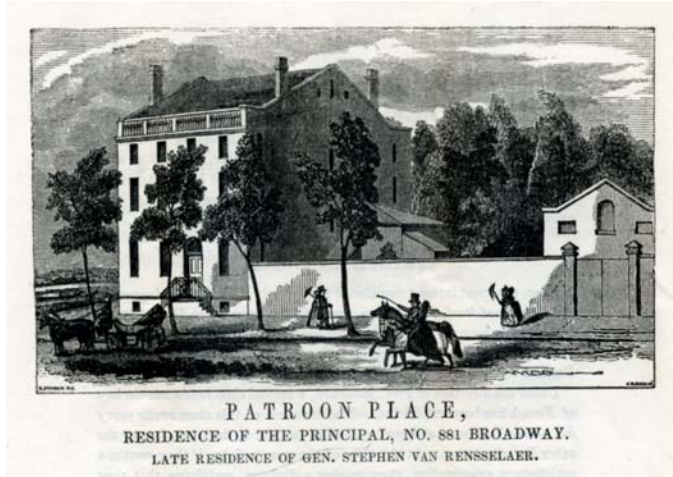
Oakey quotes one of Mather's students: "What she has been to us we have no words to tell. Her daily life has been before us—a beautiful and perfect temple, in which the smoke of unending sacrifice ascended night and day. We have seen her beautiful consistency, her patient endurance, her lovely self-forgetfulness, her earnestness, her holy aspirations, her endeavors to fit herself for the companionship of the angels with whom she is surely mingling now. 'Well is our treasure now laid up: it will sleep in the marble undecaying; and in our hearts, too, it lives and works.'"



bas relief by Erastus Dow Palmer

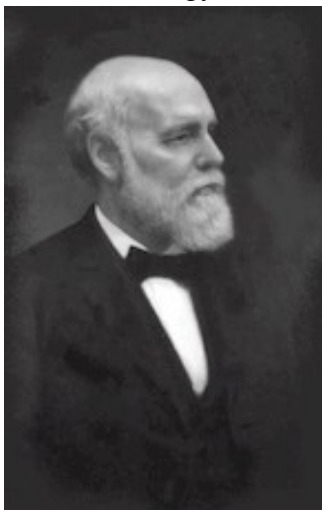
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Crittenden’s successor was L. Sprague Parsons, a graduate of Yale, about whom the Semi-Centennial is largely silent. He did introduce teacher certification classes. He lived at Patroon Place, 881 Broadway, in the former mansion of General Stephen Van Rensselaer. It was also the home of the boarding students. It was described as “healthful and airy” with a splendid garden appropriate for secluded play. “Seclusion” was a term designed to attract young lady boarders, as was the provision of a carriage to transport them to and from school and church.



principal	L. Sprague Parsons, A.M.	1845-1855
	Rev. Eben S. Stearns, A.M., D.D.	1855-1868
	Miss Caroline G. Greely	1868-1869
	Miss Louise Ostrom	1869-1879
	William G. Nowell	1879-1880
president	Hon. William L. Marcy, L.L.D.	1850-1855
	Hon. Amasa J. Parker, L.L.D.	1855-1879
treasurer	L. Sprague Parsons, A.M.	1846-1856
	Rev. Eben S. Stearns, A.M.	1856-1868
	William L. Learned, LL.D.	1868-1870
	Miss Louise Ostrom	1870-1879

The next principal was Eben S. Stearns. He was the youngest of thirteen children of Rev. Samuel Stearns and wife, Abigail French. He graduated from Harvard College in 1841, studied theology, and was ordained as a minister of the gospel. He came to the Albany



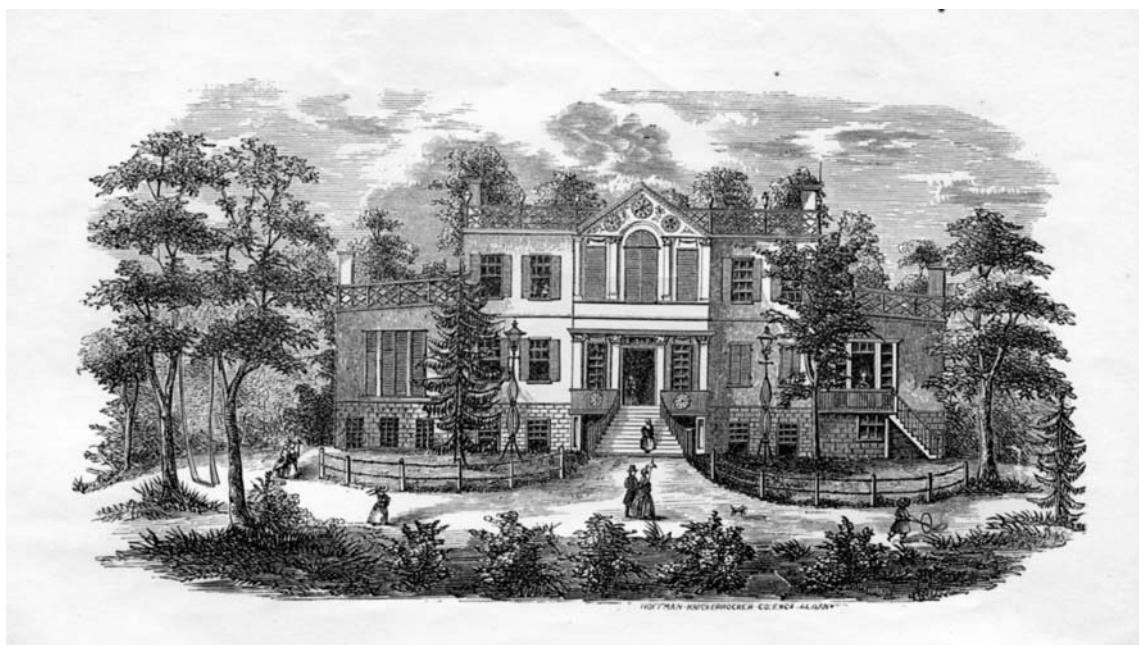
Female Academy from the State Normal School of Massachusetts where he was president. Mrs. Electa N. L. Walton wrote of his tenure there:

“Mr. Stearns was devoted, earnest, exact, and gentlemanly, and won the cordial support of teachers and pupils. He had a nature of unusual gentleness, and a winsome humor that made him a delightful companion. As a teacher he inspired confidence in his pupils to do their best, while his recognition of any lady-like refinement in them was an inspiration to be true to his expectations. It seemed impossible to be rude or heedless under his observant eye. He impressed his pupils with the dignity of the teacher's work and his influence upon them was lasting.”

short version

1856 The Yates mansion, sold in 1809 to James Kane, and later the residence of Governors Daniel D. Tompkins, DeWitt Clinton, and William H. Seward, was purchased in 1856 by Thomas W. Olcott for \$16,000. He gave the home to the Albany Female academy for the use of its principal. It housed boarding students. This mansion was also called Ash Grove, and was located at Broad and Westerlo streets. The annual catalogue promoted the new acquisition:

[Ash Grove,] with its spacious halls, beautiful lawns and garden, fine old shade trees and extensive grounds, is justly regarded with admiration; and being in the very heart of the city, and within convenient walking distance for such pupils as desire to promote health and beauty, is deemed singularly agreeable and appropriate to the purpose to which it is to be devoted. Several of the teachers will board in the family of the Principal; and it is intended to spare no pains to make the residence of young ladies from abroad as pleasant and homelike as may be. Those who wish to avail themselves of these opportunities the present season should apply as soon as possible.



1860 At the Albany Female Academy commencement in 1860, Principal Stearns, on behalf of the graduating class, presented a national flag to a faculty member, Augustus Sonntag, commemorating the regard of the seniors and the “excellence of his instruction.” European born and trained, Sonntag came to the United States by 1853. Soon after his arrival, he went on the arctic expedition led by Elisha Kent Kane in quest of the open polar sea and to find the location of the ill-fated Sir John Franklin expedition. Few, if any, explorers had to that date been north of 82° latitude and it was not known in 1853 how far north the Greenland land mass extended. As the Kane expedition astronomer, August Sonntag conducted two years of astronomical observations and calculations.

short version

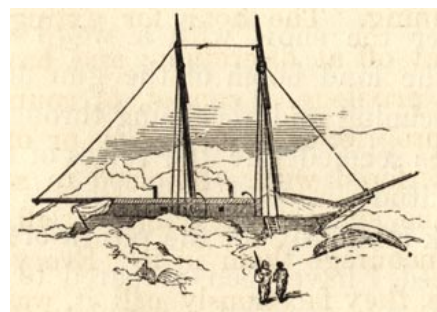


In 1859 Sonntag became associate director of the Dudley Observatory and teacher at Albany Female Academy. Few schools could boast of a more diverse and experienced scientist. Although warmly received and successful as a teacher, Sonntag could not pass up another expedition to the area of Greenland and Ellesmere Island, led by Isaac Israel Hayes, M.D., with the aim of finding the open sea that would allow passage to the North Pole. Sonntag became the astronomer and second-in-command.

The Academy students wished him to fly their flag at the farthest-most northern reach of the expedition. The schooner United States left Boston on July 7, 1860 and reached Upernavik, Greenland (73° N), “civilisation's furthest outpost,” in August. In September, the ship became icebound ten miles north of Cape Alexander ($78^{\circ} 17'$ N), a place they dubbed Port Foulke. Sonntag set up an observatory on shore and recorded climate, astronomical, and magnetic readings that were later published by the United States Coast Survey in the Smithsonian Contributions. Atop his ice hut, Sonntag flew the flag made by Academy girls.



Upernavik



United States at Port Foulke

Tragically on December 27, 1860, Sonntag broke through some shore ice while on a side trip to fetch sled dogs. His guide pulled him free and attempted to shelter and warm him, but Sonntag perished. His body was placed in the Observatory, “where his fine mind had been intent, a few weeks before, on pursuits the delight of his life,” until a grave was dug in the frozen terrace; then the burial service was read, and afterward a neat mound raised, with a chiseled inscription:

AUGUST SONNTAG.
Died, December 28, 1860
Aged 28 years

short version



UNFURLING THE FLAG.

The flag from the girls at Albany Female Academy was used in his burial. When the expedition reached the northern limit of their adventure, they flew several flags from previous expeditions, including the “one presented to the lamented Mr. Sonntag by the ladies of the Albany Academy.” Isaac Hayes returned the flag to the Albany Female Academy in October, 1862.

The Dana Natural History Society was started after a series of lectures at the Academy by Professor Adrien J. Ebell.

There were a number of Dana Chapters that he founded in honor of Prof. James D. Dana of Yale. Only the one formed by the women of AFA survived the century. “The object of the Dana is, first, to awaken in ourselves and others a growing interest in the study of nature and the natural sciences; second, to collect for our use a cabinet and library.” Field events in some years were held jointly with the Albany Institute and the Troy Scientific Association.

Semper Fidelis formed in 1871. It was “a circle composed of members of the alumnae who, during eight months of the year, meet fortnightly for reading and discussion upon themes of literature, art, and science,” some under guidance of AFA faculty. Anna Morrow wrote in “Historical Sketch of the *Semper Fidelis* Society,” that *Semper Fidelis* was formed in June as a branch society to increase interest in the Alumnae, to raise its standard of literary work, promote social intercourse, and a “taste for art, science, and literature.” At its meetings, participants read from and discussed various authors such as “Sydney Smith, Holmes, Curtis, Emerson, the Brownings, Lowell, Schiller...and occasionally original papers have been read by their authors.” The society published a magazine called *The Portfolio*. It included outstanding works of student and alumnae writing.

At its fiftieth anniversary, Albany Female Academy could contemplate its transition from a school designed to provide young girls with an education focused on family and social responsibilities to one aptly described as an institution of higher learning for women. The curriculum of the school became challenging beyond the perceived needs of girls and ladies of the period. The early nineteenth century concepts of appropriate study for females were broken, and where the formal curriculum stopped, the auxiliary curriculum continued in the form of supplementary lectures and “graduate” societies.

short version



the library at North Pearl

1864 The fiftieth anniversary of the academy was celebrated on May 17, 1864. Four ladies attended who were among the first students in 1814, including Lucretia Foot Booth. Alonzo Crittenden was also present, the only former principal still living. At 10:00, a large assembly met in the chapel of the North Pearl Street building. From the lyrics of the “Welcome Song” by Miss R. A. Ackerman (cy 1847), we have:

We've met, long parted steps have turned
To olden haunts once more ;
It seems but yesterday they paced
So oft each well-known floor.
But years of joy and grief lie linked
Between that Past and now,
And hearts that then sought learning's shrine,
At other altars bow.

We're not *all* met, sweet tones that once
Joined in the morning song,
Have left no trace of where their homes,
If still of earth, belong.
Some were, whose gifts like meteors flashed,
They ne'er can be forgot ;
Fame sought them, but a Spirit called,
They were — and they are not.

Board president, Hon. Amasa J. Parker, made opening remarks and Principal Stearns and former principal Crittenden led devotional exercises. In the afternoon, a public exercise was held in Tweddle Hall, a private performance hall at the corner of State and Pearl. Rev. William Augustus Stearns, brother to the principal and president of Amherst

short version

College, gave a long oration. He addressed the equality of women and of women's intellect. "In the existing state of society, I know not how this question of intellect can be settled. There must be equal advantages before there can be a fair decision."

Eben Stearns' concluding remarks summed up the accomplishments of AFA:

The number of its pupils has been great, and has represented not only this city, but the country at large extensively. Many of them have been distinguished for their literary attainments, and are not unknown to fame. Some have been instructors of others, and some have gone to the ends of the earth, bearing with them "those leaves which are for the healing of nations," while hundreds have blessed, in their day, or now are blessing the homes of our citizens.

The fiftieth celebration concluded with poetry, music, and prayer. Emily Oakey wrote the poem, of which this excerpt captures the significance to women of the creation of their own academy:

The wondrous fields where Knowledge first
Spread her illimitable page,
Unlocked her springs to souls athirst
For that immortal heritage ;
Where first we caught upon the shore
The murmurs of the infinite sea,
In solemn cadences, and bore
The weight of Being's mystery ;
Where starry purposes were born,
And upward soared from higher to higher,
With exultations of the morn,
And cleft the blue with wings of fire.

Hard Times, Merger, The Move Uptown

1868 Eben Stearns left AFA in 1865 to head the State Normal School at Nashville, Tennessee, later part of Vanderbilt University. To succeed him, the Board named the first woman principal, current assistant teacher of eleven years, Caroline S. Greely. Because she soon married and moved to New York City, Miss Louise Ostrom replaced her after one year and served for nine.

Ostrom's tenure was darkened by new competition. The Episcopal diocese established St. Agnes school in 1870 and the city of Albany in 1866 created its first public high school, Albany Free Academy (Albany High School), (it opened in 1868 on State Street near Eagle with 140 students).



Caroline Greely

short version

Ostrom's successor, William G. Newell, was the last man to lead the school for ninety years. His tenure was not successful and he was dismissed by midyear. Some of the trustees officiated in his place. It was a troubled time. Even as the merger described below took place, a lead teacher removed herself to start her own enterprise and many older students followed. Enrollment plummeted to about 31 students.

principal	Miss Lucy A. Plympton	1880-1901
president	Hon. William L. Learned, LL.D.	1879-1904
treasurer	William G. Nowell	1879-1880
	John Templeton	1880
	Lucy A. Plympton	1880-1899
	Dudley Olcott, Esq.	1900

1879 With the support and counsel of trustee Thomas W. Olcott, Albany Female Academy merged with Miss Plympton's North Pearl Street School for Young Ladies.



Thomas Worth Olcott

This was Olcott's greatest contribution to the school and it was in the last year of his life. The schools met first as co-inhabitants of the North Pearl street building in 1880. By the opening of school the next fall, they were merged.

Replacing the losses the Albany Female Academy suffered were the sixty or so students that came with Miss Plympton. Numbers were also augmented by the absorption of Mrs. Millard's private school for primary children. Miss Lucy



Lucy A. Plympton

Plympton became principal and led Albany Female Academy, one decade more on North Pearl Street and one decade on Washington Avenue, 1880 to 1901. Olcott died March 23, 1880. The school closed for the day of his funeral.

Another boon for the Academy was an arrangement with Wellesley College to admit any AFA student completing a specified certificate program. In return, Wellesley graduates were welcomed to at least two positions on the faculty of the Academy.

1892 Pearl Street became heavily commercial, dangerous to foot traffic, and residents moved westward to higher ground. To serve this shifting residential pattern, Miss Plympton rented at her own risk the former Amos P. Palmer residence at 155 Washington Avenue. The North Pearl Street building unsold, the school moved its quarters to uptown in January, 1892.



short version

Lucy Plympton goes into great detail, the matter being close to her heart, about the role played by the alumnae to get the trustees to build an academic building behind the home. The alumnae representatives spoke to the trustees: “to wait is dangerous, may be fatal, to the vigorous life of the school, and that if the trustees will decide at once on some course of action we shall be glad to use all our efforts to help them, will, if necessary, organize a scheme to aid in raising a sum of money sufficient to restore the school to the place it used to occupy, and will again if we can compass it.” The trustees bought the Palmer building.

In January, 1893, a public meeting was held in the old school on North Pearl to promote the academic building behind the home. All the important figures and supporters of the school were there, 200 in all. Judge Learned and Melvil Dewey, Secretary of the New York Board of Regents, were among the speakers. Dudley Olcott publically made the first pledge of \$1000. The newspapers covered the ensuing drives and by April, 1893, the construction began. By November, the new addition was ready to receive the school library, which was then brought up from the unoccupied and unsold North Pearl Street building.



THE PRESENT BUILDINGS

At the dedication on December 11, 1893, “Judge Learned gave a brief account of the main events in the history of the institution and presented the other speakers of the evening, the Rev. Wallace H. Buttrick, Dr James H. Ecob, Dr. A. V. V. Raymond, later president of Union College, and President Taylor of Vassar.” All sang “Alma Academia.” For the many alumnae who remember this building, read Lucy Plympton’s [tour](#).



The Alumnae Library with its open fire is a pleasant place on winter mornings

The World's Fair


The Columbian Exposition of 1893, one of the many great world's fairs of the nineteenth century, was in part a celebration of the 400th anniversary of the landing of Columbus. Melvil Dewey, Secretary of the Regents, invited New York academies to participate in this Exposition in Chicago. This chart was created by Professor Morgan to put forth the significance of the school's history.

OLDEST SCHOOL IN THE WORLD
FOR THE HIGHER EDUCATION OF GIRLS.
ALBANY FEMALE ACADEMY.
ALBANY, N.Y.

FOUNDED AD. 1814

By Mr and Mrs Ebenezer Foot.

Chartered AD. 1821. Act of Incorporation drawn up by Honorable
 Gideon Hawley, Secretary of the Board of Regents of the State of
 New York.




PRESIDENTS

H^{on} James Kent, LL.D.
 R^{ev} John Chester DD
 R^{ev} John Ferris DD
 H^{on} Greene C. Bronson LL.D.
 R^{ev} John Ludlow DD
 R^{ev} J. W. Campbell DD
 H^{on} William LeMarcq LL.D.
 H^{on} August J. Parker LL.D.
 H^{on} William LeFevre LL.D.

Faculty

Lucy A. Plympton, Principal
 Anna Anderson.
 Grace Perry, AB.
 Anna C. Plympton.
 Augustus W. Lyman.
 Cecelia P. Wempleton.



PRINCIPALS

Kerac Goodrich A.M.
 R. Edwin James A.M.
 Lebbens Bath A.M.
 Frederick Mullyns A.M.
 Alonzo Crittendon A.M.
 Le Souquet Parsons A.M.
 R^{ev} Eben S. Stearns A.M.
 Miss Caroline C. Greely.
 Miss Louisa Ostrom.
 Miss Lucy A. Plympton.

Faculty


Elizabeth C. Morgan.
 Mlle Anais Gery.
 Carl A. Meyer.
 William P. Morgan.
 Sara C. Ralle.
 Townsend H. Fellows.

Oldest Alumnae Association in the World. Founded 1841.

Semper Fidelis Society, organized 1871

Permanent Alumnae Classes in Literature and Modern Languages, organized 1882.

Only private school in Albany whose Certificate is accepted at Wellesley
 College in place of entrance examinations.





It was displayed with a premium book awarded to a first student, Mary Kent. The book was An Epitome of Universal History, Ancient and Modern by Rev. Richard Turner, Jr., LL.D., London, 1804.

The Academy's claim as the oldest chartered school for girls in the world was a particularly bold assertion in this tempting global setting.

These claims are considered in the full bicentennial version of this study.

short version

In 1894 the Academy published a detailed chronicle, replete with biographical notes of all the officials, teachers, societies, and graduates about whom the school could boast. It is a remarkable collection and shows the strong hand of Principal Lucy A. Plympton.



For the alumnae, she recounts the successes of many graduates, observing that not only are many among the “most esteemed ladies of this city,” but also among the “elect” in various states of the Union. By far the greatest number in her essay were writers, penning poems, columns and articles in newspapers and magazines; several women published books. Here are a few examples, grouped by profession. More are included in the full bicentennial version. Those already described above are not repeated: Robinson, Gardiner, Lathrop, Oakey, Chase, Mather. Paragraphs in quotation marks are Plympton’s.

First Century Alumnae

Education

Since the founding in 1792 of Sarah Pierce’s Litchfield Female Academy, it was common for female seminaries to prepare its graduates for teaching, the one profession readily available to women after the Revolution. Emma Willard’s school, first called Troy Female Seminary, did so prodigiously. What is interesting about Plympton’s survey is the number of AFA women who broke new ground as to place or purpose.

Catharina Van Rensselaer (cy 1834, daughter of Gen. Solomon Van Rensselaer) married Rev S. W. Bonner, sailed for China, and founded a school for Chinese girls in Canton. After her husband’s death, she founded the Pekin Home in Japan and established the Eurasian school in Shanghai, the first such in China. Back in America, she published The Legacy of Historical Gleanings, a two-volume work of primary source materials and letters (Van Rensselaer family, missions to China, New York State history). In 1883 she was president of the Claremont School for Girls in Hickory, North Carolina.

Jane Tomlinson Meigs (cy 1838) was born in India where her father was a missionary for four decades. She was sent to Albany for her education. She taught for forty years in the New York Institute for Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb. Like Anne Mansfield Sullivan, the tutor of Helen Keller from Perkins School for the Blind in Boston, Meigs in 1894 was tutoring two deaf and blind pupils.

short version

Samantha Brightman (cy 1839), a rare scholar in languages and a botanist, mastered German, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and French. A “deep thinker and thorough scholar,” she taught at women’s colleges in Virginia and, in Alabama, the Mesopotamia Female Seminary, with the famous botanist Alexander Winchell.

Writers

“Miss Alida G. Radcliffe (cy 1851) is the author of Schools and Masters of Painting, and has recently published a superb work named Schools and Masters of Sculpture, books which stimulate research and are a source of pleasure to all who are interested in the arts.”

“Miss Anne F. Springsteed (cy 1866), who is now Mrs. Thomas Cole, is favorably known to the reading public through her able and interesting contributions to *Good Housekeeping* and other periodicals. Her successful book, The Expert Waitress, deals with a perplexing social problem by telling the unemployed just how to earn a living, and in a novel, practical way teaches all the necessary knowledge required for the vocation of waitress.” [Note: This book is actually back in print in 2010 and is an excellent guide for the host or hostess of any dinner party.]

Philanthropy and the Arts

Anne Charlotte Lynch Botta (cy 1934) was sculptor, poet, lyricist, writer, and teacher. She was the governess of the Gardiner girls. She wrote the Handbook of Universal Literature and left unfinished a universal history. She became a patron of arts and a renowned hostess in New York City. “There are probably no Americans of note as writers or artists who have not trodden her broad stairway, and no distinguished foreign traveler in this country who has failed to taste her hospitality.” Among the dozens of famous writers who attended her soirees were Edgar Allen Poe, Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Catherine Sedgwick, and Herman Melville. Evenings included recitals, dances, readings, and “tableau vivants.”

Gulielma Bowne (cy 1842) married Daniel Breed, superintendant of Washington, D. C., schools for African American children. The Bowne family itself had a “long-standing commitment to black education” and Gulielma testified to the American Freedman’s Inquiry Commission (1863-1864) on the good qualities of freed slaves, their moral and social behavior, and their readiness and capacity for free work.

Business, Law, and Politics

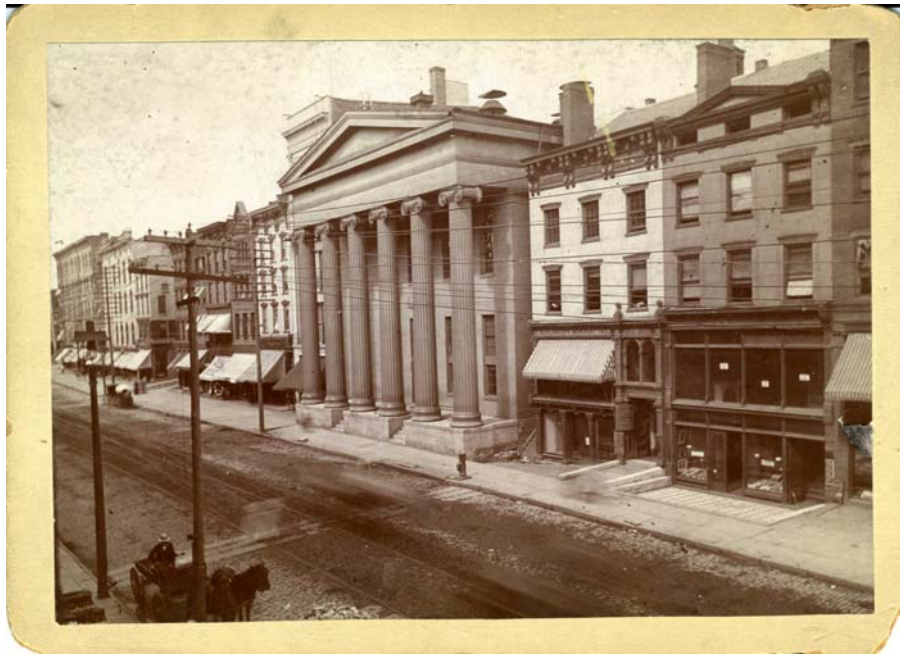
Miss Helen M. Walter (cy 1848) was the first woman recorder employed in the county clerk's office in Syracuse. When the family removed to New York city in 1866, she started writing for *Century* and *Harper's* magazines. In 1882, she was made treasurer of the Woman's Hospital and also assisted Mrs. Russell Sage in her charities. From 1889, she worked for the magazine, *Woman's Work for Women*.

short version

“Mrs. Ella Hood Cooper (cy 1867) was awarded the gold medal in 1872 for an essay on ‘Inventive Genius in Women,’ and perhaps this title foreshadows the trend of the author's thought, for she and her husband have evolved and patented many useful inventions.”

Science and Medicine

After AFA, Clelia Duel Mosher (cy1881) went to Wellesley, Cornell, and University of Wisconsin. After accepting a position at Stanford, she received an M.A. in physiology. She got her M. D. from Johns Hopkins in 1900. Her work in female sexuality pre-dated Kinsey by more than fifty years. Mosher railed against body confining corsets and the heavy and bulky skirts of the “properly” dressed Victorian woman: “The day of the type of woman who is all spirit, a burning flame, consuming her misused body, is passing. What we need are women no less fine and womanly, but with beautiful perfect bodies, a suitable receptacle for their equally beautiful souls, who look sanely out on life with steady nerves and clear vision.” Clelia continued at Stanford as professor. She left us details about Jane Lathrop Stanford, and was the photographer of the North Pearl set of photographs.



Centennial, Looking Back and Ahead

In 1900 The Board of Trustees elected two alumnae its first female members. They also challenged the Alumnae to raise funds to liquidate a mortgage debt upon the school. It was a rather one-sided challenge, \$2500 from the trustees for \$7500 from them. But the women succeeded and the debt was paid in 1901, leaving a surplus that formed the basis of an Endowment Fund. A bazaar in 1904 added \$3000 and annual contributions steadily increased the fund to \$75,000 by the centennial.

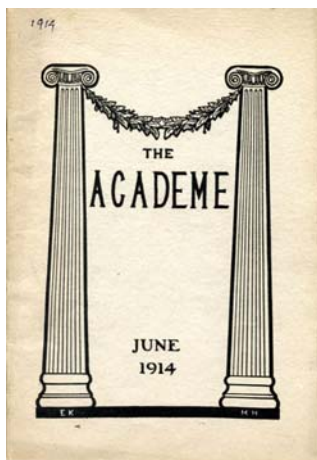
short version

In 1901, after a service of 21 years, Miss Lucy Plympton retired, her service devoted and courageous in one of the most demanding eras of the school history. Leadership passed to Esther Louise Camp. Nancy Van Dyke recalled Miss Camp as of “medium height, extremely thin, rather grim of countenance, but withal one of the finest, most just women whom it ever has been my good fortune to encounter. She ruled her girls with an iron hand...but never asked of others what she herself was not willing to undertake. She was a splendid educator and her morning talks at the assembly period were always worthwhile. One idea she was always instilling into our young minds was “Not failure, but low aim is crime.”



Huldah Classen (cy 1932) wrote a paper for her university class, Education I. She recalled, “I remember [Miss Camp] during my first few years at the Academy. We used to march out of morning prayers, two by two, and drop a deep curtsy to her as we passed. The day she died, in 1923, school was closed for the day after we had been informed of her death at prayers.”

In June, 1903, the Junior class published a paper and called it “Academe.” They went on as seniors to make the effort into a formal magazine under the senior editors (all cy 1903) Sylvia Gersbach, literary editor, Marion Peckham, school notes, Emilie Hoffman, business manager, Abbie Chapin, alumnae notes, and junior editors (cy 1904), Sara Shaw and Lola Deal.



With minor variations, *Academe* appeared three or four times a year to 1968. From 1969, with one exception in 1973, the *Academe* became a stand-alone class book. The *Academe* is one of the highest achievements of Academy girls. For over fifty years, it created a record through journalism, literature and art, of the times, thoughts, and happenings of generations of students. The first pages of the *Academe* appear on the Archives website.

1906 Principal Esther Louise Camp led an effort to modernize the school name. The Legislature re-chartered the school as Albany Academy for Girls. Seniors studied plane geometry; physics or chemistry; Virgil, Greek, French, or German; English literature, history of Italian painting, botany, astronomy, physiology, and zoology, and English history. Feeling the deficiency of a school song, Camp wrote in 1910 the lyrics of “Academia, Hail to Thee.” She selected Emily Coolidge’s (cy Radcliffe 1908) music of the new Radcliffe Alma Mater, “Now We Rise to Greet Thee, Alma Mater, hail to thee!” Students today know Camp’s version by its first line:

short version

Academia, Hail to Thee

Classic columns lent their beauty
Alma Mater, to thy fame;
Gone are they, yet still thy daughters
Join in praises to thy name.
Splendors bright may flash and vanish
But our love shall burn more clear;
Loyal hearts no doubts can banish,
Hold thee daily yet more dear.
Faithful, clasp we hands and greet thee.
Academia, hail to thee—

Though we've toiled for Learning's treasure
Many a lesson, we forget:
But fair Friendship's sweetest measure
Lingers in our mem'ries yet.
Loyal service thou hast brought us,
So we offer unto thee
From the lessons thou hast taught us,
Steadfast truth and loyalty
Faithful, clasp we hands and greet thee,
Academia, hail to thee.

The Centennial proudly declared:

Of the one hundred and sixty-nine graduates in twelve years, fifty-six, or exactly one-third, have been sent to Vassar, Radcliffe, Mt. Holyoke, Barnard, Wellesley, and Bryn Mawr. Of the class of 1914 one-third will go to college and practically the whole of the other two-thirds will carry on some work in advanced courses of art, music, or languages. The curriculum provides for those pupils who do not go to college special courses in history, art and science....The youngest children, from two and a half to seven years, are in charge of a teacher trained in Italy in the Montessori system and skilled by experience in the adapting of this system to American children.



MONTESSORI CLASS AT WORK IN THE GARDEN.

short version

In 1909, baseball and basketball had become popular among girls. To raise further interest, the students formed an athletic association. Ruth Miner (cy 1911, shown holding the horse) was its first president.



According to Thelma Wade Holding (cy 1926), the association sponsored student picnics in remote Albany areas like the Albany Country Club or private estates, just to have a “bat,” or a good time. The *Academe*, December, 1911, has this: “The association is grateful to Miss Camp for securing privileges of grounds near the Country Club, where the members of the association may play baseball. The association has enjoyed several “bacon bats” this fall, in the woods adjoining the baseball field.” At the end of that academic year, the *Academe* reported: “On Saturday, May eleventh, the Athletic Association gave a bacon bat for its members, in Holmes’s woods. A large number went out in the Country Club car and took lunch in the woods. The association furnished delicious coffee, the girls toasted bacon, and after dinner played baseball.”



Class of 1911 at one of their picnics

The Centennial was celebrated in **1914**. Festivities were planned for May 31 through June 2nd. The one-hundred-and-four-page book published by the Alumnae provides the program:

short version

THE TRUSTEES
OF THE
ALBANY ACADEMY FOR GIRLS
FORMERLY
THE ALBANY FEMALE ACADEMY
REQUEST THE HONOR OF YOUR PRESENCE AT THE
CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION OF THE SCHOOL
May Thirty-first, June First and Second
nineteen hundred and fourteen

PROGRAMME

School Sunday, May 31st, Service 5 p. m., Study Hall
Sermon by the Rev. Charles A. Richmond, D. D.

Alumnae Breakfast, June 1st, 1 p. m. Ten Eyck Hotel
Historical Address by Miss Grace Perry

Centennial Celebration, June 1st, 8 p. m.
Auditorium of State Education Building

One hundredth Commencement, June 2nd, 11 a. m.
Auditorium of State Education Building
Speaker, Rev. Samuel McChord Crothers, D. D.

Reception for visiting Alumnae, June 2nd. from 4 until 6 p. m.
Hostesses—Mrs. William Law Learned
Mrs. George Douglas Miller

Loan Exhibition, June 1st and 2nd, Alumnae Room



The opening event was held on a traditional day of the school calendar, School Sunday. It provided a religious context for the particularly hallowed anniversary of the “unsectarian” academy. At the Alumnae breakfast (held at 1:00 pm), the portrait of Betsey Foot that is now at the head of the Drawing Room was presented by Mrs. W. H. Arnold who was Betsey’s great-granddaughter. The song, “Old and the New,” by Ida McKinney (cy 1871) was sung and there followed a signing of the parchment roll. Miss Lucy A. Plympton, retired for thirteen years, rose to give her greetings.

The Historical address by Justice Alden Chester, board president, reviews with accuracy the early history of education in New England and New York of young women with young men. He then relates the outline of the Academy, noting in oft-quoted comparisons the social and historical context of greater U. S. events. Chester mentions Field, Sonntag, Kent, and gives synopses of several successive board presidents. He notes especially the fundamental role of Thomas W. Olcott and of

short version

Frederick P. Olcott, who gave \$25,000 into the Endowment Fund, and of Dudley Olcott, treasurer of the Endowment Fund. By his will, Dudley Olcott left the school \$35,000.

Flavel S. Luther, direct descendent of Martin Luther’s brother, was the remarkable president of Trinity College, a mathematics scholar and competent in astronomy and engineering, with connections to business, politics, and the Episcopal Church. Dr. Luther’s address was controversial and interesting in many points. Here is one:

“What a hundred years it has been! Why, the difference between 1814 and 1914 is indefinitely more than the difference between 1814 and no hundred and 14. Barring gun powder and the printing press the activities and conditions of life changed more in this century that has just been completed than they changed from the days of Julius Caesar to the time when this school was founded. Medical treatment in 1814 was not a bit better. George Washington's surgeon did no better for him than Julius Caesar's surgeon might have done for him....”



Governor Glynn was gracious in his praise of the Academy’s accomplishment:

There is to me no more encouraging sign of modern progress, no more convincing proof of modern development than the position which woman is now assuming in our social and economic life. Lincoln said that no nation could exist half slave and half free, and it seems to me equally true that no nation can live up to its opportunities which is half educated and half uneducated, half trained and half untrained, half developed and half undeveloped.

Between 100 and 125 – the Academy Prospers

principal	Miss Esther Louise Camp	1901-1923
	Miss Edna F. Lake	1923-1930
	Miss Margaret Trotter, M.A.	1930-1941
president	Hon. Alden Chester, LL.B., L.H.D.	1904-1934
	Charles B. Heisler	1934-1940
treasurer	Dudley Olcott	1900-1919
	Robert Olcott	1920-1922
	Robert Olcott continues as T Endowment	1922-1930
	Esther Louise Camp	1922-1923
	Ella F. McKinney	1923-1926
	Charles B. Heisler	1926-1931
	Douglas W. Olcott	1931-1936
	Herbert J. Kneip	1936-1940

Edna Lake succeeded Miss Camp in 1923. She was a Vassar graduate, did post-graduate work at Columbia and Cornell and received an honorary doctorate from Western Reserve

short version

University. She had taught Latin at Bradford Junior College and started teaching at AAG in 1916. Isabel Gutelius Gordon (cy 1923) wrote, “We all loved Latin with Miss Lake. She even had us ‘do’ little plays....The idea was to attune our ears to spoken Latin....The day we translated Queen Dido’s death we all wore black ties instead of our purple class ones. We were delighted when Miss Lake, duly surprised, wanted to know why the black ties, and we solemnly told her we were in mourning for Queen Dido.”



In her tenure, the school grew from about 125 to 300. Signs of the school’s academic reputation were evident in the accreditation of the school by the Middle States Association, the establishment of a chapter of Cum Laude Society, and the success of seniors in the College Entrance Board Examinations. Lake served as an officer in the National Association of Principals of Schools for Girls, was admitted to the prestigious Headmistresses’ Association of the East, and was President General of the national Cum Laude Society (1944-1950).

1925 The first school uniform for older students was adopted, apple green poplin for spring, dark green serge for winter; jumpers for grades five through eight, skirts

and blouses for the high school.



In 1926-27, a new gymnasium/auditorium and a cafeteria were added. Alden Chester put the cost at \$75,000. The boarding program was gradually phased out and the Palmer home used for offices, classrooms, and some faculty housing. To make more room for physical education, two houses on Washington Avenue to the east were purchased and torn down.

When Edna Lake left in 1930, the board commended her highly and expressed appreciation that for many years she had refused numerous headships offered her. “Miss Lake, by her untiring efforts and rare executive ability, has brought an enviable reputation to the Academy amongst the colleges and the college preparatory schools for girls of the country.” After serving as headmistress at AAG, she headed the Laurel School in Cleveland from 1931 to 1958.

short version

Miss Margaret Trotter was chosen as the next headmistress. Also a Vassar graduate (cy 1908), she went on to Columbia for graduate work, then taught English at Halsted School in Yonkers. Trotter had executive experience in hospital management, then undertook further study of English and literature at Oxford and the Sorbonne. Her mother was an AAG graduate, Mary L. Patten (cy 1875). Miss Trotter contributed a chapter in Charles Blessing's Albany's Schools and Colleges. She wrote:



“In this year 1935-1936 the school has an enrollment of 260 students. There is a staff of thirty-two teachers. There are 55 alumnae of the school enrolled in major colleges and 20 in art or other special schools.... A strong self-government organization gives girls practice in cooperative citizenship. The student activities are largely student directed and planned and the scope of them is wide and varied enough so that every girl naturally participates.

“There is physical education for all girls in the morning....The sports program varies with the season, and every girl is urged to spend three afternoons a week at some sport. Interpretive dancing, riding, hockey, basket-ball, soccer, as well as individual sports like tennis, golf, badminton all

have their place in the programme. The younger children play out of doors every morning on the sunny protected school grounds....”



Celebration and Distress



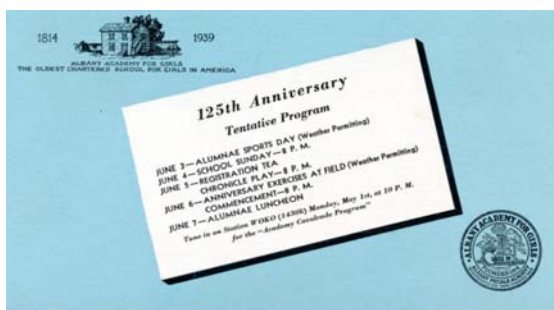
The Palmer building was an ideal nineteenth century school building but not twentieth. The alumnae had “fond” memories of “the swaying bridge between the buildings; the old gym with its interfering columns, the new gym built in 1927 which doubled as an auditorium; the school year; the five flights of stairs; the gracious study hall with its fireplace and double-desks.”

Jean Hufman described commencement: “[It was] much the same as today. The seniors wore white silk street length dresses, all made alike, and all the same number of inches from the floor. We carried bouquets of blue, yellow, and white flowers, and marched into the gym to the strains of ‘Land of Hope and Glory.’ The diplomas were given out by

Judge Chester, President of the Board of Trustees, and the recessional was Kipling’s ‘Lest We Forget.’”

1938 The School purchased land opposite The Albany Academy for future development on the country day school model. The Second World War interrupted planning and fund raising, but tennis courts and a hockey field were laid out and students bused there to play.

In June, 1939, the school celebrated its 125th Anniversary, combining special events with the regular end-of-year ceremonies. Thelma Holding was the General Chairperson. On Saturday, June 2, an anniversary elm was planted at the new fields on Academy Road. There were a tennis match and an alumnae-student baseball game. The next day was School Sunday and its ceremonies were held at First Church in Albany. Rev. M. Stephen James, D.D. gave the address.



On Monday, alumnae and guests registered and visited the school in the afternoon. At 8:00 in the evening, everyone gathered at the Philip Livingston Junior High School auditorium for the Chronicle play. Credits for its writing were given to two dozen collaborators, chaired by Truman D. Cameron. Ella Robinson was the director. It involved drama, dance, chorus and slides, segmented into twenty episodes of the school history. Some of the notables in the production were Eugene Carson Blake as Lebbeus Booth, Winthrop P. Stevens as Ebenezer Foot, Mrs. Herman J. Diekman as Betsey Foot, and Lester W. Herzog, Jr., as Alonzo Crittenden. A special skit, “Academy Cavalcade,” was broadcast on radio station WOKO. The Archives has these scripts.

short version

There is an interesting imbalance in the story line. The founding was such an important issue for the school that a quarter of the program was devoted to it. By the time the semi-centennial is reached, three-quarters of the episodes are over. Only episode twenty, the last, dealt with the 1892-1939 period. Use this link to view the [program](#).

Commencement was held the next evening at the State Education building's Chancellor's Hall. After greetings by the commissioner, Dr. Frank P. Graves, the speaker was Dr. Roswell Gray Ham, Ph.D., LL.D., president of Mount Holyoke College. Finally, the Alumnae luncheon was held on Wednesday at the DeWitt Clinton hotel.

Hard on the heels of the 125th anniversary of the school, and just after the second dip in the nation's economic depression, came informal discussions of trustees of both academies concerning the future of the schools. These men were Charles B. Heisler, Ledyard Cogswell, Jr., and Winthrop P. Stevens. Soon both boards were fully involved. Discussions were kept confidential, but in a matter so vital to so many, word leaked out, controversy arose, and the boards were accused of rushing to a decision without constituent input. On November 24, 1939, President Heisler sent the following letter to parents and alumnae:

Your school recently celebrated its one hundred and twenty fifth anniversary; an anniversary marking a very long period of great accomplishments and a history of which we are proud. It is the belief of your Trustees, however, that your school in the future, in order to improve upon, or even equal, its accomplishments and proud history of the past, may have to undergo changes, possibly changes that may seem radical.... There are two outstanding problems with which your school is confronted. They are

1. No private secondary school can perform an outstanding service in the future, or probably even survive, unless it is in a position to and does continually improve its educational curriculum so as to maintain a commanding advantage in that respect.

2. The tremendous decline in birth rate, especially among the social and financial classes of people whose children primarily go to private schools, definitely indicates for a long time ahead a continually decreasing enrollment in all such schools. That change has already been felt in both public and private schools. For example,

There are 1,000,000 fewer children in primary grades of the schools of the U. S. than ten years ago. We are told that Albany public schools, in spite of Albany's increase in population, have 12% fewer students in the elementary grades than ten years ago.

One of the seemingly advantageous changes which has been under careful consideration and study, under the guidance and counsel of educational experts, is a possible merger of your school with the Albany Academy. While such a proposal may seem at first to be startling, if not even revolutionary, it would appear, as far as present studies have gone, that it might be a solution of the above two major problems.

short version

A brochure was sent to the communities of both schools. The proposal envisioned a coeducational lower school, upper school girls in one wing of The Albany Academy, and upper school boys in the other wing. The chart on the right reveals the statistical impetus for a coeducational lower school.

Grade	A.A.	A.A.G.	Combined
Kindergarten	13	7	20
1st Grade	11	11	22
2nd Grade	15	7	22
3rd Grade	23	12	35
4th Grade	25	10	35
5th Grade	20	17	37
6th Grade	22	10	32
TOTALS	129	74	203

The reasons given for the proposal were a declining birth rate and a “material” decline in enrollment in both schools, the economic stress of depression, and the “general tax structure.” Moreover, “new public high school and parochial school buildings have been erected and equipped with many of the advantages of a private school...” A private school could survive only if it continues to offer “a superior form of individualized secondary education...which brings students into contact with a carefully selected group of teachers who will also fill the role of guide, philosopher and friend.” Further:

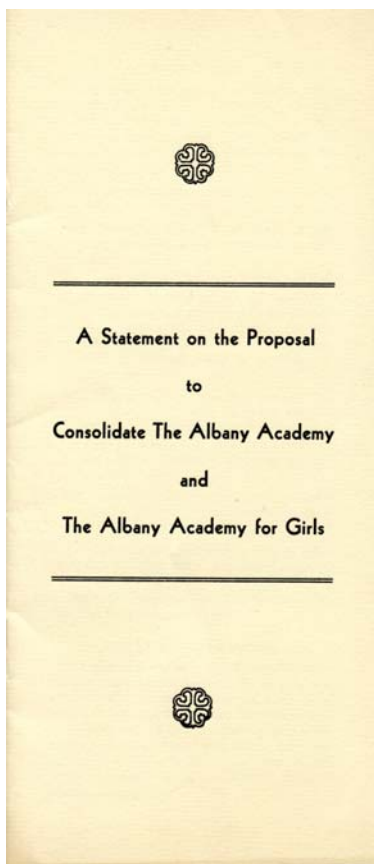
It should be distinctly understood that neither school faces anything like bankruptcy, but each must avoid a static future. The Albany Academy has a commanding location, a new plant and a debt of \$251,050 (as of June 30, 1939). The Girls' Academy has a serviceable, but less modern plant, and a debt of \$93,000. The endowment of the Albany Academy is \$100,000 (market value, July 1, 1939), and the Girls' Academy has an endowment of \$210,000 (market value, July 1, 1939). The total operating deficit of the two schools combined is \$37,500 over the period of the last nine years. **But the net worth of the two schools combined totals \$1,245,950.00.** Endowment income on the basis of the year 1938-39 is \$13,319.63 annually.

The operating savings (non-personnel) to be gained by having two populations in one building were estimated to be \$15,000 annually, more than enough to eliminate the current annual operation deficits.

The board then summarized the educational advantages that they perceived would follow from consolidation.

1. A much richer and broader program educationally, esthetically and socially, stressing the development and enrichment of personality and character.
2. Experienced and able leadership by a staff of three experts, one for the older boys, one for the older girls and, of great importance, a trained educational expert to supervise the lower school.

short version



3. More effective and superlative teaching for all classes because of
 - a. An increasingly valuable library and additions to teaching apparatus and equipment.
 - b. A more educationally selective student body with higher scholastic standing.
 - c. More attention to the individual needs, interests and abilities of each student. Upper school teachers would have to carry a teaching load of only four periods per day—other periods being available for conference with students of the upper school forms, especially those needing additional help on their work.
 - d. Other opportunities for experienced teachers to do their best work.
4. A common program of extra-curricular activities for the upper school boys and girls in glee clubs, dramatics, literary societies, etc., that will make for a more natural social relationship.

All this would not alter the splendid, traditionally characteristic features and events of each school's present life. (bold type original)

The brochure concluded with a plea from both boards for “calmness, open-mindedness and straight thinking:”

They ask your patience, your counsel, your continued loyalty—that whatever the future holds, strong, enduring outstanding education for your boys and girls may continue to be found in Albany, either through the two academies as they are now, or in whatever form of organization they may be, when the study now under consideration is complete and a decision reached.

Opposition from parents and graduates scuttled the proposal. The leadership of the boards turned over, as did the heads of schools.

The Era of Rhoda Harris and the Country Day Plan

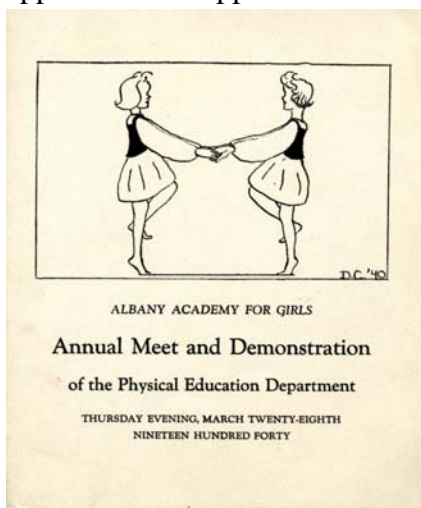
principal	Miss Rhoda E. Harris, M.A.	1941-1964
president	Hon. Harold J. Hinman	1940-1941
	Winthrop P. Stevens	1941-1942
	Douglas W. Olcott	1943-1954
	Dean Andrew V. Clements, LL.B., LL.D.	1954-1964
treasurer	Arthur G. Pellman	1940-1949
	Oliver H. Day	1949-1959
	Julian de F. Hills	1959-



Rhoda Harris, a Vassar graduate, following relief work in Poland and work for the YWCA (later serving on the national board), entered the profession of education in Buffalo, then went to New York City. She earned a master's degree at Columbia and undertook progressive education projects and teacher-training classes for the Public School system. She was associated with the Bureau of Educational Experiments that eventually developed into the Bank Street School. She was involved in the founding of The Little Red Schoolhouse. She was friends with Elisabeth Irwin and Dr. Benjamin Spock. Dr. Ruth Andrus of the New York State Education Department, called her

“one of the most creative teachers I ever have known and also a very able executive.”

One of the great annual events of the school was the Gym Meet. In the archives there are programs for the event from 1915 to 1988 (the last year). In 1918, the upper classes competed for the Loving Cup in five categories: floor work, carriage, posture, spirit, and apparatus. The apparatus forms were box (courage vault and trail vault), saddle (wolf

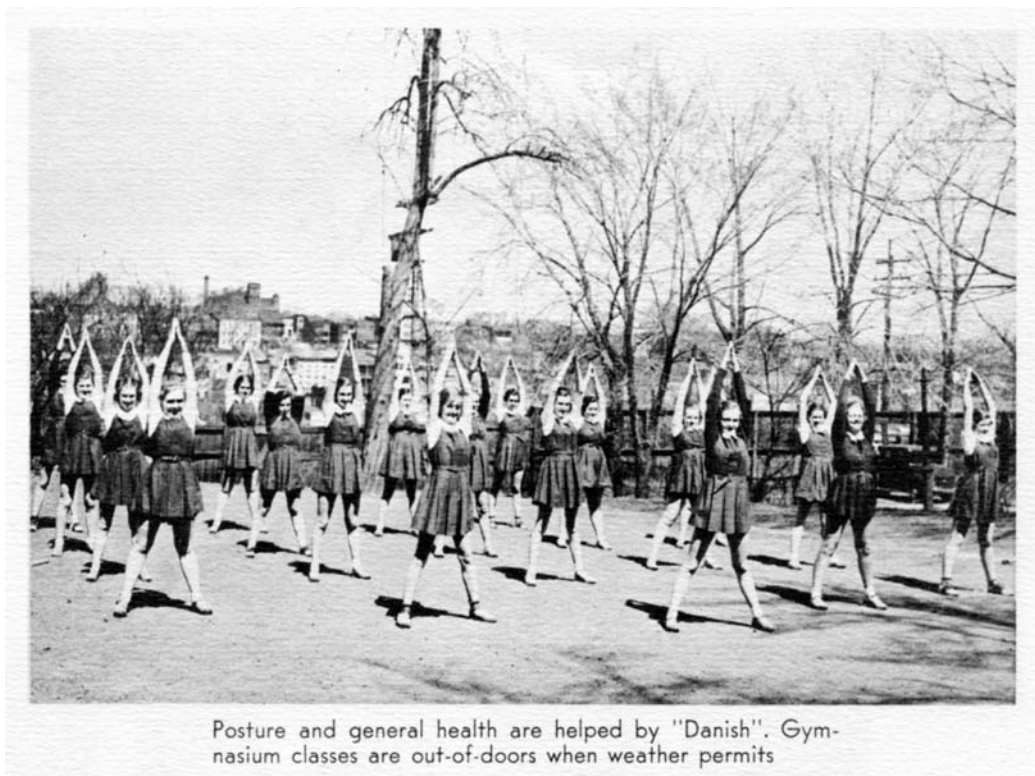


vault and squat vault), and boom (one-height scissor and squat vault). Individuals scoring well on apparatus during the year could compete in straddle vault over the box, rear vault over the box, running and turning on the rings, straddle vault over the saddle, and rope climbing for height.

The 1921 program lists a great deal of marching, athletic drill, apparatus work, and awards. The 1940 competition and demonstration reached new levels of sophistication under instructors Helen Mason Frey, Barbara Newman, and Mrs. Grace P. Van Guysling. Each upper school class (freshman thorough seniors) competed in “Danish” gymnastics. Denmark had become the epicenter of a popular form of gymnastic exercises done by teams, done at a

short version

fast tempo, sometimes to music, sometimes through vaulting and tumbling, to stretch and exercise the body, increasing flexibility and health.



In the 1940 Gym Meet, the girls performed stunts, danced in classical, modern, and folk styles, used the apparatus, played a basketball game, sang class songs, and marched.

The Middle School Meet program of 1963 lists these principles of the physical education program. Note how they are tied to the academic learning process.

1. The instinctive characteristics of man all find expression in play: gregariousness, kicking, running, jumping, exploration, laughter, fighting, self-assertion, etc. Personal emotions are given expression: love, hate, disgust, desire, fear, anger, sorrow, etc. All of these drives must be modified if any person is to be socially adjusted at any age. They can all be modified in play.
2. The law of readiness is necessary for application to learning. One of the phases of this law is a keen interest, therefore, since physical education forms a large part of the child's natural life, you have the keen interest.
3. The law of exercise (repetition for learning) is carried out in play because of the large amount of time spent in play.
4. The law of effect: behavior with satisfactory results tends to be repeated and vice versa; therefore the child who plays well gets good results from teachers and friends, (sportsmanship, etc.)

short version

5. Sportsmanship includes all desirable personal and social attitudes.
6. In physical education activities children learn by doing more than in other fields.
7. The opportunity for self-testing is important in education. Physical education is an easy thing to objectify in this way so that the child may see the progress.
8. Everyone must adjust to group living. Physical education offers social relationships and the exercise of the characteristics necessary for this adjustment.
9. Civic responsibilities - loyalty, obedience, service, etc.

The program for the 1966 Gym Meet lists similar events as the one for 1940, except volleyball replaced basketball. The physical education department consisted of Miss Harriet C. Rawle, Miss Gertrude Hallenbeck (cy 1938), and Mrs. Katalin Toth, a formidable trio. The point system was explained in the program. Marching was judged on rhythm and step, execution, originality of floor pattern and use of space, and the quality of the leader's commands. Apparatus was judged on start and approach, take off, form in execution, landing and exit, and control and coordination. The Danish was scored as well: how many body systems were exercised, e.g. legs and hips, abdominal, etc. (70 points); strength, flexibility, and coordination (30 points); accuracy and control (20 points); rhythm (10 points); and interesting combinations (10 points).

By 1985, the meets had shifted from the martial and gymnastic flavor to a more artistic one. The marching was much reduced, gymnastics were performed by members of a club, not by all girls. Danish Exercises were replaced by Aerobic Exercises, at least in name, and Dance Workshop performed a large portion of the program. The instructors were Katalin Toth, Linda Michele, and Cathy Rosenblatt Teitelbaum (cy 1965).



Physical Education is a daily requirement for girls of the Middle School

short version

Blazer Day was the culmination of all of a girl's physical education and athletic activities. Based on accumulated points, numerals, emblems, or shields were awarded and the recipient proudly sewed them on her green wool blazer. For the senior shield, a 12th grader needed 375 points (later lowered to 350, because in some years, no one qualified). The emblem required 260 and any high school girl was eligible. The numerals required 70 points. Here is how the points were earned: a varsity team - 25 points, a JV team - 15, participation - 10, each apparatus - 1.

Gertrude Hallenbeck Cashvan (cy 1938, K-12) provided the general objectives of dance at AAG:

1. Ability to use the body as an instrument of expression
2. To develop strength, endurance, flexibility and coordination
3. To develop a vocabulary of movement and a knowledge of the forces which influence movement
4. To provide an opportunity for creative dance
5. To provide greater enjoyment of dance as a recreational activity both in school and later in adult life
6. To develop a knowledge of the fundamentals of music and other accompaniments as they relate to dance
7. To provide an appreciation and understanding of the benefits of dance to develop physical well-being

Rhoda Harris allowed strong student leadership, and shared with the Student Council an unusual amount of school governance. She asked her teachers to use community resources in their teaching. She promoted a wide international perspective, drawing on her own experiences in Poland and travels in Peru. She was great friends with many of her staff, Mrs. Schumann, Mrs. Sroka, Miss Robinson, and Mrs. Childers especially. Douglas Olcott, Mel Bender, Thelma Wade Holding, Mildred Hinman Straub, and Henry Blatner were her great supporters among the trustees.

Just as John Kafer and Edward Beauparlant are so highly regarded today, one of the great figures of the Harris regime was Mr. William B. Wilson, Superintendent of Buildings. According to Tim Harris, Rhoda's son, who as a youth worked with Mr. Wilson for five summers, Mr. Wilson kept the school going, with all the skill, love, and respect required by an old building, grand as she was. Mr. Wilson was much loved by the girls and staff and was a frequent object of attention in the *Academe*. At the new building, Mr. Wilson had an apartment in the school. Tim also praises Erna Botner, head of the cafeteria, as a wonderful lady. She greeted each student by name, and, as Susan Rockmore recalls, "if she knew your preference, she had a special sandwich waiting for you. I was in my fifties when I learned I wasn't the only one getting a special sandwich."



short version



Similarly, Miss Elsie A. Erben, secretary of the school, who, among all her other duties, typed out the *Academe* at least twice a year. “Her kind smile and invaluable friendship are second only to her vast knowledge of everything concerning the Academy.” In 1957, the editors dedicated the winter issue to her.

The baby boom generation was ready to be accommodated, but where? The age of 155 Washington Avenue, the extreme cost of renovations, the lack of parking and land had made clear a building campaign was a post-war priority. The Alumnae started an annual fund called Friends of the Academy in 1949. The Academy Road building fund was launched in 1956 and raised \$350,000. Thelma Wade (Mrs. Reynolds) Holding (cy 1926) and Mildred Hinman (Mrs. J. Vanderbilt) Straub (cy 1926) were co-chairs of the Building Fund campaign, and later, the 150th Anniversary Fund.

The building was designed by Henry L. Blatner. He also designed Shaker and Niskayuna high schools, homes and churches, and the South Mall Towers, among other projects. Lewis A. Swyer’s company did the construction. Swyer became a trustee in 1961 and chaired the buildings and grounds committee for twenty years. Both had children in the schools.



Henry L. Blatner

1959 Mementoes and items of historical interest were placed in the cornerstone. The presidents of the Mothers and the Fathers Associations, the headmistress, and two students officiated. The stone itself was laid October 29, 1958, following a ceremony in the old school and a procession to the new. At the ceremony, President Andrew V. Clements presided. Rev. Robert C. Lamar, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Albany, gave the invocation and benediction and there was singing of two hymns. A list of the documents and the program is in the archives. At the new uncompleted building,

short version

student Pam Morgan, President of the Student Council, President Clements, Rev. Lamar and Thelma Holding, building fund chairperson, presided.



Moving day was a snowy March 14, 1959. "Students of all ages helped transfer books to the library and treasured possessions to their classrooms." Miss Harris was careful to bring to the new campus items from the history of the old. The frame and door of the office of the headmistress came from Washington Avenue to Academy Road; the beautiful marble fireplace and mantel were removed from the old Drawing Room to the new. The key to her goal is seen in this insightful observation about learning and unconscious attachment:

We have forgotten the battle of Hastings, the frantic hieroglyphics in the old black notebooks, when Lady Macbeth began to plot. We can never forget the excitement of the opening day of school and its new beginning, the teachers excited by things of the mind and devoted to leading young minds into new discoveries, the explorations in unknown areas, the exposure to great ideas, the books, the impact of a new idea. The unconscious learnings of our school days live within us forever: insight into life itself, the sturdy life of the spirit which survives the hard, the exalting, the disappointing, the frustrating, the rewarding experiences, the real joy of tackling a problem and staying with it until it is solved, the unafraidness in facing the unknown and the new.

The 1959 *Academe* has a student perspective by Linda Sutherland (cy 1959) on leaving the old:

No one involved will ever forget that period in the school's history. Newspaper pictures and publicity, mortgages to be reduced, laying the cornerstone, a dedication of the new building, making new schedules, wearing paper bricks on jacket lapels, converting the sedate drawing-room into a busy office, covering blackboards with mysterious figures, defacing walls as memories are transported to Academy Road, workmen scurrying self-consciously through the halls, puzzling transportation problems, books and equipment being mysteriously packed while teachers wonder if they'll ever see them again, fathers industriously salvaging worn furniture and returning alumnae searching wistfully through rooms soon to be demolished: ultimate confusion.

And as we left Washington Avenue, we abandoned many things ingrained in our old way of life: the downtown traffic, the absence of parking space, raucous

short version

parades, boys drilling noisily in the Armory, the wiggly gym floor, and washable wallpaper. Even the most calloused become suddenly nostalgic.

Tour of the 155 Washington Avenue building by Lucy Plympton

Upon her retirement, an editorial in the *Knickerbocker News* proclaimed the three major attributes of Miss Harris's leadership.

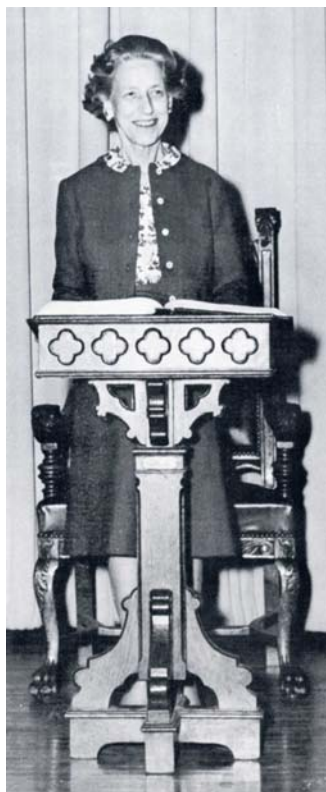


Scholarliness and the ability to attract others of like mind. The faculty under her stewardship has increased vastly in academic stature and the curriculum has kept pace with the times.

Administrative acumen which has enlarged the scope and population of the school and leaves it in a fine new plant that is already virtually paid for.

Community consciousness that has meant the school has been related at every turn to the cultural and intellectual needs of the area.

Already unwell in her last year, Miss Harris died soon after her retirement in 1964. An editorial in the city newspapers proclaimed, "Albany loses a fine educator, gracious lady, and a good friend."



Douglas W. Olcott, board president for ten of the Harris years, wrote, "We should remember that in 1941, the fortunes of this school were at low ebb. Enrollment had dropped; our finances were sadly depleted; faculty salaries had suffered; and a balanced budget seemed impossible of realization." Rhoda's perseverance, hard work, energetic sympathy won over the constituents and gradually solved all of these problems, including the transfer of the campus to Academy Road. "Financial stability, a sound and growing endowment fund, improved faculty salaries, and practically a full enrollment are her legacy to us, so largely due to her unquenchable spirit, her infectious enthusiasm, and her faith in the academy's purpose and its basic value to our community."

Olcott continued, "Far beyond our respect for her as our Headmistress, we remember her as an individual of personal charm, complete unselfishness and a keen but kindly sense of humor. She could forgive human weaknesses and chose rather to emphasize the points of strength in each associate and student, always aiming high in urging one to the strongest effort. She offered her friendship to everyone connected with the School, and who could resist her?No one listening to

short version

her Commencement addresses could mistake her feelings and her meaning. She had the fervor and zeal of a true missionary.”

principal	Jean T. Rich (Mrs. Townsend Rich), M. A.	1964-1970
	Erwin H. Kitzrow, M. A.	1970-1980
president	Mildred Hinman Straub	1964-1981
treasurer	Julian de F. Hills	1959-1974
	George M. Auchincloss	1974-1977
	John J. Nigro	1977-

1964 The 150th. The first woman president of the board of trustees is Mildred Hinman Straub (cy 1926). A former president of the Alumnae Association, she became a permanent member of the board in 1951, just after her father Hon. Harold J. Hinman, a former Supreme Court justice, retired. After AAG, she graduated from Wellesley College where she was later an alumna trustee. Mildred served on many other Albany boards, including Community Chest, United Way, and YWCA. She even taught ancient history at AAG in less busy times.

Her classmate, Thelma Wade Holding (cy 1926), entered in VII and graduated first in her class, winning the First Honor and the prize in mathematics. Millie and Thelma went to Wellesley together, remained life long supporters of Wellesley and the Girls Academy, and were both involved in the same Albany charities. Thelma studied math and economics. During World War II, Thelma was the chairman of the USO-Traveler’s Aid Lounge in Union Station.

Thelma and Millie were great fund raisers for the Academy, launching the annual giving program in 1949, leading the building fund in 1956, and the 150th anniversary fund that paid off remaining mortgages and established an endowment for faculty salaries and retirement. They kept going, organizing projects for the Middle School Science Lab, the Music wing, a Middle School activities room, and the dance floor at the back of the auditorium. Thelma also took to the archives, keeping order in the alumnae records and writing narratives about the rich past of the school.

Thelma served as president of the alumnae association more than once, had board positions as such, and became a full trustee in 1952.

Martha Decker retired. She taught from 1921 to 1965 and is fondly remembered for her love of history and Class VIII leadership. Miss Decker, remembered by the class of 1958 in a large poster hanging in the school, was synonymous with “Eighth Grade Play,” “Twenty Bridges,” and academic rigor. Martha’s will left the school \$150,000 to endow a scholarship fund. The AAG Alumnae Council in 1987 set up the Martha Decker Fund, to be used to sustain the school archives,

thenceforth to be known as the Martha Decker Memorial Archives. Susan Rockmore



short version

writes, “Many, many students were influenced by her strength and love of history. Although we were, at times bewildered by her classroom antics, she commanded our respect and deserved it.”

Clarence A. Hollister taught music from 1943 to 1968 and instilled a deep respect for music and singing throughout the school. He directed the Upper School Glee Club and led the processional and recessional every day in Chapel.



Everyone in the Fifth Grade plays the recorder

Miss Ella R. Robinson was a favorite of many. She headed the English department from 1925 to 1956. She was a Colby College graduate and earned a Master’s degree at Columbia. Ella Robinson advised the *Academe* for many years, and her staffs participated in the Columbia Scholastic Press Conference in New York City, frequently winning first prize. She introduced the joint play concept, and, on one particularly boisterous rehearsal day, calmed the raucous boys and girls by standing up and, “in her inimitable way, spoke but one word: subside!”

She left the school to marry a high school friend, and returned to Maine. When she died in June 4, 1979 (b. 1893), the tributes poured in. Here is one from AAG art teacher and sculptor, Marjorie White Williams (cy 1945).



Miss Robinson, as example, was liberated, because she was confident of her vocational power, her professional strengths, and made no apologies for her publicly avowed feminism. Who cannot remember, (and most of us with envy) the beautiful, poised woman sitting with us in a circle of chairs reading with immense power a passage from Shakespeare? Who cannot see the flush on her face, the tears moving down her cheeks, and the breaking voice as she read some of our own work?

Oh yes, she was roasted during every Senior Skit for her intractable “No!” Remember the one that was short and chopped like the stamped foot? And the one that was rapidly cued but then slowed in pace and trailed off at an increasingly higher pitch? Always she was mimed adjusting her hair and requesting someone to “throw up the window!” But who laughed harder than anyone? Rob, of course!

short version

It was a clue to her great confidence in herself that permitted her continued idiosyncrasies without undermining her moral and creative intensity.

Reform, Recession, Turbulence

Jean (Mrs. Townsend R.) Rich, pictured to the right of Mildred Straub, board president, was a teacher in the history department when she was appointed to succeed Rhoda Harris. She and Dr. Rich (chairman of the English department at SUNY Albany, had two children, Wunderley, AAG and Radcliffe, and John, AA and Harvard. Jean had a master's in English from University of Michigan, did further graduate work a University of Chicago and taught in the English department at Michigan State before coming to Albany in 1948. At AAG, she taught junior and senior history. After her first three years, Mrs. Rich reported on the additions and reforms energizing the curriculum, moving it away from the uniformity of the 1950s generation:



In the lower school

- more phono-visual, more science, more French
- more music, more art
- more reading and mathematics

For the middle school

- institution of a weekly assembly
 - an opportunity to express themselves
 - a sense of identity
- programs in science and studio arts greatly expanded

In the upper school

- reorganized and amplified social studies sequence, K - 12
- added speech, world cultures, a second course in biology, humanities, art appreciation and music appreciation, and economics

In her last year (1970), Mrs. Rich gave this report, detailing how students of the 1960s wanted and were given more responsibility.

I am going to review for you very briefly some of the ways the school has responded to the changing interests and attitudes of students today. Last year a student evaluating committee met with members of the faculty and evolved a

short version

concept of *school* government rather than *student* government in order to give students a more effective voice in school affairs. Faculty representatives were included on Student Council to open the way to joint discussion and decisions. Student Council sponsored open forums for the whole upper school in which any girl could speak....

Students took an increasingly greater part in all areas of the school. They were added to faculty committees, they attended some faculty meetings, and they were invited to some meetings of the Board of Trustees and the Search Committee for the new head. In every case they made thoughtful and valuable contributions. One of their suggestions was more flexibility in the school program. So this year we had more electives. Medieval History, requested by a group of seniors, music appreciation, and art appreciation, have been added. Next year we plan to have project physics and in the senior year independent study as a credit course. To remove the emphasis on working just for marks, certain subjects will be pass-fail....

But by far the most exciting innovation this year was a week in April (Exploration Week) in which the regular schedule of classes was suspended and the time given over to special interests. What was most significant about this week was that two of the older girls took full responsibility for the week, canvassed the school for interests, made all arrangements and time schedules, and secured the programs which ranged from electronic music, auto mechanics, rock poetry, dance, and yoga to speakers from the state legislature, the city's social agencies and narcotics bureaus. The week had tremendous value not only in expanding interests and in giving girls responsibility, but in demonstrating how well and effectively they take responsibility. I have great confidence in our young people. We who are concerned as educators and parents are learning to work not just for them, but with them in the whole challenging process of learning which is undergoing such fundamental and rapid changes to-day.

Jean Rich moved the school into a new era. She retired after twenty years of service at AAG in order to travel with her husband.

1971 Erwin Kitzrow was the first man to lead the school since 1880. He was a student at University of Wisconsin and a World War II veteran. His B.A. and M.A. in history came from the University of Chicago. Just before joining AAG, he chaired the history department and was faculty dean at Emma Willard. He served for ten years and left the school with appreciation for his care and support. James Howard Jacobson wrote of him to Millie Straub, "He is a fine scholar, warm in personality, rich in understanding, wise in analyzing students..." and just, kind, and considerate.

Kitzrow was always charmed by the community spirit and true friendship and sense of oneness among students, faculty, parents, and trustees. He contributed much to the enrichment of the curriculum, given the small size of the upper school. He had to devote much time to financial management in a period of rapidly rising inflation. With his five

short version

boys and two girls in both academies, Kitzrow knew well the advantages of both schools. While favoring the coordination with The Albany Academy in Exploration Week and coordinate course options, he felt AAG should guard against loss of the specialness of the separate identity of a girls' school.

A crisis arose in February, 1977, when Albany Academy for Girls, heated by natural gas, was closed by order of the governor during a national gas shortage. 110 girls crossed the road to take classes for a week in the boys' building.



Kitzrow followed the maxim Alfred North Whitehead wrote in The Aims of Education: “Knowledge does not keep any better than fish. Somehow or other, it must come to the student, as it were, just drawn out of the sea.” In addition to strengthening Exploration Week, Kitzrow introduced Wednesday afternoon opportunities for Upper School students on a quarterly basis in one or another of some ten or twelve workshops, interest groups and activities. They ranged from performing arts, dance, art studio, and physical activity, to creative writing, arts and crafts, film study, community service, and child study. They promised “to be as stimulating for the faculty as for the students, as they will enter the groups both as leaders and as participants at

various points.”

In June of 1971, Kitzrow reported: “In the Upper School, the number of offerings and electives has been expanded, making it possible for any girl to take a full four-year sequence in any of the major academic disciplines as well as a double concentration in her last two years.”

On March 17, 1975, Erwin Kitzrow and Harold Santee, Headmaster of The Albany Academy, signed a statement of coordination:

1. both schools are committed to single-sex education
2. the schools shall independently design their curricula
3. electives for grades 10-12 shall be offered for optional cross-enrollment
4. schools schedules shall be designed cooperatively
5. there shall be a common registration period
6. each school will hold some places in electives for cross-enrollment

Both Boards of Trustees endorsed the agreement. Within this modest framework, both heads of schools worked hard to make substantial cross-enrollment possible. By October, 1976, there were 70 students cross-enrolled in twelve courses. The class passing time was extended from 2 to 4 minutes to accommodate the more frequent inter-campus treks. By 1977, AAG's Exploration Week was a fully coordinate affair and a big success. For the first time, AAG cheerleaders were allowed to cheer for AA football and basketball teams. Coordination continued to grow slowly over the next twenty years. By 2000, over 100 students were cross-enrolled in up to 50 different courses. Here the program coasted until

short version

2003 when Caroline Mason became Head of both The Albany Academy and Albany Academy for Girls.

With the steady growth of the glee club under Allan Mills and the recommendations of the 1973 Middle States Evaluation Report, Henry Blatner added in 1978 a 1200 square foot music room to the school. This was the second addition to the building, a science room having been built in 1974. Mills wrote of the program:

AAG can well be proud of the accomplishments of its students in the area of musical performance. The singing of the Primary during its Winter and Spring programs; the music performed as part of the Eighth Grade Play; the piano recitals in May; the Glee Club's vocal ensemble work heard at Winter Open House; the annual Spring Concert; and our guest appearances out of school.

Susan Hengerer Sneeringer (cy 1972) recalls the ceremonies of Final Assembly. The senior heads of student committees gave speeches and passed their presidential pins to the incoming junior heads. As in the days of Rhoda Harris, the student committees shared many administrative duties with the professional staff.

Marion T. Thorstensen served the school twenty eight years before retiring in 1981. Marion Duggan Thorstensen wrote:



Mrs. Thorstensen

“Hundreds of us are not only grateful to her for the wonderful foundation she gave us in writing and literature, but have an enduring affection for her. One of those rare people who could enforce class discipline without raising her voice, Mrs. T. was always patient, diplomatic, encouraging and inspiring. She generously shared her fascination with learning and love of fine writing. She could make a passage of Shakespeare come alive. Her wit, her charm, her sincerity, her intelligence and her sensitivity make her special.”

Katalin Toth taught physical education for twenty-three years, from 1965 to 1988. For sixteen of those years she directed the department. When she started, under Jean Rich, she turned primary recess play into a skills program. She brought fourth graders into the gym to extend their PE training. She had the dance floor built at the back of the auditorium to free up space in the gym. She introduced primary children to tennis and gymnastics.

Mr. Kitzrow was succeeded by Elaine Wiswall Betts, the first alumna Headmistress. She graduated in 1943, went on to Smith, and had a Master's degree from Holy Names College. Before coming to AAG, Elaine was head of the Upper School at Head-Royce School in California. In her letter to alumnae after her first year, there are several discordant notes: seniors discontented, faculty exhorted, staff reorganized, and difficulty

short version

replacing the irreplaceable Mrs. Thorstensen. Elaine was also “commuting” to the school from California. The school struggled with the rising inflation and the need to honor teachers with decent salaries.

principal	Elaine Wiswall 1943 (Mrs. Darby Betts), M. A.	1980-1984
	Kathleen G. Johnson, M. A.	1984-1990
	Ronald Fay, M. Ed.	1990-1992
	Mary Buchan (board president, acting head)	1993
president	Anne G. Older	1981-1987
	Michael Whiteman	1987-1989
	Mary Buchan	1989-1993
	Andy Prescott, First Vice president, Acting President	1993
treasurer	John J. Nigro	1977-1982
	E. Michael DiFabio	1982-1985
	Marilyn A. Prendergast	1985-1988
	William Hendricks, III	1988-1991
	Richard O. Bollam	1991-



On the other hand, Betts announced a major introduction of computer instruction throughout all grades for 1981-82. Barbara Athanasiou carried this out. Barbara would go on to teach math and computer science for twenty-seven years at AAG. She had a Master’s in computer science from Union. Betts brought in Linda Dorwaldt Allanson (cy 1965) to teach fifth grade (1980-2002). Allanson enjoyed an important and successful tenure.

Two major grants came in, one from John Bender for faculty enrichment and the other a challenge from the Edward E. Ford Foundation to support scholarships; by the latter, \$50,000 was added to the endowment. Elaine Betts also revived important school publications: catalogs, handbooks, and an improved alumna magazine.

Governance problems arose in the early 1980s when a faculty association, then active at the school, maneuvered for power sharing through collective bargaining and, according to one source, sought redress for the firing of some of their members. The complaint was dismissed by the NLRB, but by 1984, Elaine had gone on from AAG to lead Dana Hall in Wellesley, Massachusetts. Under the next headmistress, the union was replaced by a faculty benefits committee.

In the fall of 1984, Audrey Koester joined the faculty as Head Librarian and is currently the second longest serving member. She was featured in the Spring 1987 issue of *Girls Academy*. Students quickly found her a energetic resource, eager to assist student research with books from inter-library loan, as well as from the school library. Ably assisted by Stephanie Donnaruma, Koester works with teachers to anticipate needs. Her Book Talks involve all students from grades five to twelve. Koester selects an author,

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summarizes the plot of a representative work, discusses style, and provides a list of titles from which each student selects a work that she uses as an English project. As the electronic revolution arrived, Koester made sure the library kept pace and promoted and provided access to on-line databases and other academic resources. Audrey's parent volunteer cadre is impressive. Audrey's B.A. was from Michigan State, her Master's in Library Science from SUNY Albany. Before coming to AAG, she worked at Interlochen Arts Academy and Emma Willard. Above all, Audrey loves books, respects the past, and is devoted to the objectives of female education. Audrey has served as faculty trustee, dean of the faculty, and President of the AAG Cum Laude Chapter since 1995. She initiated the practice of highlighting the achievements and special qualities of each senior (not only the inductees) at the annual Cum Laude induction ceremony.

Kathleen "Kiki" Johnson started her six year tenure in 1984. She attended the Holton-Arms School in Washington, graduated from Vassar, and held a master's degree in American Studies from University of Maryland. She started teaching at The Madeira School where she became history department chair. Johnson knew and admired the founders of both female institutions, Mrs. Jessie Moon Holton and Lucy Madeira Wing. They inspired in her a lifelong commitment to female education. More recently she had been assistant headmistress at Garrison Forest School in Baltimore.

Here, Johnson comments of the challenges for teachers of women in the 1980s:



More so than their male contemporaries, the girls whom we are educating today will clearly face more options, more challenges and more changes, not all of their own choosing, as they work to resolve issues of combining marriage and careers, as they consider timing and all the other variables involved in the raising of a family. If they are to feel confident and secure, as and after they make these choices, they may do so best if they grow up in the environment of a girls' school. There they can be supported from their earliest years with steady encouragement as they work to develop a sense of inner direction, self-confidence and self-worth which will provide balance in a future full of unknowns.

Controversy was no stranger to Johnson. At Madeira, she became acting headmistress when Jean Harris was arrested for the murder of Dr. Herman Tarnower, author of The Complete Scarsdale Medical Diet. People described Kiki as ebullient, "a whirlwind of informed enthusiasm," a woman of "idiosyncratic vivacity." Kiki said she believed in MBWA, "management by walking around," often accompanied by her two miniature collies. Johnson's style had a confrontational side that arose sometimes with parents and the Alumnae Association. The latter thought it best to protect its interests by forming into a 501(c)(3) organization. Her plan was "not to improve one thing by 100 per cent, but to improve 100 things by 1 per cent." Johnson was elected President of the Headmistresses' Association of the East in 1986.

short version

Enrollment had been declining in the 1980s (from 300 to 262) and reversing this trend became Johnson's main goal. Joan Lewis joined Johnson in 1985 as Director of Admission, a position she defined and filled for fifteen years. When she resigned, she had admitted all girls at the Academy. Enrollment became more diversified, inquiries rose dramatically, the population rose from 270 to 363 (by 2000), financial aid rose from 3% to 26% (from \$20,000 to \$400,000). Lewis also created Student Ambassadors to give tours and host visiting students.

Regaining the Momentum

Board President Anne Older announced a Long Range Planning committee, assisted by consultant Anne Lenox. This was underwritten by William S. McEwan (cy AA 1930) whose mother, grandmothers, aunt and cousin had attended the school. Bill attended Williams (cy 1934, Phi Beta Kappa) and spent forty-four years at Key Bank, retiring in 1977 as vice president and cashier. He served over a dozen community boards, and was quietly and very generous to numerous causes, including both academies. He died in October, 1977. His will included a \$300,000 bequest to AAG.

In 1985, an endowed fund established by Winifred Sutherland Kermani (cy 1922), supported the Arts in both schools through visiting artists and special arts days. The school's arts calendar made its first appearance in 1985. The school also received a handsome legacy from Alice Pauline Schafer (cy 1916), a nationally known print maker. The legacy amount was \$92,090.56.

Anne Older retired from the board in 1987. AAG had overcome, in her words, the problems of declining enrollment, low faculty salaries, image confusion, and budget deficits. She gave credit to Elaine Betts and Kiki Johnson for their leadership, both guiding the trustees and implementing their policies.

Science became still more rigorous under Caroline Nardolillo, head of the science department. When she came in 1977, there were about seven girls in chemistry classes every year and five in physics in alternate years. That had grown to two chemistry sections and one physics class every year, with Advanced Placement opportunities in biology and chemistry. Mrs. McTighe's A.P. Biology emphasized independent research. Fifth and sixth grade science classes grew from thrice weekly to every day. There Nan Rosenbach taught a lab-oriented general science course and had reclaimed the campus pond for ecology projects. Seventh grade science emphasized health awareness in a life science context and eighth graders were introduced to the physical sciences. Patricia McTighe also rewrote the school's entire health program. Lisa Fieseher organized a science fair.

By 1989, a middle school science lab, three classrooms, a music room, and an activities room had been added to the physical plant. Plans for the 175th anniversary included a Convocation, alumnae art exhibit, commemorative historical publication, a special Founders Day program, career workshops with the theme of the strides made by women since the founding, a gala in June, and the 175th Commencement.

short version

Gail Stuart, counselor, helped form a peer support system in 1988. She guided a student organization, S.O.S. (Student Organization for Support) to train ten juniors and ten seniors in leadership and counseling skills. This was part of Gail's program to foster self-esteem and competent life skills among AAG girls. Throughout the 1990s, S.O.S. sponsored seminars in women's health: one on general health issues, including reproductive health, another on adolescent emotional development, including sexual identity, and the last on health and nutrition, including eating disorders and weight control. All seminars were given by medical, social work, and dietary professionals.

In 1989, Deane Semerad Pfeil (cy 1966) edited the Footsteps history of 175 years. Lisa Furlong (cy 1966) contributed the contemporary events and Dardis McNamee (cy 1966) and Deborah Ward wrote the narrative. It was dedicated to Thelma Holding. The words from Trudy Thorstensen O'Connell's (cy 1964) brilliant *Academe* editorial are a theme and concluding remark for the study.

Kathleen Johnson wrote the epilogue, "Future Steps." In it, she renewed the school's commitment to education in a school for girls, while providing for rich out-of-class experiences and cross enrollment with teachers and boys at Albany Academy. Looking ahead to the 200th, she enunciated the challenge of maintaining a strong program of faculty compensation and professional development. Another school challenge was stated as how to address the changing structure of families, noting that only 7% in 1989 had a "Dad at work, Mom at home, with Dick and Jane at school." It had implications for day care, student counseling, and length of school year.

In 1990, Ronald Fay became the new Head. He had served nineteen years (1971-1989) as head of the coeducational elementary Ensworth School in Nashville. Fay was a graduate of University of Vermont and held the M.Ed. from University of Pennsylvania. He promised to run AAG by consensus and to address the need for fund raising to keep the school "interesting, exciting, challenging and fun." After his first years, the results were marked neither by consensus nor by fun. Fay resigned six months into his third year, on December 29, 1992. There was no time to do a search, so the trustees appointed their president, Mary Buchan, acting head of school. Dr. Sarah Elmendorf (cy 1970) chaired a new search committee.

The Girls Academy has always strived to develop attitudes in exercise, sports, and health-consciousness that would carry young women into rewarding and productive lifelong practices, to become continuously physically fit and confident. The physical education programs, Gym Meet, and dance have accomplished this for over a century. In the 1950s, interscholastic athletic teams were field hockey, basketball, and tennis. Because of Title IX, women's sports improved dramatically in the 1980s. Elizabeth Hemstead helped propel the program into the



short version

twenty-first century, heading the physical education department from 1987 to 2008. When Liz started, the interscholastic offerings were soccer, field hockey, volleyball, basketball, and softball. Counting modified, junior varsity, and varsity levels, there are now over twenty athletic opportunities.

AAG and Emma Willard schools were pioneers in the Capital District for lacrosse. After starting their own programs in the 1990s, they worked with public schools to further build the sport. Today, the fall sports are soccer, field hockey, volleyball, cross-country, swimming and diving, and tennis. In winter, the girls play basketball, skiing, ice hockey, and squash. While not an interscholastic sport, dance is scheduled in the winter. Spring sports are lacrosse, track, and softball. Since the late 1990s, lacrosse and tennis have been very successful. Thanks to the talents of the players and the coaching of Greg Giombetti (cy AA 1989), who was a soccer star at the Academy and at the College of St. Rose, the lacrosse team reached the division C sectionals regularly, and were runners-up to the State champions in 1995 and 2005. Ashley Gersuk (cy 2001), was a star in soccer and lacrosse at AAG and in ice hockey and lacrosse at Northwestern. In 2005, she was the number one player in the United States.

In the final *Footnotes* issue, senior Amanda Fuchs (cy 2007) wrote an article on sports showing how far the athletic program had come. With improved playing fields, the opening of the Silipigno Athletic Facility, and both new interest and a new three-sport requirement of athletic participation for seventh and eighth grades, the author chronicled “another impressive year in sports.”

The 2007 soccer team under coach Greg Giombetti reached the semifinal round of Section II Class C competition. The basketball team, also coached by Giombetti, finished first in the Central Hudson Valley League. In tennis and skiing, individual performances by Sarah Kandath (cy 2011) and Michelle Bielak (cy 2009) stood out. In the spring sports, Colleen Werther (cy 2007) and Amanda Fuchs (cy 2007) got recognition in lacrosse, and Bailey Buran (cy 2007) placed in two field events at the Sectional Track meet, while Nora Lankhof (cy 2011) placed third in the 400 meter race.

Dance is intimately connected to physical education as well as to the arts. AAG has had a unique history of instruction in the dance program. Martha Hinman Ellis (cy 1929, shown at right) was the first teacher of dance at AAG. She danced at Jacobs Pillow and toured with Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis. One of her students was Gertrude Hallenbeck (cy 1938). Gertrude Hallenbeck Cashvan also was an alumna teacher of dance. She went to the school of the American Ballet Theatre and further studied at Jacob’s Pillow, the Vilzak-Scholler School, University of Ohio, and Williams College. She headed the dance department at AAG from 1955 to 1972. One of her students was Cathy Rosenblatt Teitelbaum (cy 1965). Cathy went from AAG to Boston University, majoring in physical education and pursuing dance all over Boston. Cathy studied





the techniques of Martha Graham, Paul Sanasardo, Jose Limon, and Lester Horton. Gertrude Hallenbeck Cashvan (cy 1938) recruited Cathy as her replacement in 1972. Cathy has taught modern dance in all divisions and added dance to the schedule of school events, notably Wassail and Evening of the Arts. Cathy employs strict performance guidelines to enable greater creativity. Her students learn the basics of movement, freedom of expression, dance composition, choreography, and musical styles. She is presently the longest serving faculty member.

Culmination

1993- 2007 Caroline B. Mason inaugurated her tenure with vivacity. She introduced senior speeches, giving every senior the opportunity and experience of addressing the Upper School. Each girl chooses her own topic, hopefully one that “might not otherwise be known by her peers and that might serve as a lesson for the younger girls.” Mason added the May (independent study) Projects in 1993. They provide seniors, under the guidance of a faculty adviser, “the opportunity to explore a field, perhaps one that is new to them, work as an intern in professional offices, hospitals, etc. or pursue a creative project in the fine arts.” The results must be presented to school community. “February Forum,” introduced by Mason in 1995, was venue for a professional guest panel to discuss some aspect of issues faced by girls and young women, such as women’s health, technology, and women in sports. Mason’s tenure also featured major fundraising efforts, collectively titled “Building toward Our Third Century.”

When she was selected, Caroline Mason was principal of Mount St. Mary High School in Nashua, New Hampshire, where she served on other civic and historical boards. In 1989 she received from Nashua its Mayor's Award for Superior Achievement in Arts & Letters. Before that, from 1964 through 1984, Mason taught literature and composition at Laurel School for Girls in Cleveland (see Edna Lake), State University of New York at Oneonta, Boston Conservatory of Music, and Harvard College.

She graduated from Denison University and earned a M.A. in English at Case Western Reserve University. She was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters by Daniel Webster College. Mason’s mother-in-law, Cornelia Saunders Mason (cy 1932) and Cornelia’s mother, Cornelia Wallace Saunders (cy 1906) were graduates.

When a teacher was needed for a section of eighth grade English, Caroline filled the role, remarking it was a highlight of her year and a chance to feel, rather than observe, what is “at the core of the learning process—worthy work.” Among her early promises was to establish a personal relationship with every girl. This she did, and with her teachers as well.

short version

“Building Toward Our Third Century” was introduced in 1995; William F. Kahl and Barbara Hoehn initiated the leadership to achieving these capital goals. Kahl, board president, has been provost of Simmons College and president of the Sage Colleges; Hoehn was campaign chairperson (and later board president). The campaign foresaw raising \$10,000,000 in three phases. I: new library/media center, renovations to science labs and art studios, improved integrated technology, and endowed chairs of humanities, fine arts, foreign language, and science; completed in 1998. II: new classroom wing and athletic fields development, completed in 2001. III: new gymnasium complex, endowed chairs for mathematics, physical education, technology. In Phase III, the gym was estimated to cost \$5,000,000 (later reduced) and the endowments \$1,000,000. The sports complex was to include a gymnasium with two basketball courts, home and visiting team locker rooms, rooms for faculty offices, health classes, and a fitness center. Julie and Joseph Gersuk were co-chairs. One of Mason’s close collaborators in fund raising was Donna Beebe, Director of Development from 1999, coming with experience in development at R.P.I., SUNY Albany, and Albany Medical Center.

Link here to [other philanthropies](#).



1998 Phase I of the implementation of the fund included a new library and media center, renovations to science classrooms, and a new studio for Lower and Middle School art, and upgraded computer and technology facilities. Several faculty chairs were endowed.

Shirley Stevens French (cy 1947) had given \$10,000 to a library endowment fund in 1987. For this capital campaign, she pledged a large matching grant and in gratitude the main reading room was named, as she wished, for her father Winthrop P. Stevens (AA cy 1916), who served as an AAG trustee from 1933 to 1958 (president 1941 to 1943, a crucial period).

short version

2000-2001 As part of Phase II, the Slingerland Wing, providing six new classrooms for Middle School, opened. The school building built in 1959 was cramped for its present



population, considering, too, the added occupancy from the coordinate program. The new wing, parallel to the primary wing, was designed by Cotler & Horsch and cost \$1,000,000; it created a new home for the middle school and alleviated the crowding in older classrooms. It was named for Fredericka Voorhaar

Slingerland (cy 1932) in honor of her lead gift of \$250,000. One of Freddie’s motives was her close friendship with Caroline Mason’s mother-in-law Cornelia Saunders Mason, a classmate. In 2000, Slingerland was named Philanthropist of the Year by the National Society of Fund Raising Executives. She had been nominated by AAG, Sage, and the YMCA. In 2002, she received the [Distinguished Alumna Award](#). When Fredericka died on November 6, 2004, the school lost a great friend.

Field hockey and softball teams got new fields. The soccer field was upgraded and a new practice field created. All the work was done by Clarke Companies and cost \$500,000. The new fields have proper drainage and a sprinkler system and meet for the first time the New York State Public High School Association standards for dimensions.

principal	Caroline Mason	1993-2003
	Caroline Mason (interim AA and AAG)	2003
	Caroline Mason (AA and AAG)	2003-2007
president	Sarah Elmendorf, M.D.	1993-1995
	William F. Kahl, Ph.D., L.H.D.	1995-1999
	Barbara Hoehn	1999-2003
	Raymond J. Schimmer	2003-2007
treasurer	Richard O. Bollam	1991-1999
	Steven Teitelbaum	1999-2002
	D. Joseph Gersuk	2002-2007

Summer 2002 *Footnotes* contains a statement of ideals, a code of conduct created by the Student Council and ratified by the Upper School, presented from a feminine perspective:

The AAG community fosters mutual respect that flourishes between the School’s faculty and students. This relationship results in the students’ willingness to trust the institution’s policies and values. This trust cultivates an atmosphere within AAG that provides each student opportunities to succeed in academic, athletic,

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and artistic pursuits. AAG's environment encourages an open-mindedness among the students and faculty which sanctions the intellectual curiosity that permeates the community. Students celebrate the diversity of the School's environment. AAG values students who are independent thinkers, who are able to work collectively and cooperatively with others. Students strive to utilize the knowledge and ideas acquired through School endeavors to become active members within both the School and greater community. In essence, AAG students are value-driven, instead of rule-bound.

2002 Caroline announced that her tenth year would be her last. Her resignation letter was very modest, though she strongly expressed her gratitude for the rewarding stewardship she enjoyed, citing the renewal of tradition and academic rigor. In replying to Caroline's letter, Board President Barbara Hoehn was more specific:

Over the past ten years, Caroline's staunch dedication to the principles underlying the traditions and mission of Albany Academy for Girls, her intellect, her love of teaching and learning, and her *joie de vivre* have made an indelible mark on this institution.

But it was not to be. With the concomitant resignation of Larry Piatelli at The Albany Academy, both schools, pursuing a coordinate program, would be leaderless. Both schools established search committees and by March had reached the conclusion that this was an opportunity to deepen the relationship between the two schools. Caroline Mason was selected as an interim head for both, achieving a best choice on an interim basis instead of two lesser ones on a permanent basis. AAG programs, leadership, and capital campaign would continue smoothly. AA President William B. Picotte wrote that the appointment "allows the schools to retain experienced and respected leadership, and to continue the progress in developing the relationship between AA and AAG, based on Caroline's deep understanding of the traditions of each school and their commitment to single-gender education."



2003 Caroline Mason explained the schools' mutual needs. She referred to the past "two years of unprecedented collaboration between the two academies," largely through the committee of the AA board headed by Jeanne Neff, which seemed headed for a "new, more effective way of conducting business." The schools could not be allowed to weaken in an environment of "fierce competition from public and private schools alike." Since the "missions and the populations we serve are nearly identical," the futures of both schools are "inextricably intertwined." It amounted to a realization by the trustees of both schools that the future of each was identified with the other. On February 4, 2005, the

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schools' two boards signed an affiliation agreement. It stipulated one head, but two boards, with the unification of some administrative functions. A new 501(c)3 corporation allowed the business offices to act as one.

Mason talked about the teachers of AA and AAG as “one faculty.” She moved forward to name single heads of departments for both schools in history, English, fine arts, world language, and computer education. “Let’s not think about what we cannot do, but think about having the best possible two programs the two Upper Schools can offer together.” “We really want to position ourselves as a great laboratory for experts on how boys and girls learn.” Mason contrasted the lifelong dedication of the “old guard” faculty to the mobile teachers of today. Given current salary scales, recruiting superior teachers was difficult. “A superior faculty is the single most critical link to our survival.”

2004 Phase III was the campaign to raise an addition 4.2 million for an athletic facility with a regulation basketball court in a full-sized gymnasium with an elevated running track. Also included were international squash courts, a new dance studio, weight room, aerobic room, Middle and Upper School locker rooms, classrooms, and lobby-reception hall. It was designed by Cotler & Horsch Architects. Elizabeth McClintock Townsend Dearstyne (cy 1958) and Shirley Stevens French (cy 1947) agreed to match alumnae contributions to Phase III, up to \$500,000. Spencer and Pat Standish made the lead gift of \$500,000.

Spencer is a graduate of The Albany Academy (cy 1942) and a generous donor there; Spencer’s daughter, Christine Standish, and granddaughter, Hope Wilk, attended AAG (cy 1983, 2012). Christine, the only sitting pre-merger AAG *and* AA board member, headed the search committees of the merged board that selected the next two heads of school.

The facility was opened as the David B. Silipigno Athletic Facility in May, 2004. Especially honored were Campaign Co-Chair Joe Gersuk, the benefactors David Silipigno and Crystal Charland, and Spencer and Pat Standish. Mason, Hemstead, and Caroline Feinberg (cy 2004) performed the ceremonies.



The soccer/lacrosse field was later dedicated to the Holbritten family: “five generations of academy girls,” in honor of the generous gift of Jean Baldwin Holbritten (cy 1939).



The lobby is dedicated to Caroline B. Mason. George and Kathleen McNamee gained naming rights to the lobby, chose Mason, and commissioned Tobin Alexandra-Young with Imagine Hand Painted Murals to paint a mural commemorating great women. They include, top row left to right, Clara Barton, Eleanor Roosevelt, Amelia Earhart, Mia Hamm, Rachel Carson, Oprah Winfrey, Antonia Novello, Maya Lin; middle row, J. K. Rowling, Jane Austen, Golda Meir, Indira Gandhi, Helen Keller, Harriet Tubman, Queen Elizabeth I; and front row, Caroline Mason, Madame Marie Curie, Susan B. Anthony, Ella Fitzgerald, Sally Ride, Mary Cassatt, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Billie Jean King. A Joel Shapiro sculpture was installed in the lobby by the Weir family.

2004 A new Distinguished Authors Series serves both Academies. It was broached by Lucia Fischer and Deidre Henderson and taken up by the AA Mothers Association and joined by the AAG Parents Association. Their committee includes the librarians and other faculty. Caroline Mason wrote that the boards are moving toward a business merger, one that will preserve “the traditions of each school” and the “unswerving commitment to single-gender classes through sophomore year....”

2006 The AAG community read with astonishment in the *Times Union* of August 26 that agreement had been reached to merge Doane Stuart School with Albany Academy for Girls and The Albany Academy, with Dr. Richard Enemark as head, subject to approval by all three boards. Reactions reverberated through the Doane Stuart parents, the AAG alumnae, and all of the entities affected. By September 21, the deal was off.

Presidents Raymond Schimmer (AAG) and Cornelius D. Murray (AA) announced on November 17, 2006, the merger of the Academies, to be effective July 1, 2007. The Academies Operating Committee, Bert Trombley chair, would direct the transition. The Board of Regents of The University of the State of New York voted that Albany Academy for Girls and The Trustees of Albany Academy were consolidated, with the Trustees of Albany Academy as the surviving corporation under the amended name The Albany Academies. As to the continuance of single gender *schools*, the new charter stated:

short version

1. The consolidated corporation shall continue to administer the educational operations and purposes of the constituent corporations in the same manner as they presently exist. The purposes of the consolidated corporation are:
 - a. To operate and maintain an early childhood co-education program for children three and four years of age;
 - b. To operate and maintain an early childhood education program for girls four and five years of age, a kindergarten for five-year old girls, a grade one through four primary school for girls and a grade five through eight middle school for girls and, when deemed fitting, coeducational courses and programs;
 - c. To operate and maintain an early childhood education program for boys four and five years of age, a kindergarten for five-year old boys, a grade one through four primary school for boys and a grade five through eight middle school for boys and, when deemed fitting, coeducational courses and programs; and
 - d. To operate and maintain a grade nine through twelve secondary school with both single-gender and co-educational programs.

The same single-sex/coordinate blend would continue, separate diplomas would be presented, but the boards were combined into one with equal representation from the parent schools. After a search conducted by a committee chaired by Christine Standish (cy 1983), it was announced that Richard J. Barter, Ph.D. would take office as Head of School on July 1, 2007.

In her last column, Caroline Mason looked back and was reassuring about the future. On the past, she mentioned in addition to what has been covered in this narrative, the growth of fine arts to a level not seen in her fourteen years. She cited Dance Workshop, drama, production in the visual arts, concerts by improved orchestras, the Mixed Chorus, and a musical performance by 182 Middle School students. As for the future, she reiterated the commitment to single-gender status, recalled that academic rigor and the competitive place of the school had been restored, that the futures of the schools were intertwined and that thoughtful and experienced leadership would promise a new era of optimism and excellence.

Caroline believed strongly in history, tradition, historical preservation, and urged by acting AAG archivist, Susan Hengerer Sneeringer (cy 1972), saw to it that the position of archivist was established for the Academies, creating the position and an expense line-item in the school budget.

For one of her final honors, the Hicks Fund, which grew from \$10,000 in 1991 to over \$250,000 was re-designated by the Hicks family as a scholarship fund and renamed for Caroline B. Mason. In difficult situations, wrote Judy Lawson, "Caroline always chose to take the high road, unwilling to compromise what she felt was morally right, yet allowing the individual to walk away whole, knowing she had been dealt with fairly." No one from

short version

her era can forget her customary address: “My dear girls...” convincing them once again, in Ray Schimmer’s words, that “she loved them together, and that she knew them separately.” There are many lovely and telling tributes to Mason in the last issue of *Footnotes*. A common thread is that Caroline could listen and hear, reassure, and find a way to move ahead, together. She was warm, empathetic, but not to forget, in editor Rita Stein’s words, “an unstoppable (and well-dressed) force.”

We have seen some of the accomplishments of the alumnae of the first century. Here are parallel examples from stories reported in school publications. Many received the [Distinguished Alumna Award](#) (complete list).

Second Century Alumnae

Education

Isabel Gamble MacAffrey (cy 1942) was a highly regarded scholar of English literature and one of the first tenured female professors at Harvard University. (She and her husband, Wallace, were the first tenured couple.) After AAG, she went to Swarthmore, then Harvard for graduate work (Ph.D. 1954). Despite her Harvard tenure, the sexist attitudes she experienced precipitated a move to Bryn Mawr, where she taught for twenty years. The International Spencer Society awards the Isabel MacAffrey Prize.

Caryl M. Newhof (cy 1944) was a field hockey star and she earned a B.S. in physical education at Boston University. She then played internationally on the U. S. Field Hockey Association Touring Team. She earned an M.S. at Smith, where she remained as Professor of Exercise and Sports Studies. B.U. inducted her into their athletic hall of fame in 1985. Her class of 1944 started the interscholastic basketball program at AAG.

Michele D. Dominy (cy 1971), who went to Bryn Mawr (over Princeton), became enamored of anthropology and interested in New Zealand and the British Isles. For her Ph.D. at Cornell, she did field work in New Zealand, and combined women’s studies with cultural anthropology in her dissertation. Since 1981, she has taught at Bard College, She is now Vice President, Dean of the College, and professor of anthropology, and is widely published. She credits her seventh grade teacher, Mrs. Colyer, and upper school English teacher, Mrs. Wallace, as among the very best she has ever had. “I had an outstanding education at AAG, and I was incredibly happy there.”

A three-sport athlete at AAG, Margaret Lamar King (cy 1965), attended Skidmore and graduated from MacMurray College. She became a teacher of physical education at William S. Hackett Middle School. She still has winning teams in adult softball competition in Albany and loves the theater. Margaret is a super volunteer to many organizations, including the Alumnae Association, the Martha Decker Memorial Archives, and the Senior Service Center of Albany.

short version

While at Wellesley, Lisa Furlong (cy 1966) spent summers interning with Westchester County newspapers. In the early 1970s, Lisa became one of the first women professional sportswriters in the New York area.

Caroline (Kim) Hessberg (cy 1971) has a gift for entertaining narrative, honed by experiences with *Knickerbocker News*, Springfield *Daily News* (as the Smith College correspondent), and the New York *Times*. Kim became director of public relations for the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Kim's experiences with the BSO are culturally rich and numerous, working closely with Seiji Ozawa, John Williams, and other musical luminaries. She co-authored and edited two books: Seiji and Symphony Hall: The First 100 Years.

Pamela Sargent (cy 1964), prolific novelist, received the 1983 Best Book Award for Young Adults with Earth Seed and a Nebula Award for Venus of Shadows. To her credit are sixteen novels, seven collections, and ten anthologies. She has an M.A. in philosophy.

Philanthropy and the Arts

Dorothy Bucknam Wadsworth (cy 1937) worked with the *Academe* in school, went on the Mount Holyoke, studying economics and political science and where she was president of her senior class. Addie deBeer Muhlfelder (cy 1937) said Dottie was “founder and first president of Neighborhood Health Centers of Monroe County, a series of clinics serving the inner city of Rochester; ... a president of Planned Parenthood of Monroe County; and served on the Board of Directors of Blue Cross, Home Care Association, and the Peoples Health Council.” She was also very active on boards and commission in the arts and served for the Junior League at all levels, local, state, and national. After the Attica prison riot in 1971, she served on a special commission, interviewing inmates, “trying to get at the story behind the story.” After that experience, she was appointed to the Moreland Act Commission, investigating nursing homes in New York State. Dottie had a “talent for organizing and a gift for dealing with people.”

Carol Tweedie Korty (cy 1954), professor *emerita* at Emerson college was recognized with the Distinguished Alumna Award for her lifelong devotion to theater and dance. After AAG she attended Antioch College and Sarah Lawrence College (M.A. in theater). Carol is a prolific writer and crusader for social justice. Deane Semerad Pfeil (cy 1966) wrote the following: “She went to New York City for extensive professional training in dance (both modern and ballet), acting, playwriting and dance composition with such luminaries as Michael Howard, Merce Cunningham, Jose Limon, Alan Wayne and Martha Graham....” Since that time she has held several academic positions, including at Antioch, S.U.N.Y. Brockport, and University of Massachusetts.

Shirley Stevens French (cy 1947) earned a B.S. in Education from Wheelock College. She was a prominent volunteer at Boston Museum of Fine Arts, a gallery instructor for students from Kindergarten through college. She was a trustee at Governor Dummer Academy and also of New Hampshire Historical Society. Five generations of her family

short version

attended AAG and her father. Winthrop P. Stevens (cy 1916), was a prominent Albany Academy graduate, major and board president.

Sally Lethbridge Hunsdorfer (cy 1969) became interested in the Sherpa people of Nepal in 1998 and has made them the object of her philanthropic and personal support. She travels there at least annually, and has raised money for improvements to their education and cultural preservation. Sally spoke at the Academies to interest and involve students.

Susan Ellis Rockmore (cy 1963), president of the Alumnae Association from 1986 to 1988, led the council to set up the Martha Decker Fund, to be used to sustain the school archives. With VP Donna Baker (cy 1966), Rockmore rewrote the Association's by-laws. She edited the school magazine for several years. She performed a search of all living alumnae and computerized AAG's shoe-box filing system for all alumnae. Susan ran the annual fund for over ten years. She established for students The Mildred Hinman Straub Community Service Award and The Thelma Wade Holding Junior Spirit Award. On the AAG board from 1986 to 1998, she chaired the development committee, and the alumnae division of the Library Capital Campaign. Susan received the Distinguished Alumna Award in 1990. In Voorheesville, she was the first woman trustee, budget officer, and deputy mayor.

Susan Hengerer Sneeringer (cy 1972), B.A. Wells, R. N. Maria College. Active in the Alumnae Association, parents associations, and Academy board's of trustees, Susie credits mentor Thelma Holding for her interest in the school, its history, and the AAG archives, to which she has given years of service. In 1994, Neal Haight Weeks (cy 1947) and Sneeringer moved the archives into the Drawing Room, placing items into the special cabinets built for the purpose by Josef Toth, husband of former faculty member Katalin Toth. For her foresight and commitment to the archives, Susan received in 2007 the Fredericka Voorhaar Slingerland Volunteer Award.

Business, Law, and Politics

Ruth M. Miner (cy 1911) was a strong athlete at AAG, the first student president of the athletic association, and went on to Wellesley and Albany Law School (cy 1920). She practiced law in Albany, and had numerous special positions, such as confidential law assistant to Hon. Harold J. Hinman, Supreme Court Justice. Minor was president of the Albany Legal Aid Society, Attorney for the Town of Bethlehem, and Executive Deputy Secretary of State under Governor Thomas E. Dewey. She was an important figure in the Albany County Republican Party, often a delegate to state and national conventions. For the school, she served on the board, and was president of the Alumnae Association.

Elsie Johnson Himes (cy 1928) also went to Wellesley, started a Secretarial Service Bureau temp service business, attended classes at Albany Business College, and went to New York City where in 1945 she landed a job in an investment firm, Douglas T. Johnston & Co. She was a woman rising in a man's world and by 1961, a vice president in the firm.

short version

Barbara Vucanovich (cy 1938) went to Manhattanville College and moved to Nevada after World War II, There she started two business, got involved in state politics, and was the first woman in Nevada elected to the House of Representatives (1983 to 1997). She served notably on the House Committee for Veterans' Affairs and aided Newt Gingrich in the development of the "Contract with America." A breast cancer survivor, she introduced a bill to make mammograms more available to women:

In 1989, she introduced the Omnibus Breast Cancer Control Act, which required Medicare and Medicaid coverage for annual mammograms for women over certain ages and increased funding for a public awareness program through the National Cancer Institute. "Breast cancer is not a partisan issue or a women's issue," Vucanovich told her colleagues. "Breast cancer must become a legislative and communications priority in the government and the private sector."

Caryl Connor (cy 1946), journalist, columnist, and author was a White House speech writer in the Carter administration and press secretary for Hubert Humphrey. Caryl credited her success in writing to her English education at AAG. "Miss Robinson taught me that details matter."

Science and Medicine

After getting her B. S. in nursing from Russell Sage College and an M. S. from Albany Medical College, Nancy Barhydt (cy 1959) became an expert in community health, environmental medicine and epidemiology. She became an early leader in the organization and for the provision of home health care in Westchester County. Returning to Albany in 1970, she helped revitalize a health clinic in Arbor Hill under the auspices of Albany Medical Center, now the Whitney M. Young Community Health Center. At the time of the article in 1975, she was Director of a joint program sponsored by Russell Sage and Albany Medical College: the Primary Care Nurse Practitioner Program.

Dr. Sarah Elmendorf DiStefano (cy 1970) took her B. A. at SUNY Albany, pursued graduate studies in microbiology at University of Rochester, and earned the M. D. at Albany Medical College. She is a Fellow in the Department of Infectious Disease, Albany Medical Center. An Academies board member, she has served on the Search Committee and husband, sons, and daughter are in the Academies family.

The Albany Academies

The account of the period of the united schools will be continued in one document.