

MAKING ROOM FOR WOMEN

THE 1790S TO 1890S

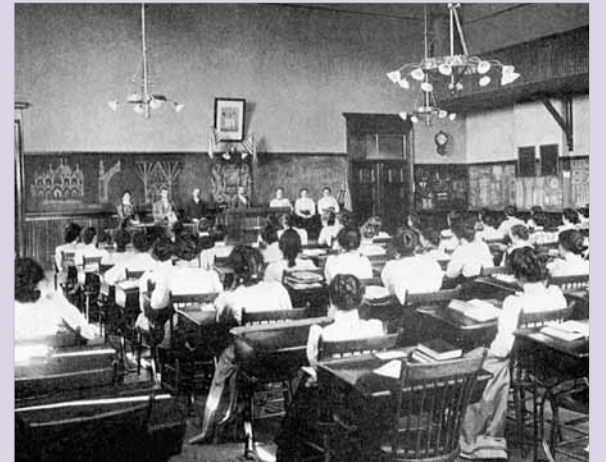


Sarah Josepha Hale, from Newport, N.H., whose daughters attended the Young Ladies Seminary in Keene, N.H., was the editor of "Godey's Ladies Book" for over 40 years. This book set trends for fashion and home decor, as well as, including poetry, songs and editorials. Hale called for equal education, better medical care, and higher wages for all women. Her persistent lobbying also resulted in President Lincoln creating the national observance of Thanksgiving Day.

After the American colonies won independence and political leaders began to discuss building the new republic, men and women identified education as the means of creating a new kind of citizen. The duties of citizenship at this point were not shared by "unpropertied males", native Americans, African-Americans or women. The nation's mothers were identified as being in a natural position to instruct their sons in political duty. But Judith Sargent Murray, an early pioneer of women's education, from Gloucester, Massachusetts, stated the case for equal scholastic training for women: "We can only reason from what we know and if an opportunity of acquiring knowledge hath been denied us, the inferiority of our sex cannot fairly be deduced from thence."

Keene was the site of one of New Hampshire's earliest female academy, founded by Catherine Fiske in 1811. The Young Ladies Seminary in Keene offered academic subjects as well as more typical domestic instruction and educated the daughters of Newport resident, Sarah Josepha Hale, founding editor of "Godey's Ladies Book."

Education opened other doors. It offered teaching as a new avenue of employment for working women in the state. The first teachers seminary opened in Plymouth in 1837. Women in New Hampshire served as teachers and superintendents in the state's one-room schoolhouses. After 1885, women superintendents were permitted to vote at town meetings, a forum in which they advocated for public education and women's suffrage.



Class at Plymouth Normal School, Plymouth, NH, around 1883. This institution was established in 1871 to train teachers for the state's public schools.

THE 1890S AT NEW HAMPSHIRE COLLEGE



Lucy Swallow from Hollis, N.H., was the first woman student at the New Hampshire College for Agriculture and Mechanic Arts. Following graduation from high school, she taught school locally before requesting admission to the college to take a course in chemistry in 1891. Her aunt, Ellen H. Swallow Richards, had been the first woman to receive an advanced degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

In 1866, the New Hampshire College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts opened in Hanover after the passage of the Morrill Bill in 1862. The Morrill Act, signed into law by President Lincoln, funded state colleges from the sale of land, hence the name "land grant colleges."

The new state college, New Hampshire College, began to attract male students but did not admit women until 1891. In the intervening years, Benjamin Thompson's gift of land in Durham was accepted by the state and a new partnership began to take shape. This collaboration between the new state college and the terms of Thompson's will, made possible the opening of "an agricultural school, to be located on my farm in said Durham, wherein shall be thoroughly taught the theory and practice of that most useful and honorable calling."

In 1891, Lucy Swallow wrote the new dean, Charles Holmes Pettee, in Hanover, asking if she might take "a course in Chemistry at the College of Agriculture". Courses were also available in Engineering, Agriculture and Electrical Engineering. Her request prompted a special trustees meeting in Concord that December when it was "resolved that women be admitted to special courses of instruction in the college under such resolutions as may be prescribed by the faculty." By the following year, eleven women, including Delia Brown, were participating in courses at Hanover. The growth in numbers led to the addition in 1892 of a general studies course deemed suitable for female students because it waived requirements for drafting and surveying.



Lucy Swallow and Delia Brown with classmates from New Hampshire College in 1891. Her brother, Frank Swallow, is in the upper left. Charles Brown, whom she later married, is behind her and Delia.