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## E-Newsletter | August 2011

### Back To School: Historic Women Educators

*To receive an education, many women started their own public schools*

As we begin the month of August, many of us are getting ready to send our children back to school. Early in this country's history, women were not encouraged to attend schools. Public education had not been established for women. In order to get an education, women started their own schools. Teaching was an early way that was acceptable for women to earn a living, particularly if they did not marry. Our book highlights some of the many women who chose to help others by educating them.

In 1793, Catherine Ferguson opened New York City's first Sunday School. Born a slave, with her mother sold when she was eight, Ferguson was sensitive to the needs of destitute children. Integrated from its founding, the Murray Street Sabbath School served poor children for forty years.

Emma Willard opened one of the first endowed schools for women in 1821, the Troy Female Seminary. It became one of the most influential schools for women in the U.S. and still operates today as the Emma Willard School.



Mary Lyon

Teacher Mary Lyon was determined to establish a school for women with a specific curriculum as well as high academic standards and began the fund raising needed to establish such a "female seminary." Lyon raised the first money from women in Ipswich, Massachusetts and built the school's endowment by soliciting many small contributions. A gifted educator, Lyon participated in every aspect of the opening in 1837 of Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, which became Mount Holyoke College in 1888.

In 1852, Catharine Beecher founded the American Woman's Educational Association to recruit and train teachers to staff frontier schools. She inspired the founding of several women's colleges in the Midwest and her writings did much to introduce domestic science into the American school curriculum. In addition, she was a strong advocate for physical education for women.

In 1904, educator and political activist Mary McLeod Bethune, fifteenth of seventeen children born to former slaves, founded the Dayton (Florida) Educational and Industrial School for Negro Girls. Through several stages of evolution, it became a college and today is known as Bethune-Cookman University. She later formed the National Council of Negro Women.



Mary McLeod Bethune

M. Carey Thomas played a pivotal role in shaping Bryn Mawr College during her 28-year association there. In 1921, she opened Bryn Mawr College's Summer School for Women in Industry, to train women in union leadership skills.



Patricia Locke

During her more than 40 years as an educator, Patricia Locke observed that Native American languages and culture were suppressed by official schools that served indigenous peoples. She became a preserver of the languages, cultures and spiritual traditions of Native Americans and other indigenous peoples. Locke influenced changes in Federal law, helped organize 17 tribally run colleges and was recognized for her creative and indefatigable efforts by being awarded a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship.

As we think about our own level of education, and what our teachers have meant to us, we might pause to thank these amazing women educators on whose shoulders we stand; we honor their passion, determination, and persistence.

**Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America**  
**[www.herstoryatimeline.com](http://www.herstoryatimeline.com)**

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