



E-Newsletter | March 2015

Education for Women

At the time of the Revolutionary War, less than 40% of white women were literate; the percentage of women of color who were literate was significantly lower. In general, those who had some education were from upper class families who employed tutors. Those women (girls) were taught privately with their brothers. Some women who were educated



Emma Willard

realized the necessity that all women be given this opportunity. Two women who were early advocates of women's education are profiled in this month's enewsletter: Emma Willard and Sophia Smith. Both have been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.

In 1821, Emma Willard opened the Troy Female Seminary in New York. Next to last of seventeen children, she was encouraged by her father to acquire an education beyond that

generally expected for a girl of her time, especially a farm girl. She taught herself geometry at the age thirteen and by the age of fifteen, she taught others. After her husband's nephew came to live with them, she was able to see what subjects he studied and the material associated with each. This clearly demonstrated to Willard the educational deprivation of American women and she was determined to do something about it!

She opened the Middlebury Female Seminary in Vermont in 1814 with a curriculum that included the classical and scientific subjects then thought only appropriate for males to study. The school predated the first public high schools that were opened for girls in New York and Boston in 1826. The Troy School ultimately became one of the most influential schools for women in the United States. One of its most renowned graduates was Elizabeth Cady Stanton. In 1895, the school was renamed the Emma Willard School and it is still in operation today.



Sophia Smith

Smith College, one of the leading women's colleges, was established through a bequest from Sophia Smith. The daughter of a wealthy farmer, Smith did not marry and after she became deaf at age 40, rarely left her home in Hatfield, Massachusetts. After her siblings died, she inherited both her father's fortune and money from a wealthy brother. Vacillating

between establishing a school for deaf students or a school for women, the decision was made for her when a school for the deaf was established in 1868 in Northampton, Massachusetts.

When Smith died in 1870, her will provided almost \$400,000 for

what became Smith College, established in Northampton, Massachusetts. The first founding of a woman's college by a woman, Smith College was chartered in 1871. It opened in 1875 with fourteen students. A member of the seven sisters, Smith College today has about 2,500 undergraduates on campus.

How marvelous that women took the initiative to ensure that our one-half of the population could be literate and receive education comparable to men's. We celebrate the extreme debt that we owe these courageous women. We encourage all of our readers to 'pay it forward.' Read to your girls; inspire them to reach for their dreams!

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Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America

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