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High School Girls”: Women’s Higher Education at the Louisville Female High School

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“High School Girls”

Women’s Higher Education at the Louisville Female High School

Amy Lueck

In our city, at least, the importance of female education is fully realized. All classes of our citizens look with a degree of pardonable pride upon this school, which is unexcelled by any similar institution in this or any other country. Girls are there given equal advantages with the boys, and fully qualify themselves to adorn any sphere of life, whether it be of the light graces of cultivated literature, or in that more solid learning which fits them to battle with adversity or to reason away unfounded and pernicious prejudices.

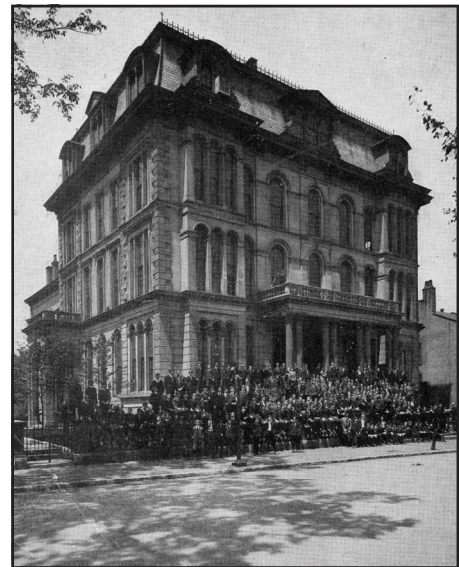
—*Louisville Annual School Board Report 1872*

As late as 1905, Emma Woerner (who would become the first principal of Louisville’s J. M. Atherton High School for girls in 1924) was able to enter University of Kentucky as a junior based on her academic accomplishments at Louisville’s Female High School; her high school and college curriculums overlapped significantly. And her case was not an aberration. Instead, Woerner’s experience is residual from the nineteenth-century legacy of her school, when what a “high school” was and did was not yet obvious or consistent in the United States, and high schools like Louisville’s overlapped politically and pedagogically with the work of U.S. colleges. In fact, when in 1872 the superintendent purported that Female High School provided an education “unexcelled by any institution in this or any other country,” he would have included women’s colleges among their ranks, as the distinctions between different institutions of higher education remained unclear until at least the 1880s and ’90s. As late as 1903, Edwin Cornelius Broome of Columbia University explained, “the joints in our educational system, because of the unique position of the college and the public high school, have become dove-tailed.” Broome went on to argue, “Secondary education, per se, however, stops the moment specialization begins; and that time may be, as it usually is, about the middle of the college course; or it may be, as it really should, at the close of the high school course,” but his distinction between what “may be” and “usually is” versus what “should” be the distinction between secondary school and college is telling, revealing that the strict divide between high school and college was as yet a proposal rather than a widely accepted reality.¹

Because of this institutional fluidity, nineteenth-century women gained access to significant higher education opportunities under the auspices of the urban, public high school (as well as at seminaries, academies, normal schools, and other variously named institutions) even when they did not matriculate into colleges proper. Women made great strides in all forms of higher education in the last half of the nineteenth century, but particularly in high schools and academies; while remaining underrepresented in colleges until 1978, women constituted a *majority* of graduates from high schools as early as 1870. This trend held true both nationally and in the local context of Louisville, where women outpaced men in high school graduation numbers eight to four in 1861 and by forty-two to twenty-nine by 1895. Still representing only a small minority of white women in the city, these early women high school graduates were envoys into higher education on behalf of their gender. Their high rates of matriculation and graduation were due at least in part to the impressive academic and professional opportunities granted to them at a time when other avenues to academic and professional advancement remained limited.²

Opened in 1856, Female High School was posited as a parallel institution to Male High School (still in operation today, now as a coeducational school), which served as the University of Louisville's "academical department"—akin to a college of arts and sciences—until some time in the late nineteenth century. In both the 1851 city charter and a report of the school board from that same year, these high schools were described as comprising the final, or highest, stage of the public education system: each ward would have one school, divided into male and female departments, and also into primary, secondary, and grammar departments. When qualified, students would be promoted through the system to the grammar departments, where "they can remain until prepared to enter, the boys the academical department of the University, and the girls the Female High School." In this way, the "academical department" of the university was proposed as an equivalent opportunity to Female High School for young men and women, respectively, to pursue a complete higher education from within the common school system.³

The connection between Male High School and the University of Louisville made the graduates of the former into de facto graduates of the latter throughout this period. Receiving a college charter in 1860, Male High School also conferred its own Bachelor's and Master's degrees until 1911.

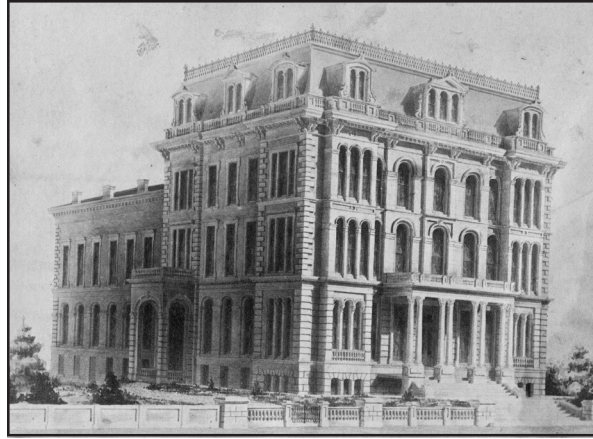


Male High School. *Report of the Male High School, Louisville, KY. For the School Year 1907-08*, (The Kentucky Print Shop, 1908).

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Meanwhile, the Female High School (later changed to Girls High School and then merged under the auspices of DuPont Manual High School in 1950), conferred diplomas rather than academic degrees and was always separated from the idea of a college or university. When female students sought access to the university even after high school graduation, they were granted enrollment only in select, limited courses and did not graduate from that institution until the twentieth century.⁴

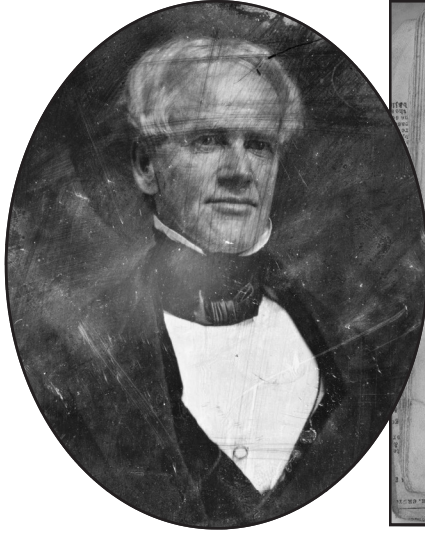


Louisville Female High School (c. 1876).
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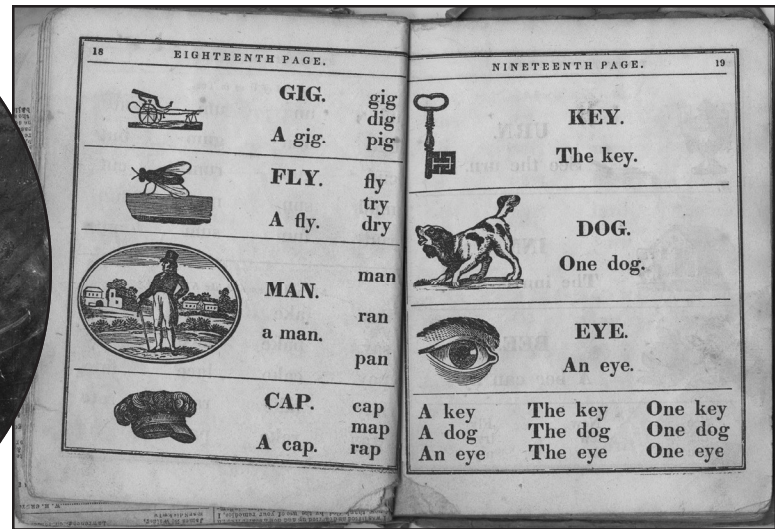
While collegiate degrees were understood to confer more value and prestige than diplomas, an academic degree was still seldom if ever a requirement for professions or even for advanced study, and Male’s degrees and Female’s diplomas both served as privileged teaching credentials for the city’s public schools at many points in the century (though a diploma or degree was not required to teach throughout much of the century either). Male conferred honorary MA degrees to those who taught in the city’s schools for three years after graduation, and Female effectively served as the city’s normal (or teacher-training) school until a proper normal school was established in 1871. Thus, both Male High School and Female High School complicate our accepted notions of the secondary/post-secondary divide because of their uncertain and even hybrid institutional statuses as “high” schools.⁵

As historian William J. Reese points out, “high” was a relative term, such that the “high school” indicated whatever was above the “lower schools,” but it was not at first clear what relation this new echelon of public schools had in relation to colleges or other existing educational forms. Women’s urban public high schools prospered in the nineteenth-century because of this relative and unclear status, as well as their relation to the existing “common schools.”⁶

Beginning in the 1820s, U.S. education reformers in New England, such as Horace Mann, famously took on the project of expanding basic educational access through the establishment of these “common schools,” free and open to the public, initiating what became known as the common school movement. The trend spread as cities across the North and East began establishing funds and organizing systems to provide free public education to their cities’ (white) youths. An early convert of this movement, Louisville, Kentucky, established its first free public schools for white children in 1829, nearly a century before much of the rest of the state. However, these early schools were what were called “lower schools,” offering a basic education to only about an eighth-grade level. After that stage, students desiring more formal education would need to attend private academies, seminaries, or colleges to further their studies.⁷



Horace Mann (1796-1859).
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Page from *Common-School Primer: Introductory to S.G. Goodrich's Series of Comprehensive Readers* (Morton and Griswold, 1841).

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This division of publicly provisioned education at the lower level and privately provisioned education at the higher levels speaks to the differences imagined between the purpose and audience conceived for education at each level—that is, “higher” schooling (which included seminaries and colleges in particular) was understood to serve a different purpose than the common education of the lower schools. Whereas the common schools provided basic literacy and numeracy to develop students as citizens and efficient workers, and were therefore framed as a public good, this higher schooling was generally conceived of as an individual good, leading to personal accomplishments and professional opportunities for the student him- or herself. Putting a finer point on the distinction between early higher education and the common schools, James Berlin explains that the purpose of colleges “was to train aristocrats, a class of men whose education was intentionally made to be unrelated to the affairs of the larger society, resting instead on eternal principles.” Paid academies, subscription schools, and a robust network of Catholic and other religiously sponsored schools provided this higher education for individuals in Louisville at midcentury. But while the city already boasted a wide array of private academies and seminaries, Louisville citizens began to advocate for public “higher” schools as well.⁸

The idea of public high schools (along with the later development of land-grant colleges) challenged and changed the sense that higher education was to be selective and for private advancement. The notion of publicly funded schooling was persuasively tied to republican ideals asserting that it was both a national interest and a democratic responsibility to provide universal access to the highest levels of education for all white children. In this way, the public high school

extended the public value of education into the previously private realm of higher education, shifting their focus from the individual gains of traditional liberal education for “the professions” (law, clergy, and medicine) to the public gains of intelligent workers and, particularly, teachers. As an article in the *Daily Courier* explained, “We rejoice in the prosperity of private schools: the more good schools we have the better for our city.” But, it continued, “in our opinion there are no schools so thoroughly republican, none which minister so directly to the mental growth of the community, as public schools.... These are emphatically the people’s seminaries, and as such they commend themselves to the regard of all friends [*sic*] of education.” Supporters commonly used terms like “people’s seminaries” and “people’s colleges” to describe the nation’s public schools, particularly the higher schools. This language served as an implicit critique of private seminaries and colleges (framed as more exclusionary or elite) while simultaneously raising the status of the newly emerging high schools to the level of these more traditional institutions of higher education. Framing supporters of the schools as “friend[s] of ingenuous and aspiring youth”—thereby casting the students not as college men and women but still school boys and girls needful of such patrons and friends—the supporters tied this higher education to the existing democratic appeal of the common schools.⁹

ATKINSON HIGH SCHOOL.
 LOCATION ON GREEN STREET BETWEEN FIRST
 AND SECOND.

THE Thirteenth Session of this Institution for young Ladies will commence on Monday, September 3d. In addition to the regular course of English studies, able Professors are engaged for teaching the Languages, Music, Drawing, &c.

A limited number of boarders can be received into the family of the Principal. Guardians might find it for the interest of their wards to place them in this institution, where, as members of the school, they could also enjoy all the advantages of a home influence.

For further information apply to the Principal,
REV. J. ATKINSON,
 au14 d2m & w4 Northeast cor. of Green and Second sts.

Advertisement for Atkinson High School, an institution for “young Ladies.”
 Louisville *Daily Courier*, October 15, 1855

But a crucial perspective in advocating for public high schools was provided by the common schools of which they were an extension: they needed teachers. In this way, the high schools stood to benefit not only the student or even some broader sense of the “public” but also the school system itself, through the direct provision of teachers for the lower schools. John Heywood of the Committee on Examination and Control was among those who drove that point home, by appealing not only

to democratic ideals of access and benefit but also to real economic and practical needs to be served by higher schools: “It is a matter of great importance,” he explained, “to place, as soon as possible, the advantages of the High School within reach of pupils...to whom we may hereafter confidently look for thoroughly educated men and women...to keep the teacher’s ranks constantly supplied with intelligent and accomplished instructors.” As he makes clear, a major function of the high schools would be to produce teachers for the rapidly expanding school system, which embraced eight schools in 1855 and eleven ward schools and two high schools by 1860, each with ever-growing classes of students.¹⁰

Combining appeals to both “advanced studies” and teacher preparation, the *Daily Courier* asserted, “The good influence of such an institution, combining in itself the advantages of a high and a normal school, will be incalculable. It will be felt in every department of our school system.” Hence, the mission of the high schools was from their earliest beginnings wrapped up in the work and traditions not only of the college, and of the common schools, but also of the normal, or teacher training, school. As Superintendent George Anderson explained, the schools’ purpose was to make the school system as excellent as it could be, which required that “we must have not only educated men, but we must have educated teachers; men, I mean (I include women also), who have been taught the art of teaching, the most important and highest of all other arts.”¹¹

The need for teachers brought the women’s high school to center stage, as women were taking on a majority of the teaching posts already by this time. By 1855, there were twenty-six male teachers in the schools, compared to fifty-six female teachers, which grew to thirty-five male and sixty-four female in 1860. The cause of this pattern in Louisville as elsewhere was the low salary paid for teaching. As Superintendent George H. Tingley explained, the average salary for a principal teacher, \$1,500, “will not obtain the services of the very best talent, because men of ability can earn more in business, or in other professions.”¹²

While few male students went into education, all nine of the first graduates of Female became teachers after graduation, as did a great majority in the decades following. As early as 1859, Principal Holyoke had experimented with offering a formalized normal (or teacher training) course of study, with explicit instruction about how to teach for all students. By 1863, teacher training was firmly established at Female (though it does not always appear in curriculum lists). When the separate Normal Training School was established in 1871, nearly half of the graduates of Female matriculated into it as well.¹³

Thus, the central role teacher credentialing played in the mission of the high school is clear, although at times it fit uneasily with the school’s academic mission. While Female’s Principal Holyoke celebrated the “advancement of [Female’s] course of study” in 1860, his successor, Principal Chase, was demonstrably anxious throughout his own annual report about the extended time and intensity of study

Female required when he took over in 1863. While both Holyoke and Chase consistently advocated for teacher training as part of the project of Female High School, and teacher training remained part of the general academic curriculum until the establishment of a separate normal program in 1871, the location of teacher preparation in the curriculum changed. While Principal Holyoke marked the highest class of students as the “normal,” or teacher training, class, Principal Chase made the change to designate the first two years of high school, or lowest classes, as the teaching track. His explanation for this change reminds us of how exceptional a full high school education was at this time, far exceeding that necessary to teach in the schools. He stated, “It is hardly to be expected that the majority of those who seek the benefit of the School, in order to qualify themselves for teachers, will remain for a longer period than one or two years; it, therefore, seems desirable that the studies of that period should be those of a Normal School, especially for the benefit of such pupils.” Chase also determined that “the course of study hitherto pursued is too heavy for the period allotted for its completion” and proposed changes to the curriculum that included a condensing of rhetoric to only the second year of study and addressing subjects like history and literature largely through weekly lectures. The tension, as Superintendent Tingley put it in 1868, was the belief that “the ability to manage a school and skill to teach, with average scholarship, are more desirable than the highest literary attainments, without a knowledge of the practical methods to be pursued in the school-room.” The school continued to maintain this balance at least until the establishment of the normal school in 1871.¹⁴

Producing teachers for their own schools was a powerful appeal to many citizens partly because, in Louisville and across the South, educational advocates were suspicious of northern educators. Aware of the claims made for literacy and higher education as shapers of morality and political ideology, administrators sought to control that process locally. State Superintendent of Education J. D. Matthews underscored this local focus, along with a regional distrust that went with it, when he wrote of the importance of forming “early associations and the most enduring attachments of youthful training” in “institutions of learning, founded in their midst, and with their own treasure, and for their accommodation.” Particularly in the years leading up to the Civil War, regional distrust was an important factor in establishing local public schools in Kentucky, especially public high and normal schools that would feed back into the public school system. After the war, too, the interest in providing local teachers to fill vacancies in the ever-expanding school system persisted. With public schools for African Americans, opened in 1871, the city established higher classes and eventually a full high school course at coeducational Central Colored High School (now Central High School), with the explicit goal of providing black teachers for the resolutely segregated common schools. With their clear professional and public goals, these high schools were challenging and changing the face of higher education in their communities.¹⁵

But not all high schools were created equal, of course, particularly across racial and gender lines. Due partly to its more explicit role in preparing teachers and partly to other gendered strictures on women's education, the Female High School of Louisville was unarguably less academically rigorous than its male counterpart, which featured a full classical curriculum akin to that of the best men's colleges of the time. The schools were unequal in other ways as well. For example, the faculty at Male tended to have more advanced degrees, received higher salaries, and were referred to as professors, while the faculty at Female were most often referred to as teachers. In addition, the cost per pupil at Female was consistently lower than at Male: in 1861, for example, it was \$51.32 (with 94 students), compared to \$69.19 at Male (with 114 students).¹⁶



Louisville Female High School teachers. From class of 1876 photo album compiled by Mamie J. McKnight, a member of the class.

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However, even if not often recognized or valued as such, the students at Female and the curriculum they studied were comparable to those at many colleges, particularly southern women's colleges. For starters, the students at Female were as old as twenty-one in 1860, while nineteenth-century colleges often enrolled students as young as fourteen years of age. According to a report of the Association of American Universities, the average age at matriculation of eighteen years reflects the fact that students into their thirties were entering alongside those in their very early teens.¹⁷

Like many colleges of the time, Female’s requirements for admission were basic, with a brief test in grammar, arithmetic, and geography. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, institutions of higher education could not afford to have stringent admission requirements, as the proliferation of colleges and high schools meant that schools were competing for students and, hence, were often forced to accept students with only minimal preparation and from a range of age cohorts. While representing a frequent concern and complaint among school leaders, the minimal requirements can also be understood as ensuring greater access to students with various levels of preparation and perpetuating the uncertain boundaries between high schools and colleges.¹⁸

The flexible boundaries between institution types also meant that high school curricula overlapped significantly with that of colleges, even if not reaching full equivalence. Thus, students in the intermediate, or preparatory, department of Female High School in 1860 were already studying some books used in colleges, alongside others of a more distinctly secondary or preparatory nature. In English, for instance, they studied George P. Quackenbos’s *Advanced Course of Rhetoric*, a textbook popular in colleges across the country, and Samuel S. Green’s *English Analysis*—in use at colleges like Michigan’s Hillsdale College the same year—which focused on sentence building and analysis of full sentences and identified as the “progenitor of the modern idea of discipline through grammar and of language books,” in place of the tradition of fostering “mental discipline” through ancient languages, which was a concept key to nineteenth-century colleges. Other textbooks from this preparatory year even more obviously blurred the lines between high schools and colleges in their marketing. For example, their geography textbook is advertised for “advanced classes, and is well adapted to the use of Colleges, Academies, Seminaries, and High Schools.” All of these texts suggest in their titles and in their uses an uncertain divide between these institutions, which was further blurred by the existence at both high schools and colleges of preparatory departments that often far outsized the regular academic classes.¹⁹

Building on these texts and studies from the preparatory year, the ensuing three-year high school course emphasized the study of Latin and French languages, reaching into ever more distinctly collegiate branches. Students studied Andrews and Stoddard’s *Latin Grammar*, which was “for the use of schools and colleges” and listed as the Latin grammar in use at Brown University in its 1838 catalogue; Andrew’s *Latin Reader*, used in the preparatory department at Oberlin in 1857, Missouri’s Westminster College, and other colleges; and Noel and Chapsal’s *New System of French Grammar*, also a text used in the senior year at William and Mary in 1874, to name just a few examples.²⁰



Louisville Female High School teachers. From class of 1876 photo album compiled by Mamie J. McKnight, a member of the class.

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The study of Latin, especially, was a marker of higher education common across high schools, colleges, higher academies, and seminaries. However, students at Female High School did not have the chance to study Greek. Without the opportunity for a full classical education (defined by the inclusion of Greek), Female High School would seem to fall outside of the definition of a college for its time. Importantly, though, while college had for a long time been defined by the study of Greek, Latin, and higher mathematics, this tradition was changing in both men's and women's colleges across the country as students came to campus

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with varying levels of preparation and interests in careers outside of “the professions.” In response, colleges developed parallel and partial courses beyond the classical course. The English or Scientific course offered at many if not most colleges by the third quarter of the century usually embraced the study of Latin but not Greek, often with an increased emphasis on the sciences and modern languages. It was this curriculum, or a parallel offering of classical and English courses, that prevailed in both colleges and high schools. As Christie Anne Farnham observes, the classics, “although highly valued, were not the sine qua non of a college.” Instead, many students across the country graduated an English program without Greek. Thus, the English curriculum and textbooks studied at Female were in line with some of the best colleges of their time.²¹



Young women in a science laboratory in Eastern High School, Washington, D.C. (c. 1899).

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While it is of course true that the rigor of these collegiate studies cannot be determined solely from the use of a particular textbook, the significant overlap between high school and college that emerges here is documented elsewhere as well, particularly in the frequent reports complaining about it in the final decades of the century. At the least, the first two years of college very often overlapped with the last two of high school. Particularly insofar as persistence and graduation rates at colleges remained low, students at Female High School studied a course comparable to that of a great many students in American colleges, revealing a tradition of scholarly achievement often overlooked in histories of higher education. As educational historian Karen Graves argues, speaking of the St. Louis public

high schools, the “female scholar” flourished in high schools during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The perspectives of the students and teachers at these schools helps us better understand the academic culture of the early women’s high school as well.²²

2 Annual Register of the Louisville Female High School, for the

| NAMES. | Davis Lewis J. | | | | | | | | | Daring Julia A. | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|----------|--------------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|----------|
| | FIRST REPORT. | SECOND REPORT. | THIRD REPORT. | FOURTH REPORT. | FIFTH REPORT. | SIXTH REPORT. | SEVENTH REPORT. | EIGHTH REPORT. | AVERAGE. | FIRST REPORT. | SECOND REPORT. | THIRD REPORT. | FOURTH REPORT. | FIFTH REPORT. | SIXTH REPORT. | SEVENTH REPORT. | EIGHTH REPORT. | AVERAGE. |
| Reading. | 5 | 6 | 6 | 5.6 | 6 | 6 | | | | 4.7 | 5.8 | 6 | | 5 | 5.6 | 6 | | |
| Spelling. | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | 5.97 | | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | |
| Composition. | 5 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 5.5 | 6 | | | | 4.8 | 6 | 6 | | 5 | 5.7 | 6 | | |
| Natural Sciences. | 6 | 6 | 6 | 5.9 | 6 | | | | | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | | | | | |
| French. | 5.7 | 5.9 | 6 | 5.9 | 5.9 | 5.8 | 6 | | | 5.8 | 5.9 | 5.9 | 5.9 | 5.8 | 5.7 | 5.97 | | |
| Latin. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mathematics. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Rhetoric. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| History. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| English Literature. | 5.6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 5.9 | 6 | 6 | | | 5.2 | 6 | 5.8 | 5.3 | 5.5 | 5.9 | 5.4 | | |
| English Etymology. | 5.99 | 5.96 | 6 | 5.96 | 6 | 6 | 6 | | | 5.6 | 5.7 | 5.7 | 6 | 5.5 | 5.8 | 5.9 | | |
| Mental Sciences. | 5.7 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 5.8 | 6 | | | 5.4 | 6 | 6 | 5.5 | 6 | 5.8 | 6 | | |
| Vocal Music. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| German. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Department. | 6 | 6 | 5.8 | 6 | 6 | 5.7 | 6 | | | 6 | 6 | 5.7 | 5.8 | 6 | 5.9 | 6 | | |
| No. Times Tardy. | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| No. Days Absent. | | | | | | 1 | 17 | | 18 | | | | 10 | | 8 | 5 | | 17 |
| Recitation Absences. | | | | | | 4 | 35 | | 39 | | 3 | | 16 | 57 | 8 | 15 | | 70 |
| Scholarship Average. | 5.62 | 5.98 | 5.98 | 5.81 | 5.91 | 5.91 | 6 | | | 5.44 | 5.93 | 5.91 | 5.73 | 5.56 | 5.80 | 5.90 | | |
| Gen. Register Av. for year. | | | | | | | | | 5.87 | | | | | | | | | 5.80 |
| Gen. Written Ex. Average. | | | | | | | | | 5.62 | | | | | | | | | 5.30 |
| Average Yearly Standing. | | | | | | | | | 5.75 | | | | | | | | | 5.53 |
| REMARKS. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| NAMES. | Frasce Mary | | | | | | | | | Goubitz Antoinette | | | | | | | | |
| Reading. | 5 | 5.8 | 6 | 5.3 | 6 | 6 | | | | 4.6 | 6 | 6 | 5.6 | 5 | 5.0 | 5.5 | | |
| Spelling. | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| Composition. | 5 | 6 | 6 | 5.5 | 5.5 | 5.7 | 6 | | | 5.7 | 6 | 6 | 5.5 | 5.5 | 5.7 | 5.2 | | |
| Natural Sciences. | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | | | | | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | | | | | |
| French. | 5.8 | 5.9 | 6 | 5.7 | 5.9 | 5.9 | 5.87 | | | 5.9 | 5.9 | 5.8 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 5.92 | | |
| Latin. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mathematics. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Rhetoric. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| History. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| English Literature. | 5.8 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 5.9 | 6 | 6 | | | 5.4 | 6 | 5.9 | 5.4 | 5.7 | 5.8 | 5.9 | | |
| English Etymology. | 6 | 6 | 6 | 5.97 | 6 | 5.9 | 6 | | | 5.96 | 6 | 6 | 5.96 | 6 | 5.9 | 6 | | |
| Mental Sciences. | 5.7 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | | | 5.9 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | | |
| Vocal Music. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| German. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Department. | 6 | 6 | 5.9 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | | | 6 | 6 | 5.9 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | | |
| No. Times Tardy. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| No. Days Absent. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Recitation Absences. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Scholarship Average. | 5.66 | 5.96 | 5.99 | 5.83 | 5.90 | 5.94 | 5.98 | | | 5.61 | 5.99 | 5.96 | 5.87 | 5.78 | 5.88 | 5.79 | | |
| Gen. Register Av. for year. | | | | | | | | | 5.894 | | | | | | | | | 5.846 |
| Gen. Written Ex. Average. | | | | | | | | | 5.57 | | | | | | | | | 5.67 |
| Average Yearly Standing. | | | | | | | | | 5.73 | | | | | | | | | 5.76 |
| REMARKS. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Senior class from the Annual Register of the Louisville Female High School for the Year Commencing September 5th 1870 and Ending June 1871, volume 2 of the Louisville Female High School Records.

One significant perspective to look toward for insights into the school is that of the principal, the academic and moral leader of the nineteenth-century high school. For its first several years, Female High School operated under the direction of Edward Augustus Holyoke, who served as principal and professor of rhetoric and English literature until 1861, just before his death, and his vision was said to have had a lasting influence on the work of the school. Born in Massachusetts, Holyoke was a descendant on his mother’s side of the ninth president of Harvard College and a line of noted Boston physicians. At least two of his brothers were Harvard graduates, though it is unclear whether Edward attended. According to one genealogical record (compiled by a descendant), he was instead trained at an art academy in New York City, after which he took a position at Munro Collegiate Institute in Elbridge, New York, before moving to Louisville.²³

Holyoke may not have been the recognized scholar that many in his family were, but, from all accounts, he led the school with great vision and inspired his students toward greatness. As one writer explained in the *Louisville Journal*, “As a mere teacher of facts in literature and principles in science, the lamented Holyoke no doubt had many equals;” but the author continues, “there was a peculiar force in his character, a nobility surrounding his every-day life, and a charm in his manner, which fitted him more than ordinary men as the moulder of the female life and the educator of the female mind.” In fact, he was “truly Napoleonic” in this regard, “for he inspired all about him with an appreciating sense of their own worth—of the grandeur of the achievements which they were themselves capable of making.” Reminiscences of one of his first graduates, from the Class of 1858, support this characterization of “a man of marvelous resources and influence. He established the success of the school: and his touch on the lives of his pupils was a call to earnest and untiring endeavor. It was an inspiring two years’ work that the first Senior Class accomplished with him.... He said that so small a class ought to make up in work what it lacked in time; and so we entered very enthusiastically into the spirit of the forty-eight hour day.”²⁴

A founding member of the Kentucky Association of Teachers, which he served as secretary, Holyoke was a serious academic professional dedicated to improving teaching and learning in his area. He established and edited the *Kentucky Family Journal* in 1859 and also gave a series of public lectures on various artistic and literary topics meant to bridge the academic-community divide.²⁵

Under Holyoke, the school began its practice of hard study, particularly in Latin and writing. As one of his students explained, “Each day the hour of Latin prose was followed by an hour of English impromptu composition. The strenuous season of writing was not pleasant at first, but we lived to be grateful for the relentless enforcement of good spelling and correct style.” The impromptu compositions, in particular, came to be a hallmark of the school and a feature of the annual commencement ceremonies, at which students composed and read them. In a time when even women at progressive coeducational Oberlin College were barred from reading their

essays at graduation, it is notable that high school students in Louisville were being trained in rhetoric and elocution, reciting their own original compositions at graduation in front of mixed-gender public audiences from 1858.²⁶

Describing the goals of his curriculum and management, Holyoke said the school aimed to make “honorable, intelligent, high-minded women” with common sense, accurate reasoning, knowledge of the world, and an ability to communicate the knowledge they gained. Likely in response to frequent criticisms of the “superficiality” of women’s higher education, the school aspired to “thoroughness.” “Above all this, however,” Holyoke notes, “we labor to make them independent of thought and action. We endeavor to cultivate the individual character of each and not bring all down to one dead level.”²⁷

Female High School graduate Marie Radcliffe further supported this independence of thought and action in her commencement speech of 1860. Picking up on the criticism of superficial attainments and other criticisms of women’s education, Radcliffe traced differences in men’s and women’s intellectual accomplishments to discrepancies in their education, using this insight as an avenue to extend not only educational but also professional opportunities for women. She argued, “If woman’s mind and talents were thus cultivated and developed” as men’s have been, with collegiate studies, “then we should have fewer aimless dreamers, and more active, brave, and earnest women; and if in their ranks were seen a physician, a lecturer, a writer, an artist, it cannot be unfeminine, it cannot be wrong, for God gave them their talents, and he doeth all things well.” Expressing a sentiment just short of radical for her time, Radcliffe’s speech made clear that Female High School fostered Holyoke’s “independent thought and action,” providing a context for students to write and speak publicly about their lives and their positions in society in the second half of the nineteenth century—a privilege not often conferred (or conferred with great anxiety) on northern women at the time. Radcliffe continued to stir up local controversy around women’s rights by speaking at public religious events on behalf of her reverend husband. She also continued to hone her literary skills, which eventually resulted in the posthumous publication of a collection of her prose and poetry in 1884.²⁸

These opportunities for a culturally valued academic curriculum, rhetorical opportunities, and professionalization are somewhat of an anomaly in histories of women’s higher education. As Farnham explains in *Educating the Southern Belle*, female academies and colleges at the time were not often offering both advanced classical education and public speaking opportunities *and* professionalization for teaching careers. In particular, classical rhetorical instruction was offered as cultural training detached from the idea of professionalization (largely in the South), and teacher training was offered with a distinctly “practical” bent that did not include classical subjects, rhetorical instruction, and opportunities for public performance (largely in the Northeast), but rarely were the two combined.²⁹

And yet, at Female students were learning the classics while simultaneously preparing to enter the workforce. Celebrating the pragmatic labor considerations alongside the academic opportunities of the school, the superintendent noted approvingly of Female High School, “All classes now seek its benefits for their children. Young ladies educated in within its walls leave them prepared to meet and struggle with every chance and change of this mortal life.” A newspaper report from 1864 similarly opined that the course of study was “of such a character as to fit a female for any position of life—imparting the mind with the strength of a practical education and the grace of elegant accomplishments.”³⁰

As a southern city imbued with the aristocratic social structure of the slavery system but also with economic and cultural ties to the North, Louisville may have been well-positioned to combine educational traditions and goals in this hybrid manner. But this educational innovation also seems informed by the high school’s particular institutional position as well, especially insofar as it is reflected in the experience of other western cities, such as Cincinnati and St. Louis. The evidence of rhetorical opportunities and advanced classical curricula at other high schools suggests that the story of Louisville Female High School constitutes not an exception but instead what proponents of microhistory call an “exceptional normal” in the history of higher education. As such, Female High School’s historical value “lies not in its uniqueness, but in its exemplariness.” It is a seemingly exceptional case that gestures to an overlooked trend—a case that makes us reconsider what “normal” is. The new normal that emerges here is the educational rigor and significance of early women’s high schools in the landscape of higher education, challenging our tacit acceptance of the distinction between historical high schools and colleges.³¹

With their uncertain position in the academic landscape, their Janus-faced mission, and their ties to the common schools, high schools like Female proved to be an exception to the presumed limitation of women’s higher education and professional training in the nineteenth century. The pattern of academic rigor and opportunity among other midwestern and even some northern high schools suggests that the scrutiny of “high schools girls” may have differed from that of “college women.” Being part of the common school system meant that students were “our children” or “our girls,” as they were often referred to, even though they were as old as twenty-one years. The discourse of girlhood serves to contain these students and their rhetorical activities within a safe and wholesome frame, far from the specter of culturally disruptive “college women.” Overall, the rendering of students as either girls or future teachers, both benign figures in the social imaginary, that dominated the discursive landscape extended the rhetorical, educational, and professional opportunities of students at Female High School. Because of their indeterminate name and their rhetorical association with the common schools, the high schools could offer women an advanced curriculum and professional training without public censure and, indeed, with public support.³²

Thus, though historians have observed that some high schools had advanced curriculums in spite of being “merely” high schools, “high school girls” also enjoyed an advanced curriculum *because of* the high school’s particular position at the upper reaches of the common school system. That is, the status of such schools as “high schools” (or academies and seminaries) and not “colleges” was consequential to rendering women’s access to higher education unobjectionable, because it was indeterminate.

Nonetheless, this status has simultaneously withheld the most valued forms of educational certification from these students, both in their own time and in subsequent historical discussions of them. This exclusion serves to suppress the value of the high school over time, particularly as the high school came to be positioned as preparatory and subordinate to the college by the end of the century. And our continued adherence to these distinctions in historical discussions of higher education perpetuates the devaluation of these young women’s educational achievements.

Overall, if our lack of attention to high schools in the history of higher education in this country has seemed obvious and rational from the perspective of the present, microhistories of high schools challenge this omission. This is not to say that there are no differences between high schools and colleges but that we have overemphasized the differences and obscured the reality of internal variation within each category. It is important to take stock of both this internal inconsistency and variety *and* those boundaries that remained largely impermeable, particularly for women. High schools are not colleges, but the ways they differ from colleges are not consistent and, in the case of high schools obtaining college charters, seem to be based as much on gender as on other curricular criteria.

While most major urban school systems contemplated extending their high schools into colleges around midcentury, in the case of gender-segregated high schools it was not uncommon for a city’s men’s high school to actively challenge the boundaries between high schools and colleges through such charters, while their women’s high schools did not. For example, schools such as Baltimore’s Central High School (later Baltimore City College) merged with or became colleges, while others, like Philadelphia’s Central High School, remained marked as high schools but conferred bachelor’s degrees on graduates (a privilege that school retains to this day). In each case, the corollary women’s high schools in these cities remained as high schools, neither obtaining charters to convert to colleges nor granting academic degrees. In Baltimore, school leaders assured citizens that, by confining to the English branches of study, the female high schools would *not* be equivalent to the men’s, which was unequivocally “the highest school of our system.” In Philadelphia, by a similar turn, the Central High School for men conferred bachelor’s degrees while young women until 1860 had recourse only to a normal school, the purpose of which was expressly “not to give an extended course of instruction to all the pupils of the Female Grammar Schools” but only to train teachers for the public schools.³³

While women have been consistently barred from the most valuable forms of educational capital, they nonetheless have a long history of academic achievement in the spaces to which they gained access. Students and teachers have found space for advanced learning in a variety of curricular and extracurricular sites, particularly in the ill-defined nineteenth-century high school. We will have a better sense of the history of higher education and rhetorical opportunity for young women when we take into consideration the work of the nineteenth-century women’s high school and other spaces that have seemed, from our common institutional assumptions, to fall outside of “higher education.” And, particularly in a time of increasingly blurred institutional divides today, we can use our enriched sense of higher education’s past to inform our visions of its present and future.

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- 1 “History,” *Atherton High School*, Jefferson County Public Schools, accessed March 15, 2015, <http://schools.jefferson.kyschools.us/high/atherton/history.html>; *Report of the Board of Trustees of the Public Schools of Louisville* (Louisville, KY: Bradley & Gilbert, 1872), 63; Edwin Cornelius Broome, *A Historical and Critical Discussion of College Admission Requirements* (New York: Macmillan, 1903), 111. For more on the uncertain divide between high schools, colleges, and academies, see: John Franklin Brown, *The American High School* (New York: Macmillan, 1915), 30; William Reese, *The Origins of the American High School* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 34, 17; David Tyack, *Turning Points in American Educational History* (Waltham, Mass.: Blaisdell, 1967), 354; Edward A. Krug, *The Shaping of the American High School 1880–1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 3, 7; Karen Graves, *Girls’ Schooling during the Progressive Era: From Female Scholar to Domesticated Citizen*. (New York: Garland, 1998), 107; R. D. Gidney and W. Millar, *Inventing Secondary Education: The Rise of the High School in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 1990), 254; Marc A. VanOverbeke, *The Standardization of American Schooling: Linking Secondary and Higher Education, 1870–1910* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 18, 27; Christie Anne Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York: New York University Press, 1994).
- 2 Margery W. Davies, *Woman’s Place Is at the Typewriter* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 57; *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Male High School, Female High School, and Public Schools of Louisville* (Louisville, KY: Bradley & Gilbert, 1861), 37–38; *Reports of the Louisville School Board* (Louisville, KY: Bradley & Gilbert, 1895), 55, 85–86. Undoubtedly, additional young women were receiving formal and informal higher education at a range of private and public institutions, though this data is not available in city records. As Reese
- points out, high schools had very much in common with academies as a curricular tradition (Reese, *Origins of the American High School*, 92). Nonetheless, the popularity and influence of public high schools grew significantly in the second half of the century, particularly after 1880. African American women and men would experience this same expansion when Central Colored High School opened in 1882.
- 3 *Public School Laws of the City of Louisville, A Compilation of the Acts of the Legislature and Laws Establishing and Governing the Male High School, the Female High School and the Public Schools of the City of Louisville, Ky. from the Year 1828 to the Year 1882, prepared by Randolph H. Blain* (1882), 20–21, microfilm, Jefferson County Public Schools Archives, Louisville, KY; “Proceedings of the Board of Trustees,” *Louisville Daily Courier*, May 15, 1851. For more on the early connections between Male and University of Louisville, see Sam Adkins and M. R. Holtzman, *The First Hundred Years: The History of Louisville Male High School* (Louisville, KY: Administration and Alumni of Louisville Male High School, 1991); Kentucky Writers’ Project of the Work Projects Administration, *A Centennial History of the University of Louisville* (Louisville, KY: University of Louisville, 1939).
- 4 “300 Male High Grads Become U. of L. Alumni,” *Alumni Bulletin* (July 1998): n.p., University of Louisville Archives and Special Collections, Louisville, KY; *Public School Laws*, 43; “Du Pont Manual High School,” *Encyclopedia of Louisville*, ed. John E. Kleber (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 260. The first known female University of Louisville graduate finished in 1903, from the medical school. Women were admitted to the new School of Arts and Sciences in 1907, and comprised ten of the eighteen graduates in 1908 (“Firsts for Women at the University of Louisville,” *Women’s Center News* 13 [Spring 2006], 6).

- 5 *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Male High School, Female High School, and Public Schools of Louisville* (Louisville, KY: Bradley & Gilbert, 1860), 16; *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Male High School, Female High School, and Public Schools of Louisville* (Louisville, KY: Bradley & Gilbert, 1868), 15–18.
- 6 Reese, *Origins of the American High School*, 34. On the relativity of high schools, see also Tyack, *Turning Points in American Educational History*, 354.
- 7 Tyack, *Turning Points in American Educational History; Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Male High School, Female High School, and Public Schools of Louisville, to the General Council of the City of Louisville, for the Scholastic Year of 1859-'60* (Louisville, KY: Bradley & Gilbert), 8.
- 8 James Berlin, *Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 41. For examples of private high schools available, see a notice for a “Female High School” run by Mr. and Mrs. Atkinson circulated in the *Louisville Morning Courier* of 1849, inviting Louisville’s public to “entrust to their care a large number of lassies, from the bounding and graceful age of ten, and younger to ‘sweet sixteen,’ and twenty” (“From Tampa Bay,” *Louisville Morning Courier*, September 7, 1849). Similarly, the classified ads of an 1855 issue of the *Daily Courier*, the year before Louisville’s public high schools opened, feature no fewer than eight schools, institutes, seminaries, and even a “regularly chartered college” for young women, not to mention the opportunities for young men (“Classified Ad 5—No Title,” *Louisville Daily Courier*, August 27, 1855). As is clear here, “high school” is not about age but level of study, and there was little sense at the time of a certain age for high school students beyond the fact that they were typically at least fourteen, as many colleges designated as well. Eventually, free high school tuition in Louisville was limited to those under twenty-five years of age. Also see Janet Eldred and Peter Mortensen on Kentucky’s Science Hill Female Academy (*Imagining Rhetoric: Composing Women of the Early United States* [Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002]).
- 9 “Annual Report on the Public Schools,” *Louisville Daily Courier*, Aug. 5, 1854; *Annual Report* 1855, 22.
- 10 *Annual Report* 1855, 23; *Annual Report* 1860, 10.
- 11 “Annual Report,” 2; *Annual Report* 1860, 32.
- 12 *Annual Report* 1855, 23; *Annual Report* 1860, 2–5; *Annual Report* 1868, 18.
- 13 *Report of the Board of Trustees of the Public Schools of Louisville* (Louisville, KY: Bradley & Gilbert, 1873), 70; “History of the Louisville Normal School,” Louisville Girls High School Collection, folder 3, University of Louisville Archives and Special Collections, Louisville, KY; Principal Grant noted in 1860 that “nearly all” female graduates to date had been hired as teachers (*Annual Report* 1860, 10). In the 1864 annual report, Principal Chase noted that ten of twelve students had expressed interest in teaching, and four had already secured positions in the public schools by the time of his writing (*Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the University and Public Schools to the General Council of the City of Louisville*. [Louisville, KY: Bradley & Gilbert, 1864], 72). In 1865, he noted that fourteen of nineteen expected to engage in teaching (*Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the University and Public Schools to the General Council of the City of Louisville* [Louisville, KY: Bradley & Gilbert, 1865], 68), and Superintendent George Tingley used the fact that “three-fourths of those who graduate desire to engage in teaching” to argue for the establishment of a distinct normal class in 1866, as well as a training school (*Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the University and Public Schools to the General Council of the City of Louisville*, [Louisville, KY: Bradley & Gilbert, 1866], 19).
- 14 *Annual Report* 1860, 10; *Annual Report* 1863, 99; *Annual Report* 1868, 18.
- 15 J. D. Matthews, “History of Education in Kentucky,” *Bulletin of Kentucky Department of Education* 7 (July 1914): 84; Ruby Doyle, *Recalling the Record: A Documentary History of the African-American Experience within the Louisville Public School System of Kentucky (1870–1975)* (Chapel Hill, NC: Professional Press, 2005), 193.
- 16 *Annual Report* 1860, 2; *Annual Report* 1861, 49.
- 17 For a discussion of average college admission and graduation ages, see Association of American Universities, *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Tenth Annual Conference* (Chicago: Association of American Universities, 1909), 35–36. As one example, 1860 graduate Marie B. Radcliffe was born in 1839, a fact reported in the introduction to her published volume of prose and poetry in 1884 (*Poetry and Prose of Marie Radcliffe Butler*, ed. Thomas D. Butler, [Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company, 1884], viii).
- 18 VanOverbeke, *Standardization of American Schooling*.
- 19 *Annual Report* 1860, 3–4; *Seventh Annual Catalogue of Officers and Students of Hillsdale College* (Toledo: Pelton & Waggoner, 1862), 28; “Formal English Grammar as a Discipline,” *Teacher’s College Record* 14 (September 1913): 5; David M. Warren, *A System of Physical Geography* (Philadelphia: H. Cowperthwait & Co., 1863), 2. Students are reported to be studying one of Noble Butler’s grammar textbooks, though the annual report does not designate which one was in use. Butler, a notable local educator, published his textbooks in Louisville with Morton & Griswold, and several of his works were used throughout the schools.

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- 20 *Annual Report* 1860, 3–4; *Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Brown University 1838–9* (Providence: Knowles, Vose & Company, 1838), 13; *Annual Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Oberlin College, for the College Year 1857–58* (Oberlin, OH: James M. Fitch, 1857), 41; *The College of William and Mary, from Its Foundation, 1660–1874* (Richmond: J. W. Randolph & English, 1874), 171; M. M. Fisher, *History of Westminster College 1851–1903* (Columbia, MO: E. W. Stephens, 1903), 12.
- 21 Reese, *Origins of the American High School*, 92; Farnham, *Education of the Southern Belle*, 23.
- 22 Tyack, *Turning Points in American Educational History*; Graves, *Girls' Schooling*.
- 23 Memorial of the Harvard Class of 1856, 145; “Edward Augustus Holyoke III,” Holyoke Family Genealogy—Person Sheet, *Larry Holyoke's Web Site*, accessed Feb. 12, 2017, http://lynnotamac.org/genealogy/database/ps02/ps02_415.html.
- 24 *Annual Report* 1864, 75; Elizabeth H. Woodbury, “The Class of 1858,” *Record* (school yearbook), n.p., Filson Historical Society, Louisville, KY.
- 25 Amos Kendall, “Educational Conventions and Associations. Kentucky,” *American Journal of Education* 16 (1866): 355–56.
- 26 Woodbury, “Class of 1858”; Farnham, *Education of the Southern Belle*; David Gold, *Rhetoric at the Margins* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008); Barbara Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 28–29.
- 27 *Annual Report* 1860, 10, 12.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 27. For more on Radcliffe and other student commencement addresses, see Amy J. Lueck, “A Maturity of Thought Very Rare in Young Girls’: Women’s Public Engagement in Nineteenth-Century High School Commencement Essays,” *Rhetoric Review* 34 (2015): 129–46.
- 29 Farnham, *Education of the Southern Belle*, 32.
- 30 *Annual Report* 1860, 27; *Louisville Journal*, quoted in *Annual Report* 1864, 76.
- 31 Jill Lepore, “Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography,” *Journal of American History* 88 (2001): 133.
- 32 Lueck, “Maturity of Thought Very Rare in Young Girls”; Lindal Buchanan, *Regendering Delivery: The Fifth Canon and Antebellum Women Rhetors* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005).
- 33 *Thirty-Fourth Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of Public Schools to the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore* (Baltimore: James Young, 1863), 21–22; *Thirty-Ninth Annual Report of the Controllers of the Public Schools of the First School District of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Board of Controllers, 1858), 162.