

Pioneers in Education



WHY THEY MADE HISTORY Mary Lyon and Emma Hart Willard were pioneers in establishing formal education for women. The efforts of their hard work still exist today in the form of Mount Holyoke College and the Emma Willard School.



As you read the biography below, think about how each woman revolutionized the American educational system.

MARY LYON (1797–1849)

When Mary Lyon was growing up in Massachusetts, she found that her educational experience was better than the opportunities that girls in surrounding towns had. In Buckland Lyon could go to school year-round, but girls in other places were allowed to attend school only in the summer, when the boys had to work on the farms.

Lyon was hired as a teacher when she was 17. This job inspired her to continue her own education. While still teaching, Lyon attended seminars and visited other classrooms. This was the only way that Lyon, a middle-class female, could further her schooling.

In 1834 Lyon decided to start a higher learning institution for women. For three years she worked tirelessly to raise the funding she needed. She developed a **curriculum** and established a low tuition to make education accessible to students without much money.

Lyon opened Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in 1837. She served as president until her death in 1849. The school, now called Mount Holyoke College, is still open today and is well respected.



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VOCABULARY

curriculum set of courses

EMMA HART WILLARD (1787–1870)

In the 1800s many people believed that women should have no formal training outside of basic reading, writing, and math. When Emma Hart Willard was young, her father thought differently. He engaged her in the abstract thinking of philosophy and other subjects.

As an adult Willard was unhappy with the discrimination women faced when trying to attain a higher education. She wanted desperately to take classes in the interesting subjects she had studied with her father.

In 1814 Willard opened a school in her home, called the Middlebury Female Seminary. Here, women could take classes in the arts, the **classics**, and science. Five years later, Willard tried to open a school in Waterford, New York. She argued her case before the state and was well prepared. In 1821 the Troy Female Seminary opened, funded not by the state but by the town of Troy. Graduates of the school were in high demand. The school still exists today under the name of the Emma Willard School.



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VOCABULARY

classics literary works of ancient Greece or Rome

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

- 1. Compare** In what ways were Mary Lyon and Emma Hart Willard alike? Give several examples.

- 2. Evaluate** Do you think it was significant that women rather than men were responsible for pioneering formal education for women? Explain your answer.

ACTIVITY

Imagine that you can travel back in time. Write a letter to Lyon or Willard explaining how their work in education has affected your school today.