

## WEST VIRGINIA'S GENDERED PROFESSION: SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND WOMEN IN EDUCATION, c.1863-1917

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*In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, more West Virginian women attended and worked in schools than ever before. Numerous historians have noted this flood of female students and teachers, commonly termed "the feminization of education." It is rarely noted, however, how the predominantly male community of school administrators came to terms with this change. Many struggled to reconcile traditional gender norms with a changing economic and social climate. Male administrators interacted with, and attempted to define shifting gender roles in their published education journals and school histories. It is evident that many failed to accept women in leadership positions and frequently employed gendered stereotypes in their assessments. They discouraged upward mobility for female teachers and pupils and criticized the abilities and roles of educated women in the public sphere. In an effort to maintain traditional values in West Virginia's modernizing society, male administrators both drew from, and created a gendered rhetoric that monitored femininity in the classroom.*

Since the eighteenth century, travel writers, reporters, and local authors have portrayed Appalachians as uneducated at best and "hillbillies" at worst. According to art historian Carissa Massey, "images of Appalachians as stereotypes have circulated in American visual culture for over two centuries."<sup>2</sup> Most of these stereotypes extend from the image of the "philistine country bumpkin" created by popular writers.<sup>3</sup> In fashioning this stereotype, many contemporary authors disregarded the numerous schools dotting the landscape and assumed women from the area had no formal education.<sup>4</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, the rolling hills of West Virginia, in the heart of the Appalachian Mountains, had plenty of primary, secondary, and higher education institutions. Contrary to the popular stereotype, women from various backgrounds attended these schools and some late nineteenth-century local school administrators even advocated for female education in order to demonstrate the progressive nature of their area's educational programs. Overall, depictions of female students found within school reports and local histories reveal the ways in which contemporary commentators struggled to reconcile traditional gender assumptions with the increased presence of women in educational institutions.

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<sup>2</sup> Carissa Massey, "Appalachian Stereotypes: Cultural History, Gender, and Sexual Rhetoric," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 13,1&2 (2007): 124.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Law Olmstead, a popular travel writer, is one example of an author who perpetuated the Appalachian stereotype in his book *A Journey in the Back Country in the Winter of 1853-4*, 2nd ed. (New York: Mason Brothers, 1863); For secondary literature, see also Harry M. Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberland: A Biography of a Depressed Area* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1963); Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978); Kenneth Noe, "Appalachia's Civil War Genesis: Southwest Virginia as Depicted by Northern and European Writers, 1825-1865," *West Virginia History* 50 (1991): 91-108; and Andrew L. Slap, ed, *Reconstructing Appalachia: The Civil War's Aftermath*. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Wilma A. Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 153.

In 1863, the same year the newly-formed state of West Virginia ratified its constitution, the state legislature passed “An Act providing for the Establishment of a System of Free Schools.” It thereafter developed a thriving public system of education bolstered by various private high schools and colleges.<sup>5</sup> Many legislators felt that the free school system provided opportunities that few women had under the previous Commonwealth of Virginia, and taught its students how to be productive, patriotic citizens. After the Civil War, rural women increasingly took advantage of the schools and, in so doing, achieved greater mobility and independence.<sup>6</sup> School administrators both supported female students and teachers and at the same time stymied their progress. In examining administrators’ reactions to educated women in late-nineteenth-century West Virginia we find that they viewed female education as a step toward modernity, but simultaneously struggled to accept changing gender roles, especially in regard to women in positions of authority.

Prior to the Civil War, Virginian counties west of the Blue Ridge Mountains could not erect new public schools aside from those established under the Commonwealth of Virginia. Many local politicians in western Virginia did not want to spend the money necessary to create them.<sup>7</sup> In 1796, Thomas Jefferson passed the first education bill, which established public elementary schools, but it remained up to the county governments to elect an education official. If a county government did not elect an official or set up a public school, the wealthy state justices rarely intervened. Consequently, few counties in the hinterlands chose to create free schools. Over the next thirty years, the Virginia legislature passed several other education acts, but they only helped to establish small, poorly funded schoolhouses. Virginia finally passed a new school law in 1846, but it did little to change the imperfect system.<sup>8</sup> This new law was the last education act passed by the Virginia legislature prior to the Civil War and was thus the most recent law in effect when West Virginia was admitted to the Union as a new state in 1863.

Because the western counties of Virginia were on the periphery of the U.S. economy at this time, local governments controlled by wealthy individuals erected only a few schools that served the needs of the local farming community. Low taxes helped companies on the periphery send goods out in exchange for cheap goods brought in.<sup>9</sup> Few local politicians wanted to create public schools because they would have to increase taxes, making imported goods more expensive. The legislating class of elite planters paid for their own children’s education at exclusive academies and refused to tax themselves to benefit the poor.<sup>10</sup> To educate their privileged children they established and funded several private academies prior to the Civil

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<sup>5</sup> State Superintendent of Schools, *The History of Education in West Virginia*, revised ed. (Charleston: Tribune Printing Company, 1907).

<sup>6</sup> John L. Rury, *Education and Women’s Work: Female Schooling and the Division of Labor in Urban America, 1870-1930* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 20-25.

<sup>7</sup> Wilma A. Dunaway, *The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700-1860* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 290-295.

<sup>8</sup> State Superintendent of Schools, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Wilma Dunaway describes the antebellum Appalachian economy in *The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700-1860* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996): the periphery operated in a global, capitalist economy, but in the zone farthest away from production centers, such as Philadelphia or Boston. People living on the periphery helped to extract products, such as wood or coal that companies sent on to processing centers, like Pittsburgh. The processing centers then sent refined goods to production centers, which created a finished product or traded for finished goods. Businesses sent those finished goods back to people on the periphery.

<sup>10</sup> Dunaway, *The First American Frontier*, 292.

War.<sup>11</sup> For example, the Virginia legislature chartered the Linsly Institute in Wheeling in 1814. Each student paid a one-dollar tuition fee for each quarter, and the institute allowed some “poor students” to attend for free.<sup>12</sup> While the nineteenth-century authors of *Columbian History of Education in West Virginia* never identify the Linsly Institute as a male institution, they list all male teachers and administrators and do not mention female students. Instead, they highlight several female academies, including the Lewisburg Female Institute, established in 1810.<sup>13</sup>

Located in Greenbrier County, nine miles from White Sulphur Springs, the Lewisburg Female Institute accepted elite young women from the surrounding Virginia countryside. During the summer months these women participated in numerous privileged activities, such as horse-back riding and afternoon teas that allowed them to display their wealth. In the evenings, they wrote home to friends and family. Their letters included romanticized stories of the “primitive” locals that emphasized their ruggedness and downplayed their poverty. Charlene Boyer Lewis, for example, relates Mary B. Blackford’s fascination with the local countrymen as they sat in the woods. To Blackford, the group looked like a “‘Gipsy camp’...They must ‘lead a merry life in the Green Wood.’”<sup>14</sup> She takes little account of their socioeconomic status and portrays them as quasi-fictional characters that have no care in the world. In reality, this group of labourers probably earned a meager living in transient occupations. Through their letters to friends and relatives, elite students like Blackford helped establish the Appalachian stereotype in the antebellum era. After the Civil War, local entertainment writers popularized this stereotype, and further entrenched it in the American imagination.

The trope of the uneducated Appalachian solidified during the late nineteenth century. During the same period, attendance skyrocketed in public and private schools throughout West Virginia. The increase was due in part to the new public system, which established free schools that had never before existed in rural areas. The Fort Martin one-room schoolhouse, for example, served as a subscription school prior to 1865, but after the free school law, poorer rural students attended in droves.<sup>15</sup> Local boards erected many of the other rural schools, such as the Iowa schoolhouse, during the 1870s and 1880s to service the local farming communities.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, business owners converged on West Virginia to build new industries, and workers soon established their families in industrial towns. Local politicians responded to the need for schools that served the local industrial communities. Constructed in 1880, the Dellslow school “grew very fast, the population grew with it, and a larger school was necessary in a short time.”<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, West Virginia had 133 schoolhouses in 1865, and by 1892 it boasted 5004.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>11</sup> State Superintendent of Schools, 34-45; Benjamin Stephen Morgan, Jacob F. Cork, and West Virginia Board of World’s fair managers, *Columbian History of Education in West Virginia* (Charleston, WV: M.W. Donnally, 1893), 5-16.

<sup>12</sup> Morgan and Cork, *Columbian History of Education in West Virginia*, 151.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Mary B. Blackford to William Blackford, 12 Aug. 1844, Blackford Family Papers, ViU, quoted in Charlene M. Boyer Lewis, *Ladies and Gentlemen on Display: Planter Society at the Virginia Springs, 1790-1860* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 109.

<sup>15</sup> “Cass District, 1906-1982,” Folders 2, Box 1, A&M 2744, “Monongalia County Schools. Reminiscences,” West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.

<sup>16</sup> “Clay District, 1921-1982,” Folder 3, Box 1, A&M 2744, “Monongalia County Schools. Reminiscences.”

<sup>17</sup> “Morgan District, ca. 1920-1985,” Folder 6, Box 1, A&M 2744, “Monongalia County Schools. Reminiscences.”

<sup>18</sup> “West Virginia: Comparative School Statistics, 1865-1892” in Folder 1, A&M 842, “West Virginia School and Agricultural Spastics,” West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.

Though the state increased the number of schools during the late nineteenth century, few historians question how that increase transformed gender roles and “modernized” society. Various scholars have written extensively on the impact of industrialization on politics and society in West Virginia urban centers, but only a few analyze the myriad ways in which educational opportunities, especially those open to women, impacted the region.<sup>19</sup> The shifting economy amplified the need for schools while, simultaneously, feminist and social reformers advocated for women’s education. Since the 1980s, historians have examined women’s education in the late nineteenth century as an effect of industrialization, urbanization, and social reform.<sup>20</sup> In her book, *In the Company of Educated Women* (1985), Barbara Miller Solomon argues that women joined together to advocate for their own higher education.<sup>21</sup> According to Solomon, women in the nineteenth century operated in the private sphere, and they had to concentrate their energies to have any impact on public spheres, especially in higher education. She set a framework for future historians of education by stressing that women could achieve much by working together in female support groups and organizations. Solomon limited herself, however, by focusing on stories of well-known New England women such as Catharine Beecher, Emma Willard, and Mary Lyon.<sup>22</sup> As a result, her work overlooks the struggles of middle and lower class women and completely neglects rural and Appalachian education. Additionally, it does not discuss local reactions to the numerous female graduates. Solomon’s work provides a top-down approach to women’s history, and raises several questions about the relationship between rural, middle and lower class women, and public education.

David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot address such questions in their discussion of the common school movement, which encouraged both female and male education in public schools throughout the United States.<sup>23</sup> They suggest that public schools in both rural and urban settings were egalitarian and note that more women were attending public schools than obtaining jobs in the public sphere. Much of their work emphasizes the “feminization” of schools, or the late nineteenth-century phenomenon that witnessed a marked increase in female teachers and pupils. Male administrators, they argue, viewed female education as the bane of their profession and considered it to be emasculating. They cite F. E. Chadwick, who in 1914 defined feminization as “the woman peril...[that] can only result in a feminized manhood, emotional, illogical, non-combative.”<sup>24</sup> Tyack and Hansot attribute feminization in part to male teachers who did not

<sup>19</sup> Ronald L. Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside: Railroads, Deforestation, and Social Change in West Virginia, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Ken Fones-Wolf *Glass Towns: Industry, Labor, and Political Economy in Appalachia, 1890-1930s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007). See also Ken Fones-Wolf and Ronald L. Lewis, eds., *Transnational West Virginia: Ethnic Communities and Economic Change, 1840-1940* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2002); Dwight B. Billings and Kathleen M. Blee, *The Road to Poverty: The Making of Wealth and Hardship in Appalachia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Ruben Donato and Marvin Lazerson, “New Directions in American Educational History: Problems and Prospects,” *Educational Researcher* 29, no. 8 (Nov 2000): 4-15; William J. Reese and John L. Rury, eds., *Rethinking the History of American Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>22</sup> Catharine Esther Beecher (1800-1878) founded the Hartford Female Seminary in Hartford, Connecticut. Emma Willard (1787-1870) founded Troy Female Seminary in Troy, New York. Mary Lyon 1797-1849 founded Mt. Holyoke Female Seminary in South Hadley, Massachusetts. See also Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York: Norton, 1976).

<sup>23</sup> David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Learning Together: A History of Coeducation in American Schools* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> Tyack and Hansot, *Learning Together*, 155.

want to be employed for teaching terms when they could earn a higher wage in a year-round job. While these scholars give much needed focus to middling and lower class women, they do not refer to Appalachian education. Like Solomon, they raise a number of important questions for further study: Did the state see the same increase in female students and teachers? How did administrators reconcile changing gender roles?

Since Tyack and Hansot, a number of historians of education have complicated the notion of “feminization.” John Rury argues that women flocked to public high schools, albeit not for job opportunities.<sup>25</sup> He finds that many male faculty members supported coeducation in high schools, but that they and their administrators worried about the decrease of the male student population. While Rury provides outstanding statistical analysis, he does not delve much into administrative discourse, and therefore bypasses a rich resource shedding light on the concerns and assumptions regarding coeducation. Joel Perlmann and Robert A. Margo also provide statistical analysis of teachers around the United States, but take issue with a number of the above-mentioned authors’ major points.<sup>26</sup> For instance, they argue that the increase in female teachers occurred primarily in rural areas and that “a great deal of the feminization process was simply not occurring in urban schools, or in any graded schools.”<sup>27</sup> They disagree with Tyack and Hansot’s explanation for why feminization occurred and suggest that districts actively hired more women because they were cheaper. Women took advantage of educational opportunities and began to master the rural school curriculum as schools began to consolidate. As a result, male teachers were edged out and the teaching profession became “sex-typed as women’s work.”<sup>28</sup> Despite their intriguing conclusions, Perlman and Margo do not indicate whether feminization was happening in Appalachia. Instead, they lump West Virginia into the South even though its economy and culture is unique compared to states in the Deep South. Like Rury, they give little voice to the administrators that hired women, and while they speculate why administrators hired women over men, they do not explore how these administrators came to terms with this marked increase.

More recent work on the history of education focuses on female agency. Mary Kelley, for example, examines literary societies and their publications. Illustrating how women created their own discourse by seeking education through female literary circles, Kelley suggests that women used education to develop a public rhetoric that changed society’s understanding of women’s roles. Women sought an education to better their lives, rather than be pawns trapped in a defunct system. Like Solomon’s, her analysis relies on elite women’s narratives. More and more non-elite West Virginian women, however, also sought education.<sup>29</sup> How did school administrators, who had such influence over assumptions regarding gender in the classroom, react to the increased presence of female students and teachers, and the changing gender norms that accompanied them?

*The West Virginia Educational Journal*, which was published throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as various twentieth-century schools reports and histories, reflect contemporary beliefs and values and reveal much about administrators’ reactions to the increase

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<sup>25</sup> Rury, 1-10.

<sup>26</sup> Joel Perlmann and Robert A. Margo, *Women’s Work? American Schoolteachers, 1650-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> Perlmann and Margo, 96.

<sup>28</sup> Perlmann and Margo, 107-109.

<sup>29</sup> W. R. White, *Second Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Free Schools, of the State of West Virginia* (Wheeling: John Frew, 1866), 38-39.

in women in the classroom. Local administrators wrote the monthly *Journal* and produced the school reports, which provide useful data in the form of student rolls, employment status, and teacher salaries. In these documents gender roles are considered to be biologically determined, or natural to a person's given sex, and are not depicted or understood as a social construction.<sup>30</sup> Such an understanding of gender also underscores contemporary histories of the school system, such as the history written by Lynn Hastings, who served as school superintendent in Monongalia County in the early to mid-twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> Works written in the same vein as Hastings' local histories include the state department's tome entitled *The History of Education in West Virginia* and Morgan and Cork's history of the same name. Together, these studies provide a privileged, propagandistic view of education. They stress supposed gender equality and suggest that all schools were established with this ideal in mind.<sup>32</sup> Many were written after 1900 and are products of their time, as is indicated by the emergence of concepts such as the "New Woman," which transformed gender roles in labour, politics, and education during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The "woman question" could not stay out of the classroom and contemporary historians of education in West Virginia could not deny its presence, especially during and after the Progressive era, the Nineteenth Amendment, and women's social liberation in the Roaring Twenties.

From 1865 to World War I, Monongalia County administrators were all male; indeed, the school board specifically reserved these positions for men. In the reports of the Monongalia County Board of Education from 1864 to 1960, only one female served as an administrator.<sup>33</sup> Because these men controlled the schools and the hiring process, they had final say in how many female teachers entered the schools and in the curriculum they taught. Male superintendents also had influence over the board that voted on teacher salary and improvement projects within the

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<sup>30</sup> The state of West Virginia began publishing its school journal in 1872 as public education became more systemic. Published monthly, it covered topics from pedagogy to grammar and also included poems, often dealing with the love of learning and teaching. It also provided administrators and local educators an avenue to voice their opinions about education. The state superintendent influenced the *Journal*, and he also wrote an article at the beginning of every issue. His articles represented the will of the people. Local teachers, no matter how remote their schools, kept abreast of issues concerning education; one major issue was the feminization of schools.

<sup>31</sup> A&M 2744, "Monongalia County Schools. Reminiscences;" Minutes of the Monongalia County Board of Education, *Monongalia County School and Local History 1864-1960*, Book One of *Monongalia County School and Local History 1864-1960* in Box 1, A&M 1375, "Schools. Monongalia County Board of Education. Bound Typescripts;" Ancestry.com. *Social Security Death Index* [database on-line], Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2011; Ancestry.com. *U.S. School Yearbooks* [database on-line], Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. Hastings began teaching in 1905, and then served as principal for several schools between 1912 and 1918, when he was elected as Monongalia County Superintendent. During the early to mid twentieth century, he served for several decades as county superintendent, compiled statistics, and wrote these histories of education. He died in 1978.

<sup>32</sup> A&M 2744, "Monongalia County Schools. Reminiscences;" Charles H. Ambler, *A History of Education in West Virginia* (Huntington, WV: Standard printing & Publishing Company, 1951); Morgan and Cork, 1-20; Thomas Condit Miller and Hu Maxwell, *West Virginia and Its People* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1913); Virgil Anson Lewis, *History of West Virginia* (Philadelphia: Hubbard Brothers, 1889). This county had a much larger population than various other counties to the south due to new industries such as glass making and mining. Few other counties kept as substantial a collection of records. While most industrial and educational activity centered in Morgantown, the surrounding districts had numerous one-room schools that served farming communities; West Virginia State Department of Education, *The History of Education in West Virginia* (Charleston, WV: Tribune Printing Company, 1907).

<sup>33</sup> Minutes of the Monongalia County Board of Education, *Monongalia County School and Local History 1864-1960*, Book One of *Monongalia County School and Local History 1864-1960*, in A&M 1375, "Schools. Monongalia County Board of Education. Bound Typescripts," 5-20. "Ami" served for less than a year in 1957.

district.<sup>34</sup> Male teachers dominated education at the basic classroom level between 1864 and roughly 1900. The last two decades of the nineteenth century, however, witnessed a watershed in classroom attendance as more women joined the teaching force. According to Hastings, “soon the feminine sex invaded the teaching ranks and finally surpassed it easily in number.”<sup>35</sup> In reality, more men than women taught in West Virginia schools at the turn of the century.<sup>36</sup> On the state level, there were 2284 female teachers compared to 3463 male teachers during the 1891-1892 school year.<sup>37</sup> As his use of the term “invaded” suggests, Hastings feared, or felt threatened by the feminizing trend in education. His opinions are perhaps best understood as a reaction to the period’s increased female activism, which challenged various patriarchal institutions, including schools.<sup>38</sup> While his statement that female teachers surpassed men in number was incorrect, his fear stemmed from the reality of increased female attendance in nineteenth-century West Virginia classrooms.

Contributors to the *Journal* occasionally commended women for their work and fought for gender equality. In the June 1888 issue, W.P. Willey argued that “West Virginia’s Wrong to Womankind” was that it did not provide higher education for women.<sup>39</sup> Looking at other innovative states he noted, “if a West Virginia girl wants more than a primary school education, she has to go out of the State to get it.” Willey equated modernity with collegiate opportunities for women and his advocacy for female higher education was radical for his time and place.<sup>40</sup> In 1885, the state legislature blocked an act that would have established coeducation at West Virginia University, despite top administrators backing the law.<sup>41</sup> Even though the act failed, the majority of professors at West Virginia University, including Willey, voted in favour of coeducation and opened West Virginia University to women in 1889.<sup>42</sup> Willey’s overt encouragement depicted a new way of thinking for the modernizing state.

The *Journal* issue containing Willey’s article also included a reprinting of Julia Ward Howe’s “Defects in the Education of American Girls,” which called for women to be educated, but strictly in the domestic sense.<sup>43</sup> It stated, “The importance of the grammar of domestic life renders it necessary for the state, the church, and the family that women shall be thoroughly instructed in its rules as to be able not only to practice but also to teach them con amore.”<sup>44</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Folder 1, A&M 1891, “Marshal County, Sand Hill District, Board of Education Notes,” West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV; Folder 1, A&M 452, “Marion County School Records,” West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV; Folder 1 and 2, A&M 2459, “Salem School District,” West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.

<sup>35</sup> Hastings, 88.

<sup>36</sup> Minutes of the Monongalia County Board of Education, 5-20; Folder 1, A&M 2744, “Monongalia County Schools. Reminiscences.”

<sup>37</sup> “West Virginia School and Agricultural Statistics.”

<sup>38</sup> Barbara J. Howe, “West Virginia Women’s Organizations, 1880s-1930s or Unsexed Termagants...Help the World Along,” *West Virginia History* 49 (1990): 81-102.

<sup>39</sup> Benj. S. Morgan, ed., *The West Virginia School Journal* 7, no. 6 (June 1888): 1.; W. P. Willey, “West Virginia’s Wrong to Womankind,” *The West Virginia School Journal* 7, no. 6 (June 1888): 6-7.

<sup>40</sup> Willey, 7.

<sup>41</sup> *The West Virginia School Journal* 4, no. 2 (February 1885): 4; Lillian J. Waugh and Judith G. Stitzel, “‘Anything But Cordial’: Coeducation and West Virginia University’s Early Women,” *West Virginia History* 49 (1990): 69-80.

<sup>42</sup> Ambler, 372.

<sup>43</sup> Julia Ward Howe, “Defects in the Education of American Girls,” *The West Virginia School Journal* 7, no. 12 (December 1888): 4. Howe (1819-1910) was a social and political activist during the nineteenth century and was most known for rewriting the words to the song “John Brown’s Body” to create the “Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

<sup>44</sup> Howe, 4.

Howe's recommendations restricted female intellect to two domains: the home and the church. According to Howe, a woman's strength and natural function was to educate her children and raise them according to Protestant morals. The ideals espoused by Howe were also exhibited in popular magazines like *Godey's Ladies Book* and *Harper's*, which told women to uphold their responsibilities as mothers first and wives second. Such publications encouraged women to learn primary education to inculcate their children, but told them to also retain a specific form of femininity, as suggested by the plethora of articles about fashion, moral literature, and general frivolities.<sup>45</sup>

Howe's article reflects what Barbara Welter has termed the "cult of true womanhood."<sup>46</sup> Welter suggests that nineteenth-century women measured themselves according to socially constructed ideals of domesticity, piety, purity, and submissiveness.<sup>47</sup> The family's moral salvation was in the hands of the mother, who needed to know church doctrine as well as primary school subjects. Nineteenth-century women's identities were defined by and founded in motherhood, so they strove for academic and domestic success when teaching their young children.<sup>48</sup> Twentieth-century historians question the universality of this modern ideology and examine the degree to which all nineteenth-century American women could live up to it. Wilma Dunaway argues that women who were not white, or elite—the majority of women living in Appalachia—could not attain this goal of "true" womanhood.<sup>49</sup> As stated above, the Lewisburg Female Institute only accepted elite white women who did not have to earn a living outside the home. According to *The History of Education in West Virginia*, the Institute was a dynamic academy, which "for fifty years [had] been engaged in training young ladies for life's work."<sup>50</sup> It is unlikely that the "life's work" referred to here was meant to indicate a profession in the public sphere. Rather, such institutions prepared women for what they considered to be women's "true" work—motherhood.

Elite white women in antebellum Appalachia were educated, but the majority of Appalachian women did not have the opportunity or means to go to school, thus rendering them as imperfect wives and mothers. Many Appalachian women helped run the family farm, but elites criticized this work as dirty and uncivilized for the ideal woman.<sup>51</sup> Thus, the experience of gender in Appalachia was not always consistent with the dominant narrative. Non-elite women seeking education in West Virginia experienced a different reality, one that often included

<sup>45</sup> Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 45-50; Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 50-60.

<sup>46</sup> Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (July 1966): 151-174. See also: Aileen S. Kraditor, *Up from the Pedestal: Selected Writings in the History of American Feminism* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1970); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1, no. 1 (October 1975): 1-29; Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Homes and Meier Publishers, 1980); Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984). These authors defined and modified "the cult of domesticity" and the theory of separate spheres that subsequent historians utilized to examine how women operated in the nineteenth-century United States.

<sup>47</sup> Welter, 161.

<sup>48</sup> Phillida Bunkle, "Sentimental Womanhood and Domestic Education, 1830-1870," *History of Education Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1974): 20.

<sup>49</sup> Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South*, 124.

<sup>50</sup> State Superintendent of Schools, 204.

<sup>51</sup> Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South*, 126.

manual labour. Despite this deep divide between experience and expectation, the majority of male administrators who controlled state discourse on education attempted to harden gender stereotypes into fixed, normative gender narratives that focused on separate spheres and domesticity.

While Howe's article in the *Journal* placed educated women in a domestic setting, another poem from the same edition reinforced the feminine, erotic qualities of educated women in hopes of subjugating them. "The Sweet Girl Graduate," did not advocate for women's education or their upward mobility, and went beyond pigeonholing women strictly as child bearers.<sup>52</sup> Rather, it eroticized the female student:

In snowy lace and satin  
 Bedecked with floral glory  
 She bows and  
 reads, in Latin,  
 The class salutatory.

A scarlet rose resembles  
 Her cheek aglow with blushes;  
 Her timid bosom trembles  
 Like singing hermit thrush's.

Her charming agitation,  
 More than any word she utters,  
 Captivates my admiration;  
 And my heart excited flutters.

Oh, fair and gentle creature,  
 Trained in language and *belles lettres*,  
 I'm very sure no teacher  
 Than I can love you better.

She has won my heart completely  
 Spite of faults in Roman grammar,  
 For she smiled so very sweetly  
 Just because she chanced to stammer.

She's the flower of the college;  
 I care not, Sir Professor,  
 What you say about her knowledge,  
 She is educated, --bless her.

Though I never saw the maiden  
 Ere to-night, nor photo of her,  
 I shall go away, heart-laden,

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<sup>52</sup> W. H. Venable, "The Sweet Girl Graduate," *The West Virginia School Journal* 7, no. 6 (June 1888): 5.

Her devoted slave and lover.

Come hither, gracious usher!  
 Carry these enraptured roses,  
 And give them to your blusher,  
 When her salutation closes.

Significantly, the poem's speaker suppresses any practical intellect the female student may have and is more enchanted by the woman's physical reaction to reading than her mental one. The readings the speaker acknowledges are refined literature with a moral agenda (and therefore "appropriate" for a female audience), and are published in Latin, the studied language of the elite. The author depicts the woman's intellect as useful only to the extent that it makes her more suitable for an elite marriage. It is likely that the poem's author also draws attention to the stammer to imply that the female graduate cannot be nearly as confident and successful in her studies as a male pupil. The author trivializes female intellect and molds his subject to the gendered expectations of patriarchal society. The inclusion of such material in collections published by school administrators is telling.

As the above excerpts from the *Journal* indicate, administrators lauded female education, but formed it to fit within patriarchal understandings of female submission. *Journal* writings that overtly castigated women were rare, but they did appear. A short article from *Common School Education* that was reprinted in *The West Virginia School Journal* in 1888, suggested that "many (especially female) teachers do not 'magnify their office,'" and claimed that such teachers were "even a little ashamed of their work."<sup>53</sup> None of the *Journal*'s other articles commented on or openly criticized female teachers, and perhaps the author of this piece wanted to point out flaws in the preparation of women for teaching positions, rather than attack female teachers per se. The other articles supported women's education and encouraged female teachers to invoke their presumed natural nurturing skills. Perhaps some female teachers were ashamed of their work because of social pressures to leave the profession and marry. Others likely found fulfillment in their teaching careers, even if it meant forgoing the prescribed roles of wife and mother.

By the turn of the twentieth century, school administrators accepted female scholars and regularly responded to contemporary nationalistic sentiments. The editors of the June 1896 issue of the *Journal* printed James N. David's article "Think," which explored gendered nationalism at a time when many Americans feared the current influx of immigrants.<sup>54</sup> David noted that many public schools started to offer military training as a way to increase national identity and pride. These schools allowed both "young men and women [to] spend an hour or two every Sunday in marching and learning the manual of arms instead of wasting the time in promenading in groups under the shade of the trees."<sup>55</sup> These schools included girls in their paramilitary training because "the 'new woman' is coming."<sup>56</sup> The concept of the New Woman arose from the first wave of feminism, which was initially spearheaded by women such as Lucretia Mott, and later by Susan B. Anthony who created the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Women of the

<sup>53</sup> Common School Education, untitled, *The West Virginia School Journal* 7, no. 6 (June 1888): 11.

<sup>54</sup> James N. David, "Think," *The West Virginia School Journal* 15, no. 6 (June 1896): 519.

<sup>55</sup> David, 519.

<sup>56</sup> David, 519.

first wave advocated for suffrage, temperance, and marital freedom.<sup>57</sup> David seemed less to support the “new,” concept of womanhood than use it matter-of-factly to describe social change. His article reflects a late nineteenth-century shift from writers who called for domestic women to serve as nurturers, to those who urged women to claim an education for their own betterment.

In addition to calling for women to employ their nurturing skills in the classroom, authors began to imply that all teachers were female, and that teaching was inherently feminine work. Thus, they sanctioned female teachers and feminized the profession. They consistently referred to teachers with the pronoun “she,” which suggests that although the number of women in classrooms did not surpass that of men, it did make a lasting impression on administrators. It made such an impression that they responded by amending the sexual division of labour. The article “In Which Rank Do You Stand?” for instance, asked teachers to place themselves in two categories—“The Good Teacher” and “The Poor Teacher.”<sup>58</sup> In each case, the teacher is assumed to be female. The good teacher, for example, teaches for a while, and “Then ‘she marries and lives happily every afterward.’”<sup>59</sup> The poor teacher, for her part, “prevails upon her relative or friend to become director, in order that she may have the same school more than one term.”<sup>60</sup> Not only does this article describe teachers as female, it also reveals the feminine audience for which the *Journal* was published.

As more women entered the teaching ranks, editors must have assumed that more women read the *Journal*. Thus, they encouraged those female readers to fit the “good teacher” paradigm. Ten years prior, as his image of “the sweet girl graduate” indicates, W.H. Venable struggled to reconcile female education with the dictates of patriarchy, but to the author of “In Which Rank Do You Stand?”, teaching children in public schools is a perfect and natural fit for intelligent, unmarried women. The author favours female leadership in the classroom, but only to the degree that it does not interfere with family life. There is a noticeable shift in this author’s depiction of female roles in education, but a continued struggle is also evident. Although women may stay in the teaching profession rather than leave to marry, in doing so they may outstay their welcome and fall into the “poor teacher” category.

Women may have attended school to become independent, but for many elite women, education was a means to an end. That end was romance, with the intent to marry and become a mother, not work outside of the home.<sup>61</sup> As the *Journal* articles discussed here indicate, women in education were prescribed roles in accordance with nineteenth-century gender expectations. Although female education was encouraged, it was still characterized differently than male education. Such characterization was grounded in the reality that many women were not only expected to, but actually did leave teaching in order to marry.<sup>62</sup> In an interview regarding her one-room school experience, Edith H. Love said, “There were many teachers, young, pretty girls and handsome men who were loved by all but we were saddened when we learned that they would not be with us the next year. They would go back to school to finish their education, take

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<sup>57</sup> Lucretia Mott (1793-1880) was an abolition and women’s rights activist who along with Susan B. Anthony (1830-1906) began the NWSA. Together they drafted the proposed women’s suffrage amendment, not passed until 1920.

<sup>58</sup> Staff writer, “In Which Rank Do You Stand?” *The West Virginia School Journal* 15, no. 6 (June 1896): 575.

<sup>59</sup> Staff writer, 575.

<sup>60</sup> Staff writer, 575.

<sup>61</sup> Barbara Miller Solomon, 16.

<sup>62</sup> Robert J. O’Brien, “Persecution and Acceptance: The Strange History of Discrimination Against Married Women Teachers in West Virginia,” *West Virginia History* 56 (1997): 56-75.

a better position or with the girls, get married.”<sup>63</sup> Love noticed that the girls never went on to higher education because they married instead. A few may have stayed single, but according to Love none in her area did. The 1896 *Journal* sheds light on an education profession strictly segregated by gender, and not by intellect or proficiency. Female teachers were caught between the fact that marriage often ended their teaching career, and the reality that staying single would not lead to career advancement since they were generally barred from administrative positions.

Regardless of the percentage of women in the profession, administrators required the same standards of male and female teachers who provided numerous opportunities for rural pupils. According to Lynn Hastings, requirements were the same, no matter the applicant’s sex. Applicants were examined by a county board and were required to answer questions on subject fields in the elementary school curriculum.<sup>64</sup> Men and women completed the same process for certification, and this procedure lent credence to the notion of gender equality within the classroom. In an attempt to demonstrate West Virginia’s progressive and expansive educational system, Hastings noted that both male and female teachers taught in free schools:

[These]...evened rural education opportunities....The sons and daughters of the prosperous farmer, the children of his farm hands, and the offspring of the common laborer, formed a school with equal opportunities for all who wished to compete for worthy school objectives. The head of the class was opened to any child who energetically and persistently strived to attain that role.<sup>65</sup>

According to Hastings, schools did not discriminate on either the basis of social status or sex.<sup>66</sup> While there were more male teachers and students in West Virginia classrooms in 1892, increasingly more women began taking advantage of opportunities for education.<sup>67</sup> For rural women, one of the only avenues toward autonomy was through schools, which became more welcoming places for them as the century progressed. As noted above, the majority of pupils at the Fort Martin School, and other schools of the same nature, came from a farming background. To Hastings, rural schools served as the vehicle through which rural boys and girls could learn the same material from qualified individuals, and use their education in their daily lives.

Beneath a veneer of progressive equality, the Monongalia County school reports reveal the history of public education to be closely tied to gender disparity. They suggest that the feminization of education stemmed from a supposed female “invasion” of the workforce, which supplanted rigorous training with feminine nurturing. To Hastings, the “successful school teacher” was unquestionably a man. In particular, a man of “local distinction,” whose neighbours

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<sup>63</sup> Edith H. Love, “A Time Out of Time,” Folder 1 “Clinton District, 1929-1982, Box 1, A&M 2744, “Monongalia County Schools. Reminiscences.”

<sup>64</sup> Lynn Hastings, introduction to Minutes of the Monongalia County Board of Education, *Monongalia County School and Local History 1864-1960*, Book One of *Monongalia County School and Local History 1864-1960*, in Box 1, A&M 1375, “Schools. Monongalia County Board of Education. Bound Typescripts,” 68.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> They did discriminate by race, however, until *Brown v. Board*. See Douglas C. Smith, “A West Virginia Dilemma: *Martin v. Board of Education*, 1896,” *West Virginia History* 40, no. 2 (Winter 1979): 158-163; W.W. Trent, “Integration,” in *Mountaineer Education: A Story of Education in West Virginia 1885-1957* (Charleston, WV: Jarrett Print. Co., 1960) <http://www.wvculture.org/history/education/trent.html>.

<sup>67</sup> “West Virginia School and Agricultural Statistics”; Thomas C. Miller, *Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Free Schools of West Virginia* (Charleston, WV: The Tribune Printing Company, 1902); Shirley C. Egan, “‘Women’s Work, Never Done’: West Virginia Farm Women, 1880s-1920s,” *West Virginia History* 49 (1990): 21-36.

held him in high esteem: "He read many books and news articles. He was able to talk about current events of the state and nation. He was a welcome visitor as a source of information. He was interested in the welfare of the community [and] was a respected leader among them."<sup>68</sup> Hastings articulated early educators as leaders of the community with a wealth of information, especially in regards to politics. Being politically savvy and a strong leader were considered masculine traits.<sup>69</sup> Women could not vote, could not hold office, and were members of a patriarchal society in which leadership positions were considered natural to men. As nineteenth-century administrators reported more women in the classroom, authors like Hastings responded by venerating male teachers in hopes of reasserting male hegemony in local classrooms.

As Hastings's various comments indicate, early twentieth-century histories of education in West Virginia share many of the same gender assumptions as nineteenth-century contributors to the *Journal*. They show support for gender equality in educational institutions, but that support is clouded by contemporary tenets of patriarchal society. The State's *History of Education in West Virginia* presents teacher salaries but typically does not distinguish between men's and women's salaries.<sup>70</sup> Teachers' salaries throughout the U.S. varied greatly according to sex, and salaries in West Virginia were no exception.<sup>71</sup> The absence of statistics in the History raises intriguing questions about how the authors wished West Virginia schools to be viewed. In addition, the two monographs detail numerous private institutions, including male academies, female seminaries, and coeducational schools that served only the elite of West Virginia. They further argued that, "ladies and gentlemen are admitted on terms of perfect equality and work together in the classes without any unpleasant results."<sup>72</sup> These school histories ameliorate any discrimination faced by women by suggesting that schools did not take gender into account. Furthermore, they characterize elite education as equal, but it is likely that men and women did not always take the same classes and did not have the same matriculation rates.<sup>73</sup>

The authors of these histories place much importance on female sexual purity. The Department of Education, for instance, mentions the occurrence of "a reasonable amount of very pleasant romances" between male and female students. They note that in spite of such romances, "the history is free from any tale of scandal. It is hoped and expected that it will always continue so."<sup>74</sup> The scandal of an unwed and pregnant student would tarnish the reputations of educational institutions. Such a scandal would have little consequence for the male involved, but for a nineteenth-century woman, whose virginity and sexual innocence was revered and considered natural, such an event would compromise her reputation. The mention of such scandal is further evidence of social tensions that emerged with the female presence in traditionally male-

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<sup>68</sup> Lynn Hastings, "'The One Room School in Monongalia County,'" in *Monongalia County School and Local History 1864-1960*, Book One of *Monongalia County School and Local History 1864-1960*, in Box 1, A&M 1375, "Schools. Monongalia County Board of Education. Bound Typescripts," 88.

<sup>69</sup> Kristin L. Hoganson, "The Manly Ideal of Politics and the Jingoist Desire for War," in *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 15-42.

<sup>70</sup> State Superintendent of Schools, 121, 125, 131, 139, 141, 153, and 275.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas C. Miller, *Biennial Report*, 11.

<sup>72</sup> State Superintendent of Schools, 250.

<sup>73</sup> Rury, 20-25; Tyack, 120; West Virginia University, *West Virginia University Bulletin* (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 1905), 22.

<sup>74</sup> State Superintendent of Schools, 250.

dominated institutions. The rhetoric of school administrators and early local historians reveals an attempt to maintain control over female bodies and the image of “proper” womanhood.

While the reports discussed here attempt to portray the classroom as egalitarian, they are limited by contemporary understandings of gender roles and obligations. Furthermore, they illustrate that gender equality, at least according to a twenty-first-century model, was impossible in the nineteenth-century classroom. West Virginia’s local historians, like its school administrators, struggled to reconcile their traditional beliefs with the reality of more female teachers and students in the public sphere. Perhaps they and their contemporaries attempted to stress gender equality in order to highlight the area’s social awareness. Their concern was likely rooted in a desire to challenge the stereotype of West Virginia as backward and uneducated, and to them, gender equality represented a progressive and successful educational system. According to Morgan and Cork, the Woodburn Female Seminary in Morgantown “was a remarkably successful school and both teachers and pupils were noted for their careful and thorough work.”<sup>75</sup> Similarly in *The History of Education in West Virginia*, the directors of the Powhatan College determined “to make the last and mightiest effort of their lives for what they believed was one of the greatest needs of the age—more real colleges for women.” Once they erected the school, they claimed that “Powhatan College has met with a success unparalleled by that of any independent Woman’s College ever opened in the Virginias.”<sup>76</sup> The reports championed the state’s flourishing schools that catered to elite women, but largely overlooked the greater number of women who attended more middling and lower class common schools. These later authors wanted to dispel misconceptions about West Virginia women, but ultimately, were limited by both the gendered and classed assumptions of their period.

It is important to recognize how late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century school administrators and historians laced their discussions on female education with gendered stereotypes, for they speak volumes about the transitional social and cultural period in which they were enmeshed. These men disagreed about, and felt torn by the degree to which “natural” female domestic prowess needed to be stressed over academic excellence. School administrators, commentators on education, and early historians all spoke highly of women’s education, but with significant reservations. Those writing in the 1880s spoke of women as nurturer-teachers and often portrayed them erotically. Less than a decade later, writers in the *Journal* stereotyped all teachers as female and described male and female students as equals, but still had a difficult time shedding traditional assumptions. Both Hasting’s school reports and early historical monographs suggested equality in classrooms, but simultaneously encouraged domestic roles for women. The discourse of administrators changed in response to fears about women in leadership positions – fears that may have shifted in focus, but were nevertheless consistent. Education in industrial West Virginia was a complex issue. Gender equality in schools symbolized modernity, but many male authors struggled to accept, understand, and adequately define that aspect of modernity. In short, the education articles and histories studied here illustrate the tenuousness of gender norms and the degree to which those in authority curtailed female activity in the public sphere in the midst of social and educational reform.

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<sup>75</sup> Morgan and Cork, 170-175.

<sup>76</sup> State Superintendent of Schools, 256.