

Mary J. Hartmann (1845-1932)

Mary J. Hartmann was born on October 13, 1845 on a farm in Franklin Township, Washington County, Indiana. She was the daughter of Jacob and Susan Hartmann. She was five years old when her family moved to a farm near Fairfield, Iowa. Her family moved once again to Galesburg, Illinois and it was there that she obtained an A.B degree from Lombard College in 1869 and an A.M. degree in 1888 (Lombard College did not survive the Depression, its last graduating class being in 1930).

In 1870 Mary taught high school at Galva, Illinois and by 1880, she was teaching high school in Marshalltown, Iowa. The next year she served as a college teacher of mathematics in Winona, Minnesota. In the fall of 1882 she accepted a position as Assistant Teacher of Mathematics at ISNU. She taught at ISNU for the next 27 years, retiring in 1909.

During her years of teaching mathematics at ISNU, Miss Hartmann became well known by students and faculty alike for her exacting standards of learning and her requirement for clear and logical thinking in her classroom. Her students came to understand what she demanded from them and those who succeeded came to her classes with their homework done. At the same time, she was highly respected and considered to be fair-minded and had a droll sense of humor. As one former student put it, she took raw material from the prairie country schools and patiently turned those students into functioning teachers who could think in terms of reality and express their thoughts clearly.

In 1874 the ISNU Board had ruled that since the majority of students were women, and since women had shown their ability to compete with men teachers, at least one-third of the regular professorships should be given to women. This never happened and years later, only one woman had reached the level of professor. Mary Hartmann never did. Nevertheless, another former student recalled that Miss Hartmann enjoyed a rivalry with “new” Professor Felmley by trying to stump him and his students with difficult mathematical problems. The former student recalled that Prof. Felmley admitted to him that “She can work harder problems than I can,” which the student felt was quite some admission from such an “ultra-virile mind as Mr. Felmley’s.” Still another former student recalled that Miss Hartman was known for her keen business sense and that a banker had once said that she was the “best business man on the faculty at Normal.”

Aside from mathematics, Miss Hartmann was also an active member of the Sapphonian Literary Society. From an ISNU history: “In 1879, a group of hopeful young men, enamored of Roman History and political thought, organized a club which they called the Ciceronian. Its meetings were given over to debate, oratory, parliamentary procedures, and a study of issues, local, state, and national. A model Roman senate took the place of the regular program every fourth meeting night. In October 1887, a number of girls decided to crash the Ciceronian Society, and learn about it for themselves. The men were expecting the impending visit and made no effort to oust their visitors. Although the girls thought it a joke and brought along crochet to ease the expected boredom, they instead became so interested they decided to start their own society. The new group was known as the Sapphonian, after the Tenth Muse, Sappho, the Greek lyric poetess. The Sapphonians undertook a study of art, literature, travel, and music. They initiated an exchange of programs with the Ciceronians, which within four years, had developed into a clash of talents and wits known as the Greek Muses versus the Roman Senators.” Here at last was

an arena in which the young women were competing with young men on a level playing field.

She was also one of the directors of the Men's Glee Club which was organized at ISNU in January of 1899. A group of men decided that their school should have a glee club after the University of Illinois Men's Glee Club presented a concert in the community in the fall of 1898. On March 17, 1899 the newly formed Men's Glee Club of ISNU presented their first concert.

After her retirement from teaching in 1909, Miss Hartmann remained an active member of the community through her involvement in various organizations: the Unitarian Church, the Bloomington-Normal Woman's Club, the Normal Improvement League, and the political Florence Fifer Bohrer Club (which became the McLean County League of Women Voters). She was also active in Red Cross work during World War I and was a lifelong member. And of course she maintained contact with ISNU by attending numerous functions there.

As with many highly educated women of her day, Mary never married. Thus she was able to devote her life to her career, her activities, and her many friends.

After being struck by an automobile in 1928, Mary's health started to fail and she died on December 16, 1932. She was cremated in Chicago and her ashes were scattered over her mother's grave a few days later in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery, Bloomington, Illinois.

Edited by: Candace Summers, 2007