

Elizabeth Jane Mitchell Christian (1842-1923)

Elizabeth Jane Mitchell, known as Lizzie, was born on July 16, 1842, in Stout's Grove, near Danvers, in McLean County, Illinois. She was one of seven children of Ebenezer and Rachel Mitchell. When Lizzie was 12, her family moved to Bloomington so she and her siblings could get a better education. This is when Lizzie first learned how important education was.

Lizzie was in the first graduating class of Illinois State Normal University (ISNU) in 1860, and she would later be the last person from that class to pass away. She studied many subjects, such as English, math, geography, music, science, history, bookkeeping, and teaching methods. She was also a member of a literary group called the Wroughtonian Society. At her graduation ceremony, Lizzie read her thesis, "The Worship of the Past," which was later published in the *Daily Pantagraph* for everyone to read.

After graduating, Lizzie taught school in Bloomington for two years and then in Decatur for two and a half years. In Decatur, her former classmate, Enoch Gastman, was the principal and probably hired her to teach. Another classmate, Frances Peterson, also worked there after marrying Mr. Gastman, so Lizzie was comfortable in the school.

On November 21, 1865, Lizzie married Matthew Logan Christian, a store owner from Springfield. They had two children, Eben and Annie, both of whom grew up to be adults. Later, Matthew tried farming but had to stop because he became ill and disabled. He passed away on June 2, 1900, at the age of 73. For many years, Lizzie and her family lived in a house at 509 East Front Street, the same home her parents built when she was young. This house is still standing today.

Throughout her life, Lizzie was a passionate reader and kept in touch with her many friends and the community. She stayed involved with ISNU, attending alumni events, reunions, and celebrations. She always wanted to make sure students got the best education possible, and she kept up with new teaching ideas.

In the last few years of her life, Lizzie couldn't attend events at ISNU, but she always knew when they were happening. Her daughter May would go to these events and represent Lizzie, greeting her classmates when they gathered.

Lizzie was a lifelong supporter of her alma mater, ISNU. She passed away on November 22, 1923, at the age of 81, and was buried next to her husband in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington, Illinois.