

Sarah Raymond Fitzwilliam was born on October 11, 1842, in Kendall County, Illinois. She is remembered as the first woman to become a city school **superintendent** in the United States. Her life was marked by her independence, **determination**, and strong values. Many people see her as a **pioneering** woman ahead of her time.

Sarah was the only girl among five children born to Jonathan and Catherine Raymond. Her parents had moved from Massachusetts to Illinois in 1834. Their journey was tough, involving **stagecoaches** and ox-drawn wagons. When they settled in Kendall County, they faced many **hardships**, including failed crops. The family survived by hunting deer, turkeys, and wild hogs.

The Raymond family valued education. Jonathan Raymond learned **mechanics** and became the sheriff of Kendall County in 1856. Sarah's brothers also went on to have successful careers. The family was deeply committed to justice and were strong **abolitionists**. They helped **enslaved** people escape through the **Underground Railroad**, assisting around 200 people. This early exposure to the fight for justice would later influence Sarah's career in education.

Sarah started her education in small, rural schools. Her first school was a log cabin that also served as a church. Later, she attended a more formal **academy** in Lisbon, Illinois, where she was taught by teachers from the East Coast. Many of these teachers were women who moved west for work and stayed active in their careers, which was uncommon for women at that time. This experience likely shaped Sarah's views on women's roles in society.

When Sarah's father became sheriff, the family moved to Oswego, Illinois, where Sarah attended high school. At just 16 years old, she started teaching. By 1862, Sarah enrolled at Illinois State Normal University (ISNU), which trained teachers. ISNU was a **coeducational** school, treating men and women equally. Sarah's time there gave her valuable experience in teaching and school administration. She graduated in 1866 and returned to Kendall County to teach for a couple of years before moving back to Bloomington, Illinois.

In 1868, Sarah began teaching in the Bloomington Public Schools. Her first position was as a second-grade teacher at School No. 5, known for having **rowdy** students. Sarah quickly improved the school's **reputation** and was promoted to principal after just one year.

Sarah supported **integrating** Black students into the city's schools. At a time when many people in Bloomington did not want Black children attending school with white children, Sarah believed all students deserved equal education. She admitted Black students to her school before Illinois officially outlawed school segregation in 1874. Her early efforts were groundbreaking and showed her **commitment** to fairness.

By 1874, Sarah made history by becoming the superintendent of the Bloomington Public Schools. At that time, it was rare for a woman to hold such a high position. Despite facing **opposition** from those who believed the job should be held by a man, Sarah proved herself **capable**. She worked hard to improve the school system by solving **financial** problems, setting new **curriculum** standards, and making education accessible for all children.

When school board members Georgina Trotter and Jacob Jacoby's terms were up for reelection, the city **encouraged** them to run again. This was good news for Sarah because both Georgina Trotter and Jacob Jacoby were her allies and with their reelection, Sarah would likely retain her position. She was close personal friends with Trotter in particular. Georgina Trotter was initially hesitant but agreed to run again after receiving strong support from local leaders. A resident **urged** voters to re-elect Trotter and Jacoby, noting that any change could lead to the removal of Superintendent Sarah Raymond. Both Trotter and Jacoby were re-elected, allowing Sarah Raymond to remain as superintendent.

During Sarah Raymond's **tenure**, the schools saw **significant** improvements. The number of **suspensions** dropped from 353 in the 1872-73 school year to just 13 in the 1882-83 school year. Attendance also improved, with only 1,262 cases of **tardiness** among 3,447 students in the 1881-82 school year. Sarah's work gained national attention, and in 1881, she was offered a higher-paying job in Seattle. Despite the **tempting** offer, Sarah chose to stay in Bloomington.

As the city's population grew, the number of teachers increased from about 50 to 70 by 1882. To **accommodate** more students, five new school buildings were constructed between 1877 and 1888. Despite these expansions, the school district remained debt-free by 1881, thanks in part to Sarah's friend Georgina Trotter's financial management.

However, not everything was smooth. When the school board discussed teacher salaries for the 1885-86 school year, some members, like Francis Funk, **opposed** raises for female teachers, arguing their pay should not increase even though the cost of living was low. Georgina Trotter fought for fair raises, but despite her efforts, only the high school principal received a salary increase.

Sarah Raymond also faced **criticism** for hiring more female teachers. Some believed she was hiring too many women. In the 1892 election, which allowed women to vote for school board positions, candidates opposing Sarah's approach won. As a result, Sarah decided to **resign** in July 1892 and move to Boston to be with her family.

After leaving Bloomington, Sarah married Capt. Francis J. Fitzwilliam on June 23, 1896. The couple traveled extensively and lived in Chicago. Sarah continued to be active in cultural and social organizations, including the **Daughters of the American Revolution**. Sadly, Capt. Fitzwilliam died in 1901, just five years after their marriage.

Sarah and her close friend Georgina Trotter worked together on community projects, including the development of the Withers Public Library. They raised **significant** funds to build the library, which opened in 1887. The library served the community for 89 years before a new library opened in 1977. In 1911, a fountain was built next to the library in honor of Georgina's family.

Sarah continued her dedication to education and community service throughout her life. She traveled the world, donated many items to the Chicago Art Institute, and supported various causes. Sarah passed away on January 31, 1918, in Chicago at the age of 76. Her **legacy** lives on through the Sarah Raymond School in Bloomington, which is named in her honor, reflecting her lasting impact on education and her **commitment** to improving the lives of others.