Philosophies of Women’s Education in the United States

When the British colonists came to America, they brought traditions from the old country, including their views on women’s roles and their education. Colonial women lived under British law and social conventions such as “coverture,” which included a male-dominated family where women were subservient to their husbands. Colonists assumed subordination of women to be a natural way of life endorsed by tradition and religion. Although women found their lives circumscribed by this restrictive culture, from the time of their arrival in the New World their circumstances contained seeds of societal change.

The unstable economic status of the American colonies required all members of a family to work in order to ensure its survival. The prevailing opinion was that the home, woman’s sphere, included not only raising a “quiver full” of children to populate the vast wilderness but also fulfilling numerous other domestic duties—a requirement if the colonists were to endure the hardships of their new environment. Colonial women earned respect for their strength and ability to participate in the rigorous new lifestyle.

Most women were minimally educated. Teaching her children became an integral part of a mother’s responsibility in preparation for their future stations in life. The home served as a training ground where daughters were taught necessary domestic skills for homemaking. Based on these conditions and requirements, colonists argued that women needed little book knowledge, since they would not be engaged in work outside the home. Though colonists perceived women as being less intelligent than
men, New England laws required parents to teach their daughters to read. In 1647 the Massachusetts Bay Colony and in 1650 its sister colony, Connecticut, passed laws commanding towns of fifty families or more to provide elementary schools and towns of one hundred families to establish Latin grammar schools—both restricted to educating young men. Young women were rarely permitted to attend elementary schools until after the Revolutionary War.  

Religious leaders deemed Bible reading an important means of attaining piety and considered it essential for both women and men. Thus the mandates of ministers and Yankee commerce hastened the growth of literacy. “Dame schools” for boys and girls, part of the British culture that colonists brought with them, became necessary, because some parents were either too busy or were themselves illiterate and unable to teach their children. Many of these private schools were conducted in the teacher’s home; for example, an older woman might take responsibility for teaching children in her kitchen. This meager education consisted of reading, sometimes writing, rarely arithmetic, reciting the Lord’s Prayer and portions of the Westminster Catechism, and proper etiquette. Though girls could attend dame schools, their main purpose was to offer basic education to young boys in preparation for the town schools.

Postcolonial Progression

Around the turn of the eighteenth century, occupations considered suitable for women broadened to include managing dry goods shops, keeping taverns, making furniture, and printing and publishing. The wave of revivals known as the Great Awakening, which began to sweep the colonies in the 1730s and 1740s through the inspiration of English minister George Whitefield, challenged “religious authority and church hierarchy” and thus fostered a new equality among men and women. During much of the eighteenth century, women, accustomed to a submissive lifestyle, accounted for the majority of New England churchgoers. As men became progressively involved in business, trade, and politics, their interest in religion began to wane. This enabled women to use religion as a means of leadership and to obtain more independence than they had previously enjoyed. Shifts from men’s to women’s responsibilities in the home and the church, along with the growth of the population and the economy, aided the development of women’s education in the upper levels of colonial society.
Enlightenment Philosophers’ Views

Those favoring women's education found support in the writings of Enlightenment philosophers John Locke, René Descartes, and François Poullain de la Barre. Locke envisioned the child’s mind as a tabula rasa, or blank slate, upon which to write the beliefs and goals of society, thus shaping a child’s character. Locke's philosophy did not distinguish between male and female; rather, it disputed the current view of women's intellectual inferiority. French mathematician Descartes supported women's reasoning ability and advocated a proper education that would erase doubts as to the mental competence of the sexes. After studying human anatomy, ex-Jesuit scientist Poullain de la Barre declared that the brain had no sex and that the only difference between the male and female anatomy was their reproductive organs.

The battle over women's intellectual ability, however, raged. Those who upheld women's mental inferiority gained validation from such philosophers as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who argued that the reproductive organs controlled every part of the human being. Thus, he alleged that along with every other part of the body, the brain was also sexed. Rousseau’s supporters expanded the concept of sexual differences and contended that equality for women existed solely through achievements appropriate for their sex.

Standards for refinement, upheld by elite society, continued to supersede the anticipation of progress in women’s learning during the Enlightenment. Wealthy Americans agreed that their daughters should have the same opportunity for education as their sons only if they proceeded to become ladies in the European sense as their brothers could become gentlemen. Apprehension ultimately persisted concerning the effect education might have on young women, making them discontented to live as submissive wives.

Mid- to Late Eighteenth Century

By the 1740s schools known as “adventure” or “venture” schools, operating as “select” schools, became popular. They received this title simply because their proprietors saw education as a business venture, offering instruction for daughters of elite families. Another type of school, known as the “private day” or “boarding” school, was also established, mainly for girls of the upper class. Influenced by the philosophy of women's education in England, these schools used instruction methods comparable to those of notable British boarding schools, emphasizing the feminine accomplishments of French,
music, dancing, drawing, and needlework. From 1750 to 1860 these day and boarding schools, which became known as female seminaries and academies, flourished as the primary type of women's educational institution. Although a few schools established in the early to mid-eighteenth century, such as the Ursuline Convent for women in New Orleans (1727) or the Moravian Young Ladies’ Seminary in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania (1742), provided a solid academic education, many of the seminaries offered only a smattering of basic instruction along with showy accomplishments.17

Reactions to women's education varied. Affluent parents became less concerned about their daughters' receiving an academic education, preferring training that would prepare them for marriage. Men who had begun to acquire some wealth and to imitate the lifestyle of upper-class Europeans wanted their daughters to be taught such subjects as the social graces, music, and French. Consequently, many parents welcomed the proliferation of seminaries and academies that specialized in the ornamental arts.18 These institutions became known as “finishing” or “fashionable” schools. Some parents, however, recognized the need for their daughters to be educated in order to be self-supporting should they remain single. With a surplus of women in some communities, it was likely that not all of them would marry.19

Given the thriving American economy at the end of the eighteenth century, men could be selective in their choice of wives. They found a woman particularly attractive if she could bring a large dowry to the marriage and sufficient skills to complement her husband in society. Limited employment choices made it difficult for single women to be self-supporting. Thus, those from the upper class found it essential to attract a well-to-do husband. In order to do so, women of means devoted their attention to becoming ladies of fashion like their counterparts in England. Once this trend began with the elite, it was difficult to reverse.20 A common opinion among conservative minds held that “a woman needed to know only 'chemistry enough to keep the pot boiling, and geography enough to know the location of the different rooms in her house.'”21 Despite prominent writers who defended women's intellectual abilities, opposing views of women's education remained strong.

Common schools for both boys and girls opened in 1770. In larger cities, school sessions lasted six months, while those in the smaller towns ran for two to four months. These schools provided a minimal education: spelling, reading, writing, and “rarely even the first rules of arithmetic.”22 As late as 1783, girls in the common schools still had limited prospects for education: “Females over ten years of age, in populous towns, were sometimes, though rarely, placed in the common schools, and taught to write a good hand,
compose a little, cipher, and know something of history." This appeared to represent significant progress in the development of women's education. In many instances, though, women had to wait until the revolutionary period to acquire instruction in anything beyond the basic academic subjects and the "fine arts." 

**The American Revolution**

With the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, women's responsibilities and domains increased, and women became accepted in both the private and the public spheres. They performed the duties of men on farms and in shops and served in the capacities of patriots or loyalists, "disguised as soldiers, spies, and camp followers." Nevertheless, some male patriots had no intention of advancing women's rights or their education. Along with less educated Americans, they feared the results if a woman should receive an academic education and argued that if women learned to write, they might forge their husbands' signatures. Rather than increase their intellectual capabilities, men wanted their daughters to become noteworthy housewives who upheld the colonial traditions of "piety, modesty, frugality, and fertility."

Girls in some locations were able to attend school from 5:00 to 7:00 A.M. or 6:00 to 8:00 P.M. In some areas schools were also open to them for a few weeks in the summer, when their male counterparts worked on the farms or at dockyards. Considering the earlier restrictions on women's education, this was a major step forward and would have been momentous had more teachers been available. Frequently, however, young women tried to learn what they could without any help. Such was the impoverished state of education for women at the time of the revolution; 90 percent of the white men in New England could write, but fewer than half of the white women were able to do so.

As a result of the American Revolution, the concept of equality was embedded in the Constitution. The proposition that "all men are created equal" became the political promise of society. Eventually women questioned if all men are created equal, why women should be excluded. Not only did the Declaration of Independence fail to provide women with the same egalitarianism as their male counterparts, but also further divisions arose in women's education—class began to establish the boundaries. While girls from the upper class received training in the ornamental arts, those from lower economic strata continued to consider themselves fortunate if they learned to read, write, and do basic arithmetic. Women from the upper class no longer
received admiration and respect for their strength and domestic capabilities as did women of earlier generations; rather, these duties were relegated to the middle and lower classes. 

In addition to class issues, the quality of institutions that the wealthy patronized needs to be understood. After the revolution, many seminaries aspired to train young women to be accomplished so that they could embellish the home and appear respectable in the society of their husbands. In order to seem attractive, some schools offered as many as forty subjects. Women’s advocates rose up in opposition to the vast number of courses offered with little depth. Inadequate supplies of materials, overworked teachers, and few endowments contributed to the dubious permanence of most seminaries.

**Postrevolutionary Struggles and Advancements in Women’s Education**

While the revolution brought political independence and the birth of a new nation, it simultaneously created the need for an educated populace. Formal education was no longer a luxury for the elite. An unprecedented way of life that resulted from American industrialization—a progression that radically changed the young nation’s financial system and generated new levels of status, manufacturing, and ways of living—demanded a literate citizenry.

Despite the embryonic stage of women’s education in the postrevolutionary period, women reformers continued to face strong objections from those who were prejudiced against learned women. Popular periodicals, such as the *Evening Fire-side; or, Literary Miscellany*, published articles that expressed widely held opinions: “A woman who is conscious of possessing, more intellectual power than is requisite in superintending the pantry, and in adjusting the ceremonials of a feast, and who believes she is conforming to the will of the giver, in improving the gift, is by the wits of the other sex denominated a learned lady. She is represented as disgustingly slovenly in her person, indecent in her habits, imperious to her husband, and negligent of her children.” Much of society condemned instruction as an unpardonable sin rather than a benefit to society. Many feared education would encourage a false sense of refinement and bolster a desire to remain single.

Advocates fought an intense battle for women’s education. Arguments for and against this heated issue during the Early Republic (ca. 1780–1830) proved advantageous to women, bringing their significance to light while further shaping their lives. Benjamin Rush spoke out strongly on the need to rectify the appalling deficiencies of female education. His address “Thoughts upon Female Education,” delivered at the 1787 graduation exercises of the
Philadelphia Academy, became the most popular American paper quoted with regard to female education before 1790. Rush commented, “Let the ladies of a country be educated properly, and they will not only make and administer its laws, but form its manners and character.” He realized the significance of a woman’s influence in the home and in society and recognized the necessity of instruction that would enable her to rightfully exert her authority.

As Rush contended, life in America was different from that in the old country and therefore required a change in educational philosophy: “It is high time to awake from this servility—to study our own character—to examine the age of our country—and to adopt manners in every thing, that shall be accommodated to our state of society and to the forms of our government.”

The fashionable women of England were not considered appropriate models for American women. At best they were “ornamental” and at worst, degrading. American women had a greater responsibility in maintaining household affairs than ladies of the same status in England. As the family purchased additional property and its status increased, women needed proper training as stewards and managers of their husbands’ lands. Given that men in America were created equal, women needed to possess the knowledge to educate their sons for future professions in government.

In a concluding prayer, Rush pleads for the increase of seminaries that offered an education for women beyond the superficial studies: “O MOST HIGH! Without whose aid, nothing can prosper,—we beseech thee to regard with favour every Seminary of sound Learning! May they answer fully the purposes of their appointment; and let the number of them be increased! From them, may knowledge flow in living streams! In them, let multitudes be receiving continually impressions, which will secure the usefulness of each individual, and lay a firm foundation for private and public Virtue!”

Women could no longer be relegated to receiving the same level of education as their mothers. The lack of institutions offering solid intellectual instruction demanded urgent attention.

The views of Abigail Adams, wife of President John Adams (1797–1801), paralleled those of Benjamin Rush. Adams spoke freely to her husband about the need to reform women’s education: “If we mean to have Heroes, Statesmen, and Philosophers, we should have learned women.” Further, she insisted, “It is very certain that a well-informed woman, conscious of her nature and dignity[,] is more capable of performing the relative duties of life, and of engaging and retaining the affections of a man of understanding, than one whose intellectual endowments rise not above the common level.” Adams could identify with many women given her responsibility of managing the
affairs of the home, which included buying and selling property and supervising the farmhands in her husband’s absence. She reminded her husband that according to the Constitution, all men, implying all human beings, were born equal. Political egalitarianism would not eliminate the need to educate women for their responsibilities in the home.\textsuperscript{44}

Judith Sargent Murray (1751–1820) was as forceful, if not more so, as Abigail Adams. Writing “On the Equality of the Sexes,” Murray maintained that women were men’s intellectual equals and contended it was a woman’s right to develop her mind. She declared that properly educated women would not desire such nonsense as trifles, gossip, and fashions, but rather would be better wives and more content in their domestic sphere than those with meager schooling.\textsuperscript{45} Murray claimed that the disparity between the intellectual developments of the sexes could be traced to the difference in education. If a woman was a rational creature, she asked, should she “be so degraded as to be allowed no ideas other than those which are suggested by the mechanics of a pudding, or the sewing of the seams of a garment?”\textsuperscript{46} To be denied an education was to undermine her worth.

In Great Britain the writings of Mary Astell (1666–1731) and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) also served as powerful arguments for the cause of women’s education. Astell became the “first English woman of letters.”\textsuperscript{47} Her first three books were addressed to women. Astell believed in the intellectual equality of men and women and staunchly proclaimed that women deserved to be educated: “For, since GOD has given Women as well as Men intelligent Souls, why should they be forbidden to improve them? Since he has not denied us the faculty of Thinking, why should we not (at least in gratitude to him) employ our Thoughts on himself their noblest Object, and not unworthily bestow them on Trifles and Gaities and secular Affairs?”\textsuperscript{48} Women not only deserved but were obliged to develop their mental capabilities.

The assumption that education would unsex women and lead them to forsake their duties dovetailed with the idea that a woman could never concurrently be a scholar and a housekeeper. Wollstonecraft’s \textit{Vindication of the Rights of Woman} (London, 1792) was the most highly regarded source concerning the worth of women in her generation and what they could become if given the opportunity. While it cannot be confirmed that her book immediately influenced American thought, it was reprinted in Philadelphia shortly after its original publication and seemingly agreed with those who supported women’s intellectual accomplishments. Wollstonecraft reasoned that educated women, as opposed to those taught to depend on frivolity and ignorance, would make better wives and mothers. Further, she argued that women could achieve financial security apart from marriage.\textsuperscript{49}
The ideal of “Republican Motherhood” served as a further rationale for women’s education. Exemplary Republican women displayed competence, compassion, and reliability. The ideals of this woman and the lady of leisure were not found in the same person. Women's advocates recognized such women as Cornelia (mother of the Gracchi), Queen Elizabeth I of England, Empress Catherine the Great of Russia, and nineteenth-century British progressive thinkers like Hannah Moore and Mary Wollstonecraft as role models. They urged women of the younger generation to follow in their footsteps, though the formation of these icons in America would become “a major educational challenge.”

Besides such established institutions as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, many grammar schools, academies, seminaries, and smaller colleges opened their doors to men long before the American Revolution, while American mothers still taught their daughters. Few schools founded before the late eighteenth century offered women a solid academic education. The Moravian Young Ladies’ Seminary in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, was an exception. The Philadelphia Academy, opened in 1787, was the first female academy established by a charter of incorporation in the United States, possibly in the world. Sarah Pierce’s Litchfield Female Academy, founded in Connecticut in 1792, and Susanna Rowson’s academy in Boston, established in 1797, can be regarded as two of the most remarkable precursors of prominent nineteenth-century female seminaries.

Educational opportunities for women increased in the years immediately following the revolution, though the number of schools for young women did not equal those for their male counterparts. The success of these late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century schools for women attests to the momentous development in the history of education in the Early Republic. By providing a quality higher education without endangering women’s proper role in American society, these schools helped to lay the groundwork for the seminary movement (1830–1860), the organization of coeducational public high schools, and the opportunity for women to attend college.

Women’s Advocates

After the Revolutionary War, several men joined Benjamin Rush in promoting women’s education. Chief supporters included DeWitt Clinton, Charles Burroughs, Thomas Gallaudet, Joseph Emerson, George B. Emerson, Horace Mann, Henry Barnard, William Russell, and William C. Woodbridge. During the early nineteenth century, Clinton was active in New York’s political affairs and promoted women’s education. In 1819 he publicly deplored the current
condition of women’s learning: “Beyond initiatory instruction, the education of the female sex is utterly excluded from the contemplation of our laws.”

Charles Burroughs, rector of St. John’s Church in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, gave an address concerning female education on October 26, 1827, vehemently arguing against the superficial training that women received at some seminaries and academies. He spoke of the purpose of women’s education and assured listeners that the objective was not to make them philosophers or scientific lecturers: “When we speak of the extent of female education . . . we speak only in relation to its practical utility, and to its importance, as connected with the virtues and happiness of females, and with the general interests of society.”

This address appeared in the January 1828 issue of the *American Journal of Education*, edited from 1826 to 1831 by William Russell. William C. Woodbridge, editor of *American Annals of Education* (1831–1839), also conveyed his support by welcoming articles discussing advanced education for women—an education that would prepare women for maternal and domestic responsibilities.

Around the same time, educational reformer Thomas Gallaudet, best known for his work with the deaf, vigorously attacked the type of rote learning that was predominant in women’s seminaries and instead encouraged a utilitarian training providing practical knowledge that would be useful in students’ daily lives. He declared that a mother’s influence was inferior only to God’s and contended it affected her family’s destiny. At his seminary’s dedication in 1822, Rev. Joseph Emerson stressed the importance of women’s education for their sons’ sakes. George B. Emerson, associated with the American Institute of Instruction and principal of Boston’s first high school (the English Classical School, for boys), stressed the need for women to be educated in order to perform their duties. In 1823 Emerson relinquished his position as principal to found a private secondary school for girls.

Beyond motherhood, exponents of women’s education emphasized the significance of women’s influence over men both inside and outside the home. Burroughs argued that education would enable women to generate a “mass of moral energy,” which in turn would help push society toward reform. Given their strong support of women’s education, Horace Mann and Henry Barnard were recognized as pioneers in the field. Though they did not defend women’s rights of suffrage and equal opportunity, they maintained that women’s calling was to teach, insisting they understood the young mind better than men and thus could guide it more effectively. Mann and Barnard agreed that if only one gender would be educated, it should be women. At the least, women deserved an education equal to that given to men.
While a few men such as those discussed above promoted women's education, the main support came from women who fought to ensure the establishment of female institutions and to raise their standards. New England produced the first group of women advocates: Sarah Pierce, Emma Willard, Mary Lyon, and Almira Phelps. It appears that each accepted the constraints society placed on women but at the same time contended that women needed an education to properly fulfill their roles. While these advocates recognized that women of all classes should be educated, they focused on the upper class, except for Mary Lyon, who concentrated on the middle class.

The early nineteenth century remained a troubled time for women's education. When Emma Willard introduced her Plan for Improving Female Education in 1818, the disparity between the possibilities of education for men and women persisted. Those who strove to advance educational opportunities for women faced continuing skepticism. By and large the intellectual world of the new nation relentlessly criticized female learning, equating it with aggressiveness and masculinity.

The New Nineteenth-Century Woman

The American middle class that emerged between the revolution and the 1830s created a new type of family life: husbands worked outside the home and provided for the family while wives remained in the home, managing domestic affairs. The middle-class family became a “refuge from the commercial ethos, an antidote to the materialism and competition of the outside world.” As the middle-class home achieved its own status, the woman who ran it became important in her own right.

While her position as overseer of the home gave a woman her own identity, she was reluctant to relinquish her independence. Along with the transition to married life, a woman faced many challenges: she automatically incurred domestic responsibilities; possibly encountered a geographic move that meant separation from family and breaking emotional ties; assumed the responsibility of child rearing, ensuring her children would not stray from the middle-class standing of their parents; and, most important, assumed the role of spiritual counselor to her children. Spacious homes needed additional attention, possibly requiring one or two servants, and necessitated supervisory responsibilities.

In 1831 renowned French politician and historian Alexis de Tocqueville observed the American lifestyle: “In no country has such constant care been taken as in America to trace two clearly distinct lines of action for the two
sexes, and to make them keep pace with the other.” He noted further, “American women never manage the outward concerns of the family, or conduct a business, or take a part in political life; nor are they, on the other hand, ever compelled to perform the rough labor of the fields, or to make any of those laborious exertions, which demand the exertion of physical strength. No families are so poor as to form an exception to this rule.”

Countless women, however, including those from underprivileged families, destitute widows, mill girls in the North and slaves in the South, negate Tocqueville’s assertions. The ideology of separate classes was not as clearly defined as Tocqueville described; rather, the lines of demarcation varied according to the demands placed on women.

The newly achieved status of the middle-class family and women’s innovative position became important issues in printed form, such as Lydia Maria Child’s *The Frugal Housewife* (1829). Changes in women’s status led to greater expectations, requiring advancement in their education. The new image of middle- or upper-class American women, known as “the cult of true womanhood,” became the nineteenth-century model. Such women represented stability and possessed piety, integrity, passivity, and domesticity. Society’s standards for the new woman were much like religious customs. The term “woman’s sphere” came to embody physical traits with specific connotations requiring no explanation. Altering this ideology, meticulously constructed over the past two hundred years, could prove hazardous.

Since it was inappropriate for a woman to exercise her influence in public, she exerted her authority over her children through a close identity with her husband. By 1868 acclaimed nineteenth-century editor Sarah J. Hale stressed that “the home, not the public arena, was woman’s battleground; her weapons were education, conversation, delicacy, femininity, and the power to persuade; and her role was that of God’s moral agent on Earth.” The impact of the domestic circle proved to be of inestimable value rather than a restriction. Belief in a woman’s guidance gave her a rare privilege: that of “having one’s cake and eating it too.” She could remain in her sphere and still receive praise from society.

**Rationales and Reforms in Women’s Education**

Women’s increased activity in the church allowed for an enlarged, pervasive influence. Various new female societies sprang up as a result of the revival movement known as the Second Great Awakening, which occurred during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Women became more involved in religious and charitable organizations such as Sunday schools,
schools for the poor and for black children, and missionary efforts at home and abroad.

New responsibilities for women helped to erase fears concerning the conflict between learning and domestic duties. Middle- and upper-class society valued the home too highly to allow it to be trusted to the uneducated. Rather than encourage demarcation, advocates intended education to unite women and help to dissolve lines of class. In addition, advocates saw women’s roles as all-encompassing. Emma Willard claimed that women were well suited to teach (and could be hired at lower salaries than men).

A letter from Mary Lyon to her mother, dated May 12, 1834, supports the argument for women’s education:

The course of instruction adopted [at Ipswich], and the course which I have endeavored to adopt when I have instructed among my native hills, I believe is eminently suited to make good mothers as well as teachers. I have had the pleasure of seeing many, who have enjoyed these privileges, occupying the place of mothers. I have noticed with peculiar interest the cultivated and good common sense, the correct reasoning, the industry and perseverance, the patience, meekness, and gentleness of many of them. I have felt, that if all our common farmers, men of plain good common sense, could go through the country and witness these mothers in their own families, and compare them with others in similar circumstances, they would no longer consider the money expended on these mothers as thrown away.

. . . . O how immensely important is this work of preparing the daughters of the land to be good mothers! If they are prepared for this situation, they will have the most important preparation which they can have for any other; they can soon and easily become good teachers, and they will become, at all events, good members of society. The false delicacy, which some young ladies indulge, will vanish away as they see most of the companions of their childhood and youth occupying the solemn and responsible situation of mothers. It will no longer appear like a subject for which no care should be taken in the training of daughters.

Such an education as Lyon proposed would replace a false sense of security with a firm foundation that prepared women for their most important responsibility: the training of their children.

Conclusion

The philosophy rooted in “Republican Motherhood” and the integral advances in women’s education broke new ground. The seeds of liberation sown in the colonists’ environment in the New World finally began to
germinate. Although arguments against women’s education were strong, they did not thwart its development; instead, they aided its advancement and brought women’s importance to light. In addition, the political revolution and the Industrial Revolution facilitated the progress of women’s education. From the confidence displayed in the American Revolution concerning the virtue of its citizens, society demonstrated its belief that Americans would continue to uphold the values set forth in the Constitution. To that end, female academies and seminaries were defended on the basis that they served a new purpose.

Between 1830 and 1860 a new type of secondary school known as the female seminary or academy sprang up from Maine to Georgia and as far west as frontier towns. This enormous expansion created opportunities for women that they had not previously experienced and also foreshadowed those of the later nineteenth century. Sarah Pierce, as well as other founders of early female academies, appropriated the theory of “Republican Motherhood,” giving domesticity the status of a vocation and motherhood that of a profession. Some schools appeared before 1800, such as the Ursuline Convent, the Moravian Young Ladies’ Seminary, and Sarah Pierce’s Litchfield Female Academy, but the greatest increase in the number of these schools occurred during the antebellum period. The founding of female academies and seminaries that stressed a quality education testifies that training young women solely in the ornamental arts was no longer meeting their needs. Rather, an education that embellished the mind and prepared women for a separate destiny became essential. Along with a strong academic education, women’s advocates valued the importance of music instruction, affording it the status of an intellectual subject. An examination of the philosophy of music instruction in the following chapter will reveal its value as part of a young woman’s higher education.