

## Topic Page: [Willard, Emma, 1787-1870](#)

Summary Article: **Willard, Emma Hart (1787-1870)**

From *Encyclopedia of Educational Reform and Dissent*

Born in Berlin, Connecticut, Emma Hart Willard (1787-1870) was one of the pioneer advocates for female education. Tutored by her father and educated at a local seminary, she began her teaching career in 1805 by opening a dame school, and in 1807 she became preceptress of a female school in Middlebury, Vermont. Upon marrying John Willard in 1809, she left teaching, but returned when her family fell into economic hardship. Willard was determined to provide women a higher education denied to her, one comparable to that of men, although she remarked that its purpose would uniquely serve female character and duties. Her role as an educational leader is exemplified by her contributions to common school reform; she provided respectability in the struggle for equal education for females in arguing for equal funding, in developing the Troy Female Academy, and in her development of textbooks and experiential methods.

In 1819, Willard wrote *Plan for the Improvement of Female Education* to persuade New York legislators to give financial support to a female seminary, the counterpart to men's colleges. Female seminaries provided opportunities for a liberal arts education across the North, rooted in the desire to foster female intellectual capacity. She appealed for state funding so that female seminaries would not be dependent on students for income and contended that the state is compelled to ensure an accountable and appropriate education for women. She defended women's right to intellectual and curricular equality with men, although she did not promote careers outside the home. Her rationale for educational equality was based on the idea of "republican motherhood": Future mothers would require character and intelligence to raise virtuous citizens and ensure social stability. Although this ideology identified gender as the primary determinant of women's lives, it is nonetheless viewed as an early expression of feminism. Willard and others were able to justify higher education for women without threatening traditional gender roles. Her Plan found supporters in John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, as well as many others from around the world.

Although the New York legislature rejected Willard's Plan, in 1821 the city of Troy, New York, offered Willard a subsidy to open the Troy Female Academy. Within 10 years it became one of the most profitable female institutions, accepting affluent students from across the country and graduating multitudes of future teachers well versed in mathematics, science, history, logic, and domestic and finishing school studies such as art and music. The Troy Female Academy thus allowed Willard to actualize her Plan and cultivate the intellectual, moral, and physical nature of her students. Rooted in her dissatisfaction with the learning materials available, she wrote a number of geography and history textbooks, focusing on innovative experimental methods that became standards at the time. Widowed in 1825, Willard remarried in 1838. After divorcing in 1843, she retired to Troy, spending her days traveling and writing about her views on common schools and female education until her death in 1870.

### **See also**

Academies, Curriculum Controversies, Experiential Learning, Women in Educational Leadership

### **Further Readings**

- Beadie, N. Emma Willard's idea put to the test: The consequences of state support of female

education in New York, 1819-1867. *History of Education Quarterly* 33 : 543-562., 1993.

- Goodsell, W. (Ed.). (1931). *Pioneers in women's education in the United States*. New York: AMS Press.
- Woody, T. (1929). *A history of women's education in the United States (Vol. 1)*. New York: Octagon Books.

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**APA**

Chicago

Harvard

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Martinez, S. L. M., & Martinez. (2010). Willard, Emma Hart (1787-1870). In T. C. Hunt, J. C. Carper, & T. J. Lasley (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of educational reform and dissent*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Retrieved from [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/willard\\_emma\\_1787\\_1870](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/willard_emma_1787_1870)

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## Chicago

Martinez, Sylvia L. M., and Martinez. "Willard, Emma Hart (1787-1870)." In *Encyclopedia of Educational Reform and Dissent*, edited by Thomas C. Hunt, James C. Carper, and Thomas J. Lasley, II. Sage Publications, 2010. [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/willard\\_emma\\_1787\\_1870](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/willard_emma_1787_1870)

## Harvard

Martinez, S.L.M. and Martinez. (2010). Willard, Emma Hart (1787-1870). In T.C. Hunt, J.C. Carper & T.J. Lasley (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of educational reform and dissent*. [Online]. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. Available from: [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/willard\\_emma\\_1787\\_1870](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/willard_emma_1787_1870) [Accessed 22 October 2019].

## MLA

Martinez, Sylvia L. M., and Martinez. "Willard, Emma Hart (1787-1870)." *Encyclopedia of Educational Reform and Dissent*, edited by Thomas C. Hunt, et al., Sage Publications, 1st edition, 2010. *Credo Reference*, [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/willard\\_emma\\_1787\\_1870](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/willard_emma_1787_1870). Accessed 22 Oct. 2019.