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Beginning a new series . . .

They named it Mary Lyon Hall

by June Welch

WHEN mother (or maybe mother's mother) arrived on the Iowa State campus she lived in Linden, Larchwood, Maple, Elm, Oak or Birch Hall. Workmen, when laying out the grounds and erecting the buildings, named them for the trees planted around the halls. However, on official blueprints the halls were designated as East, West, South and the Lodges.

Later a housing committee was appointed to rename the buildings in honor of prominent women. Larchwood, or West Hall, was changed to Mary Lyon Hall.

Mary Lyon is remembered today as the founder of Mount Holyoke College, the first school of higher education for women in the United States. Her own early education was of a haphazard sort. She attended, at irregular intervals, the district schools in Buckland and Ashfield, Massachusetts, then Sanderson and Amherst academies and the female seminary at Byfield.

At the age of 17, Mary Lyon began her career as a teacher in a district school. For her efforts, she was paid 75 cents a week and was "boarded 'round" by the families of her students, spending 5 days for each scholar enrolled in the school.

After devoting about 10 years to teaching in girls' schools and being principal of Ipswich seminary, Miss Lyon turned her thoughts and efforts to broader educational activities. She set as her goal the establishment of a permanent seminary for girls, endowed by the public, which would compare with the colleges for boys. There were several conflicting ideas to be considered, among them where to locate the school and how to finance it.

Mary Lyon took charge of the first money-raising campaign. With customary enthusiasm, she explained the project to prospective donors. She told the men she approached in a very good-natured but earnest way that she had come to cut off one corner of their estates and give it to their wives to invest in the form of a seminary for young ladies. She held before them the object dear to her heart, the bringing of a liberal education within the means of the daughters of the common people.

There were several conflicting ideas on where the future school should be located. At one time Mary Lyon had even considered the western portion of our country as a prospective location. However, her native New England seemed to hold the most advantages. Insisting that the final decision should not be her own preference, a committee eventually agreed on South Hadley, Massachusetts, as the future site. The school would be located at the foot of Mount Holyoke, in the center of New England.

IN INTRODUCING the institution to the public, a Greek name, Pangynaskean, was invented by a friend of Miss Lyon. Pan meant all; gyn, women; and askean, the physical, intellectual and moral attributes of women which would be cultivated. This rather ridiculous name did a spectacular job in attracting public attention. Newspaper editors pounced on it with witty sarcasm but the school benefited by the free advertising. The sensible suggestion that the school be named Mount Holyoke to indicate its locality was later adopted.

After much planning and persistent effort, the seminary was opened on November 8, 1837. A novel feature of the new school was its domestic system. This was a family idea in which the young ladies did all of their own housework. For one hour every day each girl washed clothes, scrubbed floors or took her turn at baking bread. This plan greatly cut down expenses and gave the feeling of one big happy family.

Besides her interests in the domestic system and the financial problems of the school, Miss Lyon taught courses in science as ably as any "professor of metaphysics." For 12 years until her death in 1849, Mary Lyon served as principal for Mount Holyoke College.

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