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ABSTRACT

Emma Willard had an important impact on teaching social studies and on the education of women in general in the 19th century through her efforts in training teachers and through her writing. Willard's writing included both textbooks and books on educational philosophy. She began teaching at age 17 in a village school. After further education, she began to campaign for a female seminary to train teachers. In 1821, the first such school in the United States opened as the Troy Female Seminary. Her educational philosophy stressed the importance of adjusting the material covered to the age of the child and developing reasoning rather than rote memorization. Her textbooks on geography and history were widely used and reflected the prejudices of her day. She was a crucial figure in extending education to women; however, she did not consider herself a feminist. (IS)

EMMA WILLARD--PIONEER IN SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION

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Emma Willard - Pioneer in Social Studies Education

Introduction

Over the past ten years a reassessment of the foundations of the social studies has become an integral part of the research in the field of social studies education. Most of this research has been confined to 20th century work in the field with a few notable exceptions (Keels 1982, Lybarger 1981, Barth and Shermis 1980). Even these works, however, have concentrated on the latter years of the 19th century. In this paper the focus is on the early 1800's; not just presocial studies, but pre-professional associations or interests in social sciences.

In looking at this period researchers are at a considerable loss for both reliable and accessible documents regarding curricular policy and processes in social studies (or that which we today call social studies). If one regards curriculum policy as a direction for the curriculum fostered by some governmental or quasi-governmental agency, then there was essentially no state or national curricular policy directions at the time that Emma willard first appeared on the educational scene around 1807. Since the common school movement had also not become firmly rooted at that time (Katz, 1968), there was also little local curricular thrust to speak of.

What one is left with regarding policy is policy as practice or policy as process. In that vein then, textbook usage and course content in academies or town schools would constitute both policy and practice. In addition, practices and "suggestions" for teaching as described by the few educational journals of the time might also be seen as influencing policy to some degree.

Thus, an impact on curricular policy in history or geography might be argued by someone who authored textbooks, who wrote on teaching, who trained teachers or who taught students of potential influence in education. Emma Hart Willard did all of these things and her influence on education in the nineteenth century was

significant. The remainder of this paper will examine two areas - Emma Willard and her educational activities; and Emma Willard's impact on schooling as both policy and process, particularly in the area of history and geography.

The Case of Emma Willard

Emma Hart was born in Berlin, Connecticut on February 23, 1787, one of seventeen children of Samuel Hart and his two wives. Mrs. Willard's youngest and closest sister, Mrs. Alma Phelps, also became a teacher and textbook writer, authoring well known texts in botany and chemistry and becoming principal of Patapsco (MD) Female Institute. (Fowler, 128 ff). Emma Willard received her education at the town school, then spent two years studying with Dr. Miner (a medical doctor from Yale) at his school. At seventeen she began teaching in Kensington at a village school. After further study at the schools of Mrs. Royce and the Misses Patten of Hartford, she again taught, this time at Berlin (CT), Westfield (CT) and Middlebury (CT).

While teaching at Middlebury in 1814 she formulated a design for a female seminary and began to write an address to th_____Legislature, but didn't fill in the blank until 1818 when she had five students from Waterford, New York and she wrote of her plan to Governor DeWitt Clinton (Woody, 305-306). This idea must be seen in perspective. As Goodsell notes, (12)

> When Emma Willard came upon the scene about 1807, most states in New England were offering free elementary education to girls in town schools. . . . The day of the free public high school had not yet dawned; and college education of women was unheard of.

Governor Clinton responded favorably to her proposal and she moved to Waterford in 1818 where she anticipated addressing the legislature and receiving support for the establishment and maintenance of a female seminary. Despite Clinton's support the legislature did not consent to hear her until 1819 when she

addressed them with her subsequently famous "Plan for Improving Female Education," subtitled "an address to the public, particularly members of the legislature of New York." Willard's object in this address was (1)

> to convince the public that a reform with respect to female education is necessary; it can't be done by individual exertion, but needs the Legislature; and to persuade that body to endow a seminary for females.
>
> Women at college may seem absurd, but it is not.

Willard's address was divided into four sections. The first addressed defects in the present mode of female education and their causes. The second considered the principles by which education should be regulated. The third section outlined a plan for a female seminary and the final section presented the benefits which society would receive from such seminaries.(4)

In addressing the defects of education Willard observed (13)

> Education should seek to bring its subjects to the perfection of their moral intellectual, and physical nature, in order that they may be of the greatest possible use to themselves and others; or, to use a different expression, that they may be the means of the greatest possible happiness of which they are capable, both as to what they enjoy and what they communicate. . . .
>
> Studies and employments should therefore be selected from one or both of the following considerations; either because they are peculiarly fitted to improve the faculties, or because they are such as the pupil will most probably have occasion to practice in future life.

The above considerations, Willard observed in the education of males, but not in the education of females.

Another defect noted was that the first object in educating females was to please males. Not that Willard was against females being attractive, however.

"Neither would I be understood to mean that our sex should not seek to make themselves agreeable to the other."(17)

In summing up the benefits of female education, two final points deserve mention. First Willard may have indirectly reinforced the low wages of teachers through her plea for the entry of more women into that field. (35)

> There are many females of ability to whom the business of instructing children is highly acceptable, and who would devote all their faculties to their occupation. They would have no higher pecuniary object to engage their attention, and their reputation as instructors they would consider as important.

A second point spoke to the widespread belief that females were illogical and scatterbrained. (42)

> Females, by having their understandings cultivated, their reasoning powers developed and strengthened, may be expected to act more from the dictates of reason and less from those of fashion and caprice.

Regarding Willard's "Plan," Woody commented that, "The greatest contribution made to our ideals of Woman's education by Mrs. Emma Willard is undoubtedly to be found in her clear presentation of the obligation resting upon the State to provide effectively for such education"(277).

According to Goodsell, the "Plan" was widely noted in a very favorable light, (24)

> The clarity and persuasive logic of her appeal, its sanity and freedom from bitterness won for it a favorable hearing from many liberal minded men. President Monroe and Thomas Jefferson are said to have approved it and John Adams. . . wrote Mrs. Willard a cordial letter of commendation.

Despite the empassioned, but well reasoned plan and the Governor's support, the New York State Legislature failed to provide the funding for a female seminary

in Waterford, New York. Willard then received an offer to move her school to Troy, which she did, and where the Common Council of Troy raised $4000 for the venture. In 1821 the school opened as the Troy Female Seminary. "Troy Female Seminary, established by Emma Willard, has been said, with some exaggeration, to mark the beginning of higher education for women in the United States." (Woody, 344), Goodsell in commenting on this noted, (15-16)

> The enthusiastic judgment of Thomas Wentworth Higginson that, in publishing her "Plan for Improving Female Education" in 1819 and in establishing at Waterford a school under (partial) patronage of the state., Emma Willard "laid the foundation upon which every women's college or coeducational college may be said to rest "is probably somewhat of an overstatement. . .
>
> This woman was in every truth a crusader in a great cause, to whom American women owe in measurable degree their rich educational opportunities.

Willard's Teaching and Textbook Writing

As early as 1814 in Middlebury (CT), Willard had been innovative in her teaching, particularly of history and geography. Fowler quoted Willard's own descriptions of one of her innovations at Middlebury (Fowler 135)

> Here I began a series of improvements in geography - separately and first teaching what could be learned from maps - then treating the various subjects of population, extent, length of rivers etc., by comparing country with country, river with river, and city with city, - making out with the assistance of my pupils those tales which afterwards approved in Woodbridge and Willard's Geographies. Here also began improvements in educational history.

Willard goes on to recount (Fowler, 149-150)

> Geography then, I dissected and remodeled, according to those laws of mind concerned in acquiring and retaining knowledge.

These included 1) map acquisition knowledge, 2) topics and views of population altitude of mountains, length of rivers, and 3) general or philosophic views of government, religion, commerce manufacturers and productions. This was by her admission (Fowler, 149-ff) an original plan for teaching geography.

> The method is now fully established; and has been for the past twenty-five years. . .
>
> These changes in educational Geography (sic) led to some corresponding improvements in History. I devised the plan of series of maps answering to the epochs into which that subject should be divided. This method was first described in 1822, in my Ancient Geography; and directions and names of places there are given to enable the pupil to make himself a set of maps corresponding to the principal epochs of ancient history.

Willard's educational thought, at least as far as teaching geography and history are concerned, was quite reflective of the progressivist thought nearly one hundred years in the future. Goodsell notes that (83-84)

> she advocates teaching geography to beginners by methods adapted to their age and understanding. (Goodsell's emphasis). . .
>
> She declares herself decisions that the child should understand as he goes rather than that he should understand as he goes. . . and suggests that she was familiar with the revolutionary methods of the Swiss educational reformer Pestalozzi.

Willard's map and geography organization sound surprisingly like Dewey and Hanna's expanding communities. She suggested that the young child should begin his study of maps by drawing a map of his own town. After he had begun to understand

a map in relation to a locality, he could go on to study the map of the United States. Last, not first, as was apparently customary at that time, he could study the map of the world.

In Geography for Beginners Willard made use of a conversational method reminiscent of Rugg's social studies materials of the 1920's and 30's. "Mother" and "Frank" carry on the conversation in each chapter - a method which she believed more suitable to young pupils than the usual formal presentation of a subject.

Goodsell points out another novel approach of Willard which we today have taken for granted. "Believing that maps of ancient times should faithfully reproduce the geography of that time (Goodsell's emphasis), she sought to give pupils historically accurate maps to dispel their difficulty in distinguishing different periods of time on maps including centuries of history." (Goodsell, 85)

Willard saw history and geography teaching, then, as going "hand in hand."

> In regard to geography, as connected with history, it is no less important than the association of the event with the visible representation of its place on the map should be strongly made. Hence, the pupils should always be required to trace on their maps the routes of navigators, armies, etc., and to show the locations of cities and battle fields (Willard, 1845, xvii)

As Roorbach noted, (86)

> She taught so that her students could grasp both the continuity of the subject and the cross-section of events. No good teacher she said would require pupils to learn all dates.

Willard combined ethnographic (her term) and chronological forms of teaching history (i.e. from country to country or through the centuries). First she constructed a chart called the Temple of Time (Figure _). The base of the pillars indicate the centuries, along the pillars are the outstanding characters of those

centuries. The pillars recede from the nineteenth century back to the creation. The floor of the temple is marked off by contemporary notions, which recede to the pillar, bearing the century of their origin. The ceiling is so divided, as to show the contemporaneous persons throughout the centuries in the fields of religion literature, exploration, war, etc.

Willard's Historic Guide to the Temple of Time described it thusly. (19-20).

> The names on the pillars are of those sovereigns by whom the age or time in which they flourished is chiefly distinguished. On the roof are the names of some of the most celebrated persons of the age to which they belonged. . .
>
> Along the right margin of floorwork are some of the most important battles of which history treats. . . . on the left corresponding margin are placed the epochs of Willards Universal History (E.g. Ancient, Middle, Modern).

The Content and Impact of Willard's Work in History and Geography

Willard in 1828 wrote her History of the United States. . . exhibited in connextion (sic) with its Chronology and Progressive Geography, by Means of a Series of Maps. The first of which shows the country as inhabited by various tribes of Indians at the time of its discovery, and the remainder, its state at different subsequent Epochas, so arranged, as to associate the principal events of the history and their dates with the places in which they occurred; arranged on the plan of teaching history in the Troy Female Seminary. This text was not only popular in the academies, seminaries and high schools of this county before the Civil War, but was printed in Spanish for Cuba, California, Mexico and South America. An 1854 edition announced that Daniel Welester used it on his desk in the United States Senate as a reference

book (Roorbach, pp. 118-119).

Willard's geography with Woodbridge preceded the history volumes, but it was these latter which were most widely read and used. These included Universal History in Perspective, published in editions from 1844 to 1882, Willard's Historic Guide and the History of the United States or Republic of America with editions from 1828-1873. The success of the geography text initially brought Mrs. Wilard "a substantial financial return," while also increasing her prestige as an educator. (Lutz, 87)

Willard's geographic concerns are obvious in her works (as was noted previously). The History of the United States is interspersed with maps of the period in question. Map Number I (Willard, 1845, 12) shows "Wanderings and Locations of the Aborigines," i.e Native American Indians. Only the area east of the Mississippi River is depicted since that was the U.S. at that time. In discussing the Native Americans Willard provides tribal names as well as "regional nomenclatures." So Lenni Lenape and Mengue are given along with Delaware and Iroquois. There is relatively extensive Native American Indian history with accurate geographic placements.

Willard was not subtle in her prejudices which sing out from her school texts. She was quite enamored of the Puritans and their strenaths (50-65) and was certainly of the belief that European whites were superior as a mater of biology and through God's plan. When discussing William Penn and other "noble whites" the Native Americans were made to sound totally enthralled.

Willard's discussion of foreign affairs was totally jingoistic. She blithely condones the annexation of Texas because of the rumor of a British takeover of the area. She claims that many Mexicans wanted the U.S. to receive more land following the Mexican-American War (The War of Northern Aggression), but the United States government said, "enough" (Willard, 1855).

Elson reiterates this criticism of Willard in discussing Willard's treatment of the Irish (Elson, 127).

> The nly specific reference to the Irish in discussing immigration in general is in Willard's popular history: she observed that foreign immigration has diminished because of disorders incident to slavery in the United States, and because Ireland had become more prospherous. She concludes: "As about three-quarters of II crimes committed in the country have been by foreigners, we hope our state-prisons may here after, have fewer inmates" (quoting Abridged History...1868 edition).

Willards' Universal History was world history from the creation to 1843. Willard's mixture of peculiar training and religious belief also reflected her values (and, for the most part, those of the day). Willard dates her work from creation and devotes 137 pages to the period before Christ with exact dates for the birth of Moses (1571 B.C.), his death (1452 B.C.), the destruction of Sodom (1897 B.C.) and the great flood (approximately 3-4000 B.C.). The great geologist, Curvier, says that the flood could not have been much farther back than five or six thousand years (Willard, 1855, 35). Also factually dated and discussed are the crucifiction and resurrection of Christ. As if this weren't enough, Willard then derides the "ridiculous theories (of history) of those who reject the Scriptures" (1855, 34).

Willard made her prejudices even clearer in a letter sent to Senator Thomas H. Benton, January 7, 1850, and quoted by John Lord (1873, 230).

> I feel uneasy about the Mormons getting possession of such a central and important part of the country...(there is) a real danger that may accrue from allowing that people to organize a State with their ...liar institutions; which, from what I have been able to learn ...oncerning them, are far more dangerous than slavery...
>
> We were born a Protestant Christian Nation... If we tolerate others, that is enough. We should not allow them to form governments

> or exercise political power on any other basis... Mormons should be held up to this rule; and is doing this, we shall teach the Catholics a lesson.

Nonetheless these beliefs and practices were most likely the norm for textbooks as the time since they reflected the dominant view of the populace. Woody noted that Willard (347):

> prepared numerous important textbooks which, judging from their excellent character and wide use, must have been influential factors in improving instruction in academics and seminaries throughout the Eastern half of the U.S.

Willard's books were divided into sections with questions related to each section. Questions were usually of lower order - knowledge, comprehension, application - but some higher order questions occasionally appear. Willard was not particulary enamored of this use of questions. As she herself noted, (1849, 41):

> As a teacher I never used another's questions, but always my own; and it was with reluctance that I complied with the solicitations of my publishers and the requirements of many teachers, to add questions to my school books...

Willard's history structures have been touched upon previously. In the Historic Guide to the Temple of Time, Willard also included biographical sketches of great figures in world history (Columbus, Ferdinand and Isabella, Charles V, Martin Luther, Napoleon, et al.) and slightly more lengthy sketches of "principal leaders of the western continent" (John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Simon Bolivar, Andrew Jackson, George Washington).

Willard went on to offer further advice to teachers. "The simple rule for the instructor to give his pupils is - Read your lesson with attention, and consider the subject matter in order to understand it as indicated by your author...Possess your subject thoroughly" (Willard, 1855, 42).

The impact of the Temple of Time was quite widespread and led to a number of honors. Lutz observed (1929, 228):

> ...at the World's Fair in London in 1851, Mrs. Willard was awarded a gold medal for this original plan of teaching history...
>
> She was indefatigable in giving demonstrations of teaching history with the "Temple of Time." She taught every class in history at the Seminary to illustrate the advantages of the new method, and spent four weeks in Philadelphia introducing it into the school conducted by her niece, Helen Phelps.

This teaching of a new, "radical" method as a form of teacher training is reminiscent of the practice Harold Rugg used with his Social Science pamphlets nearly 100 years later. And, like Rugg, Willard's success brought jealousy and controversy.

Marcius Willson, also the author of textbooks on American history authored a report submitted to the Historical Committee of the New Jersey Society of Teachers and Friends of Education. The report was subtitled, A Critical Review of American Common School Histories, but it was less a review than an attack on a number of popular history textbooks, most notably Willard's. The report, published by Willson's textbook publisher (Willson, 1847) took Willard to task for what Willson saw as significant errors of fact and style in her Abridged History...

Lutz noted that (229),

> She was made very unhappy and indignant about this time (1847) by attacks on her histories by Marcius Willson, who also was the author of textbooks on history. He claimed that his book should be used by schools, as previous histories, including Ms. Willard's, were filled with errors....The result was a

> succession of controversial pamphlets...(in which) Ms. Willard forcibly defended her reputation as a historian and showed that Ms. Willson's accusations were groundless.

Willard's Appeal (1947) focused on Willson's "self-servingness," his inaccuracies and his plagarism of her materials. Unlike today when an overly litigious society either deters such attacks or drives the parties into the courts, Willard and Willson "slugged it out" in print. Mrs. Willard first noted that Willson's report was not one (a report) at all, but existed only to point out defects in order to sell his own books.

She disputed his errors asserting that all of his stylistic "corrections" were wrong and that the dates in dispute were correct (or had been corrected in subsequent editions of the volume. She then presented many text parallels between her volume, and Willson's that reinforced her claim of his having plagerized her work.

In the appendix to the Appeal... Willard included testimonial letters of support for the book from the Principal of the Academical Department of The University of Pennsylvania, the Principal of the Female Seminary of Philadelphia, the Principal of the Academy in Philadelphia and other school people in Mt. Joy (PA), New York City and Suffolk County (NY). Also included in the appendix were press reviews from the Boston Traveler, New York American, Cincinnati Gazette, and the Albany Evening Journal with universal praise for Willard's Abridged History.....

Willson reiterated his prior charges in another tract and Willard replied in her Answer...(1847). There she directly refuted Willson's charges point by point and went on to explicate what she deemed Willson's bigger errors. Mrs. Willard then "called up her reinforcements", quoting well known people who found her style and substance correct. A letter from the Marquis de Lafayette, who Willard had entertained at her school in Connecticut when he had visited the U.S. and who she

visited in France, endorsed her version of the history of the Revolutionary War. Daniel Webster's letter (previously noted) to Mrs. Willard claimed her book to be "correct in facts and dates" (Willard, 1847b). Harrison Otis Gray praised its account of the Hartford Convention as the only impartial one he had found in a school textbook. Henry Clay found the synopsis of a great speech of his "perfect" and a New York Supreme Court Justice found it "in conformity with the first great law of historic composition--TRUTH." (sic) (Lord, 315-316).

Willard's Contributions to education are clear. She was one of the most instrumental educators in the higher education of women, in teacher training (at Troy which Goodsell (33) called a prioneer Normal School), in the Common School movement in her later years (Bernard, 1840) in in-service education (Lutz, 214) and, of course, textbook writing in both history and geography. Willard's text writing also made her a text critic and when working as a supervisor in Kensington (CT) in 1840 noted (Barnard, 1840):

> I have collected and examined the school books used in the Kensington Schools. The amount of fiction put into the hands of the children in their daily lessons strikes me with surprise and regret.... Some of these books, too, contain low and vulgar language. Who would send a child among clowns to learn manners?

Willard also tried to focus on the thinking process and the shaping of a good citizen. She "strove to get away from pure memory work, to encourage reasoning and experimentation, and to make education applicable to life (Lutz, 109). "In several of the seminaries there developed some practical phases of self-government, responsibility being placed on students by such leaders as Mrs. Willard, Miss Beecher and Mary Lyon"[1] (Woody, 434).

Willard's effect was far reaching because of her textbooks and the wide usage and because of the quantity and quality of young women trained at the Troy Female Seminary[2]. These women, many of whom became teachers with a real impact on further generations, as well as prominent women of society continued to enhance Willard's reputation long after her death in 1870. It is only fitting that Willard is rediscovered in an era when women are beginning to be recognized for their achievements as professionals rather than as women in professional jobs.

[1]It should be noted that Emma Willard was not for women's suffrage; in fact she spoke out against it.

[2]These included the daughters of the Governors of Vermont, Michigan, Ohio and Georgia; three nieces of Washingtin Irving and the niece of Mary Wollstonecraft.

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