

[Barker, Louisa Maria]

A NOTABLE WOMAN EDUCATOR

Miss Louisa Maria Barker, Founder of Houghton and Cottage
Seminaries, and Former Principal of the White Seminary

To the Editor of the Courier:

The passing of Houghton Seminary has caused a revival of interest in those who were connected with its long period of usefulness, especially Louisa Maria Barker, its builder. A brief sketch of her life may not be amiss, nearly fifty years after her death.

Her father, Levi Barker, a soldier of the Revolution, born in Connecticut, was one of the first settlers in that part of the town of Paris which was afterwards the town of Marshall. As he was one of the young men that trailed the Indians who stole the "fine fat steer" (the story of which is found in the early annals of the town) he must have been here as early as 1787. At any rate, his oldest child, Col. Lester Barker, was the first white boy in the Brothertown Tract (1791). Miss Barker's mother was Lydia Benton, daughter of Barnabas and Martha (Griswold) Benton of Harwinton, Conn. Levi Barker removed from the town of Marshall to Sodom (now Franklin Springs) where he kept an inn which was built of logs. Later he erected a frame building on the same site, the main part of which stands and is still used as a tavern. The upper floor was in one room, with a big fire place at each end, in which could be burned logs four feet long. This room was used for balls, Sunday school and preaching services, general training dinners, and gatherings of all sorts.

In this room Miss Barker was born March 15, 1808. She was the eighth child in the family. Her early education was obtained from the district school and probably the Clinton Grammar School. Most of it, however, came from her extensive reading of the best in literature. At the early age of 13 she began her career of teacher. Tradition says that the first school over which she presided was on Utica street, about a mile from the village of Clinton. It also says that even then she walked about engaged in deep thought, apparently planning for the future.

The next we know of her, she was assistant teacher in the Clinton Liberal Institute [a Universalist establishment], when the Female Department was located on Utica street. Later she was preceptress from 1839 to the time when she went to New York City to be principal of the Female Department of the Winchester School, corner of Grand and Clinton streets.

About 1845 she leased Whittemore Hall in West Cambridge, now Arlington, Mass., where she conducted a boarding and day school until she returned to Clinton to be principal of the female department of the Clinton Liberal Institute. The new building, which was afterwards called the White

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Seminary, was from her plans and was just then completed, sometime about 1848-49.

In the history of the town of Kirkland by Rev. A. D. Gridley is this tribute to her: "It is due to Miss Barker to state that this was the beginning of a career as instructor in Clinton which lasted 30 years, excepting a short period spent in New York and at Whittemore Hall, Mass. She was successful as a teacher and as an example to young ladies, and her pupils in large numbers are now exerting a happy influence in society as the result of her excellent instructions. Clinton fails to appreciate fully its indebtedness to her efforts in building up and beautifying the place. She collected about \$2000 of the fund for erecting the present Ladies' Institute (C.L.I.). She built the house now occupied by Mr. Peter Fake (Prof. P. L. Wight now lives in it.) After years of experience she felt that she could not fully realize her idea of a true school while it was under the control of a board of trustees [of the Clinton Liberal Institute], and so she planned and built the Home Cottage for a new seminary." That enterprise proved too much for her means and her failing energies and she sold it to Dr. J. C. Gallup, who renamed it Houghton Seminary in 1861. After this she built a smaller school house, calling it Cottage Seminary.

Her associate in this enterprise was Miss Anna Chipman. For a short time while Cottage Seminary was being built, Miss Barker and Miss Chipman occupied the old Hastings home (now occupied by the Hayes National Bank) for a school.

In person Miss Barker was short, thick set, with blue eyes and light brown hair. She had a habit when thinking deeply of walking about with her hands clasped behind her back. She had a keen sense of humor and she did not hesitate to laugh heartily when any of the funny happenings that are incident to the school room occurred. Her mind was a storehouse of the best in literature and she read with a feeling and expression that brought out the beauty and thought of the subject to the utmost.

After her death, which occurred September 3rd, 1864, her pupils erected a monument to her memory with this inscription: "Her grateful pupils, more fully recognizing the value of her friendly influence in each succeeding year, erect this monument. (1865?)."

Miss Clara Barton of Red Cross fame came to Clinton and lectured for the monument fund. The Civil War was just over and she told many of her thrilling experiences. Later Miss Barton, who was a pupil in the Clinton Liberal Institute in 1851, wrote: "Among the cherished memories of a life that holds some recollections very dear, none are more tenderly reverted to than quiet, classic Clinton. I see the faces that always greeted me with quiet smiles and hear the voices full of gentle, scholarly wisdom. The memory of Miss Louisa M. Barker (blessed be her name) has been an

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inspiration to me. With humble gratitude would I lay my wreath of immortals on her honored grave."

Perhaps the most appreciative tribute to Miss Barker came from the pen of Rev. A. D. Mayo: "We have met few women in whom our liberal Christianity has ripened into a nobler style of character than in Miss Barker. Outwardly a person of great dignity of bearing and decided independence of action, accustomed to a good share of very strong thinking on all subjects, fond of her own well-considered theories of instruction, she was one in whom strength was an adornment of womanhood. But no woman of the most feminine type had deeper, truer and more tenacious affections. Somewhat slow to attract her friends at first[,] she held them with an attachment that bordered on idolatry. She was always surrounded by a company of teachers and pupils whose reverence was only equaled by their love. Her mind was stored with the best of modern literature; her vigorous understanding was always at work to present knowledge in forcible and original methods, while her fine taste and absorbing love of beauty attracted all to the charms of a student's life. She was no mean writer of prose, and many of her thoughtful and graceful essays deserve preservation. Her religious faith was an ever prevailing principle of her life."

Miss Barker was a member of the Universalist Church so far as a person of her original and forceful type of mind can subscribe to any church creed. Her life was throughout an example of noble Christian womanhood.

It may not be out of place in this brief sketch of this remarkable woman to note that she was one of the original stockholders of the Franklin Iron Works.

MARGARET L. SANFORD

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