

NORTHWESTERN FEMALE COLLEGE, RECORDS OF THE, 1855-1976

Series 36/2

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History

In 1855 William P. Jones, Jr., and his brother, J. Wesley Jones, both Methodist ministers, founded the Northwestern Female College (Evanston, IL) with the stated goal of offering to “Young Ladies of the Northwest” a “thorough Collegiate Education *near home*, and amid such rural seclusion as will secure every possible guaranty [*sic*] for health, morals, and refinement.” The college, established with the Jones brothers’ personal fortunes (including funds acquired in the California gold rush), opened in fall of 1855 to an enrollment of 84. Its trustees included J. F. Willard, father of temperance advocate and suffrage leader Frances E. Willard. Its supporters included respected local educators Philo Judson of Northwestern University and Rev. John Dempster, President of the Garrett Biblical Institute.

Dedicated in January 1856, the Female College building (located between Chicago and Sherman Avenues, and Lake and Greenwood Streets) burned to the ground in the following winter. However, the College resumed classes in February 1857 in temporary quarters at the Buckeye Hotel on Ridge Ave. When the Illinois General Assembly granted the Female College its charter in 1857, the College was able to procure enough credit to rebuild its facilities at the original site.

Among the Female College’s early students were members of prominent Evanston families, including the Judsons, Pratts, Fosters, Moodys, Morses, and Bannisters; as well as Frances and Mary Willard, who graduated respectively in 1859 and 1860. Apart from an interlude (1862-1868), during which Lizzie Mace McFarland and Lucius H. Bugbee served as acting presidents, William P. Jones presided over the Female College from 1855 until its merger with the newly founded Evanston College for Ladies in 1871. Throughout its short history the Female College operated without an endowment, surviving mainly on tuitions.

The Female College offered college preparatory courses both to women (day and boarding students) and young men (day students only); as well as collegiate coursework for women only. The College’s “practical, thorough, and extensive” program of instruction included courses in classical literature, natural sciences, grammar, arithmetic, history, French, German, and eventually Spanish and Italian, along with “ornamental branches” such as music and drawing. In 1856 the College offered degrees of Laureate of Literature, Laureate of Arts, and the “honorary titles” of Mistress of Science and Mistress of Arts. By 1860 it had dropped the literature degree and added the degree of Laureate of Science. (The substitution of French courses for courses in Latin comprised the Science program’s main distinction.) By 1870 young ladies also could choose an “elective” program that excluded classical language and literature, leading to an alternative “Elective Degree.”

Aiming to safeguard the “health, morals, and refinement” of the young women, College administrators carefully regulated female boarding students’ conduct, social activities, and exercise. In 1855, for example, no female student could receive a male visitor who did not first present a letter of introduction to the College President; thereafter she could converse with the man in the parlor on a Saturday, but the interview could last no longer than 30 minutes. In

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addition, the College forbade boarding students from leaving the grounds after 7:00 pm; missing church services on Sunday; running on the stairs; and talking during study hours. A 30-minute walk each day was mandatory. Alumnae later recalled that these strict rules inspired Northwestern University men to term the Female College the “Jones Nunnery.”

The women, however, did participate in polite sports (such as croquet and skating) and formed a “Minerva” literary society. In 1858 Female College students published Evanston’s first printed newspaper, *The Casket and Budget*.

After the Civil War, support for coeducation grew among prominent Evanston women, whose goal became the establishment of a women’s college under the auspices of Northwestern University. In what President Jones’ daughter Lydia Jones Trowbridge would later call a “distinctly feminist movement,” these women—including Frances Willard and others connected with Northwestern Female College—established the Evanston College for Ladies on land, known as “University Park,” granted them by Northwestern University in 1869. The Evanston College for Ladies would have a female president (Willard), board of trustees, faculty, and student body. This project enjoyed the full support of President Jones, who—according to Trowbridge—“shared with President Haven [of Northwestern University] the vision of sex equality.” Jones realized that Northwestern Female College could not survive unendowed, and therefore made the College for Ladies the “free-will offering” of his own institution for the nominal sum of \$1.

In 1871 Evanston College for Ladies (enrollment 236) absorbed the Northwestern Female College; recognized its alumni; and commenced instruction in its building. As President of the College for Ladies, Willard immediately began to negotiate for a merger with Northwestern University, which had adopted coeducation in 1869 at the insistence of President E. O. Haven. In 1873 the Evanston College for Ladies became the Woman’s College of the Northwestern University, with Willard as Dean.

Throughout its short history the Northwestern Female College produced 72 graduates, 31 more than Northwestern University graduated between 1855 and 1871.

Description of the Series

The Records of the Northwestern Female College date from 1855 to 1976 and comprise one linear foot of historical materials, minutes, correspondence, financial documents, and publications. Over half of the records date between 1855 and 1873.

Dating from 1860 until 1976, the histories comprise published and unpublished historical sketches of the Northwestern Female College, a few authored by William Jones’ daughter Lydia Jones Trowbridge. One folder of reminiscences and biographies (1861-1935), containing some undated material, includes alumni recollections of the College, its faculty, and fellow students; as well as J. Wesley Jones’ account of the College’s founding and Trowbridge’s biographical

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sketches of her father (College founder and president William P. Jones) and mother (College Principal Mary Hayes Jones). Also noteworthy are Frances E. Willard's handwritten "Biographical Sketch of the Alumnae of the N.W. Female College" (1861) and an undated scrapbook page showing pictures and signatures of Frances and Mary Willard.

The charter and minutes of the Board of Trustees document trustees' meetings from 1857 until 1871.

The bulk of the general correspondence spans the years 1914 to 1967 and pertains mainly to donations of Female College documents to Northwestern's library; and to inquiries fielded by the library concerning the College's history and alumnae. However, one general correspondence folder (1857-1862, n.d.) contains two incoming letters to William P. Jones; a letter by Luella Clark, a College teacher; and an undated letter to Rev. John Dempster. An additional folder of correspondence, dating from 1883 to 1933, concerns Northwestern University's incorporation of Female College alumnae into its alumni records.

Spanning from 1868 to 1908, the sparse financial documents consist mainly of tuition receipts and blank perpetual scholarship bonds (sold for \$50 and guaranteeing the purchaser's descendants free tuition at the College). Materials do not include a record of College income and expenditures. The Luella Clark scholarship materials (1942-1947) concern a bequest to Northwestern University in the name of Luella Clark, a teacher at the Female College.

Chronologically arranged, the catalogs of the Northwestern Female College span the years 1855 to 1871 and include rosters of students, trustees, and faculty, as well as information regarding coursework and policies. Circulars date from 1855 to 1870 and describe the College's philosophy, facilities, tuition, and boarding expenses. An issue of the Female College publication entitled *Casket and Budget* dates from 1858.

The events and activities file contains commencement programs, Minerva Society announcements, and alumni event announcements, chronologically arranged from 1856 to 1871.

One folder of duplicates comprises extra copies of College catalogs.

Cross References

William P. Jones (1831-1886) Papers, 1857-1932 (Series 36/1)

Records of the Women's Educational Aid Association, 1871-2000 (Series 55/38)

Records of the Evanston College for Ladies, 1869-1933 (Series 39/1)

Records of the Woman's College of Northwestern University, 1872-1893 (Series 40/1)

Frances E. Willard Papers (Series 40/2)

Provenance: Uncertain. The Records of the Northwestern Female College appear to combine a number of individual donations, including those of Lydia Jones Trowbridge.

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Restrictions: None.

Separations: None.

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Container List

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	1	Histories	1860-1976
	2	Reminiscences and biographies	1861-1935
	3	Charter (copy) and Minutes of the Board of Trustees	1857-1871
	4	General Correspondence	1857-1862, n.d.
	5	General Correspondence	1914-1967
	6	Correspondence: Alumni records	1883-1933
	7	Financial documents	1868-1908, n.d.
	8	Luella Clark scholarship	1942-1947, n.d.
	9	Catalogs	1855-1866
	10	Catalogs	1866-1871
	11	Circulars	1855-1870
	12	<i>Casket and Budget</i> [newspaper]	1858
	13	Events and Activities	1856-1871, n.d.
	14	Duplicates	