

Dedication of Jane E. Leonard Hall
28 November 2022

It has been six years since we gathered for this building's ribbon-cutting in January 2016, and we are now reassembled to free it from the cumbersome, generic name that it carried. Some of those who had migrated across campus to new offices here had hoped to carry the name of their former building with them in 2016. It is a joy now to see that wish fulfilled. This is to be Jane E. Leonard Hall.

I think I can assume that nearly everyone here today knows that this is the third building to carry Aunt Jane's name. The campus began with one building in 1875, known only as the Normal School Building. Two buildings were added in 1893 and known at first only by generic names: the model school and the boys' dormitory. When two more buildings, a recitation hall and a dining hall, were opened in 1905, it was thought that all five buildings should be dignified by more than generic names. The choices were the first four presidents of the Council of Trustees—essentially the school's founders (John Sutton, Silas Clark, A.W. Wilson, and Thomas Sutton) and Jane Leonard, after whom the recitation hall was named. It was an elegant building with a grand staircase and art glass windows, which unfortunately burned to the ground in 1952 (blame falls on the chemistry department where the blaze originated). That building was replaced by a second Leonard Hall that was modern and functional, but rather undistinguished architecturally. This building—as you know—was torn down to make room for the new Kopchick Hall.

references to her as “the guiding spirit,” “a beacon light,” “an inspiration,” “a guardian angel”—“the soul of the school.”

Alumni searched for ways to explain what they thought of her and often despaired of finding adequate words. An 1883 alumnus tried placing her in a wide, historical context. “Every school of note owes its prestige to some great personality,” he proposed. “Rugby had its Arnold, Harvard its Eliot, Princeton its McCosh, and Cornell its White. It is in this way that I think of Miss Leonard.” A member of the Class of 1915 used a different historical analogy: Miss Leonard was to Indiana as George Washington was to America.

Her reputation spread until she was the embodiment of the school. One alumna said she enrolled because a friend told her, “It is worth going to Indiana just to know Miss Leonard.” Parents, it was said, did not send their daughters and sons to Indiana; they sent them to Miss Leonard. At her death, she was hailed as “the greatest woman educator Pennsylvania ever had.”

Jane Leonard was born two days after Christmas in 1840 on a farm near Curwensville, Clearfield County. She was educated at Millersville and taught history and geography there for 12 years before coming to Indiana. We recruited her as the preceptress, which meant she was responsible for the students’ behavior and nurture outside the classroom as well as within. I’d say she rather combined today’s Academic Affairs and Student Affairs divisions all by herself.

At first, she taught the same things she taught at Millersville—history and geography. In a reorganization of the faculty after the first year, she dropped geography and picked up English literature. She continued to divide her teaching between history and literature until the late

1890s, after which she gradually taught less and less history. In 1907, her identification as a member of the history faculty was dropped from the catalog, and she was listed simply as a professor of English. But I cannot resist noting that her literature class was titled “The History of English Literature.”

She was known as an exceptionally magnetic teacher. In her history classes, she adopted an innovative seminar method, had the students digging into primary sources and critiquing each other’s papers and presentations—and some of you think ‘peer review’ is a new idea. Her history students remembered her ability to make history come alive with good stories. Her literature students remembered gaining an appreciation of poetry. One alumna said she had never since seen a snowfall without recalling Miss Leonard’s reading James Russell Lowell’s ‘The First Snowfall.’ Another smiremt h tehcir

wrote, "Her life itself is a paradox—