

Women's History in Oberlin : Education, Reform Movements, & Women's Rights



Oberlin town and college have played an important role in the history of women's education and women's rights; likewise, women have played an important role in Oberlin's history, and in the history of Oberlin-based reform movements that later became national and international.

Oberlin College (and town) were founded in 1833. The town and college had very strong religious principles and guidelines to which all residents and students were expected to adhere. The College was co-educational from its very beginnings, believing that men and women should labor together to accomplish what they considered the "Lord's work." The first four women in the United States to receive their bachelor's degrees earned them at Oberlin College. Famous female alumni of Oberlin College include Antoinette Brown Blackwell, the first female ordained minister of a recognized denomination in the United States; Lucy Stone, famous women's rights activist and suffragist (and Antoinette Brown Blackwell's sister-in-law, but, of course, Lucy Stone did not take her husband's last name); and Mary Jane Patterson, the first African-American women in the nation, and probably in the world, to receive a bachelor's degree. Women also were active in the academic



world as researchers--take, for example, Julia Hall, who was research assistant to her famous brother, Charles Martin Hall: working together, they invented the electrolytic process by which aluminum is purified for use. (Prior to this discovery, aluminum cost as much as gold did because of the difficulty of refining it!) Both Julia and Charles were OC alumni.



Women also contributed greatly to many of the most well-known social movements that originated or were popular in Oberlin. For example, many Oberlin women

went into the missionary field, following their religious convictions into the "savage" world; many died or were killed while performing their self-defined duty. Among these are the women killed in the Boxer Uprising in China, those who died of disease or in childbirth in Africa, and those killed in the Pacific Northwest of North America. Women also participated in abolition activities and the Underground Railroad in Oberlin; in fact, the only house in Oberlin with a secret room for hiding fugitive slaves is in the Bardwell house, where Mrs. Bardwell sheltered fugitive slaves. (Her husband was away doing missionary work during most of the decade preceding the Civil War, so the majority of the Underground Railroad work in the house was undertaken by Mrs. Bardwell.) And Lucy Stone got her start giving public lectures as an

abolitionist! Of course, women were active in the movement for women's rights and suffrage; equally, if not more, popular in Oberlin was the temperance movement. Oberlin was a dry town from its foundation, and in 1894, the Anti-Saloon League, which later gained nation-wide popularity, was founded in Oberlin. A key player in Oberlin's temperance activities was Sarah Frances Jewett, a former missionary and author of "The Gulick Hygiene Series" on public health and sanitation--a key part of which included temperance and prohibition!

These are just some highlights of Oberlin's women's history. Find out more! Visit us for a [tour](#), check out some recommended reading [online](#) and in [hard copy](#), and visit our website again--the information available will continue to expand!

