



The prominence of music and the arts in the Ward's Seminary curriculum is evident in this 1869 program. Musical performances are combined with essays on a wide range of topics. (The Harpeth Hall School Archives)

lic. Twentieth century curricula would include less letter writing and mental philosophy and more calculus and economics, as well as the feminized curricular departments of domestic science and

physical culture.²⁷ Regardless of claims of superior instruction, location, facilities, and competitive cost, these courses supported the "finishing school" philosophy of most southern educational institutions. Students often were drilled in the art of elocution and letter writing, which emphasized (perhaps passive aggressively) that political and economic power remained in the hands of men. As the seminary catalog put it, "Every evening a pupil is named to write a letter on a designated subject, and to a certain person (king, emperor, lord, prince, governor, attorney, man of letters or private party), which letter is read publicly the next evening just after prayer, and hypercritically criticized by the Principal."²⁸

Ward Seminary gained a reputation for its fine arts department, organized as the Ward Conservatory of Music.²⁹ The music department reinforced acceptable notions of female behavior, as upper class women commonly sang, played piano, or entertained family, friends, and intimate groups. Many students attended the school specifically to study voice, piano, and stringed instruments. The 1867 commencement for Ward Seminary provides evidence of the musical emphasis. Ceremonies included many student performances such as a duet by the Currey sisters, an essay reading entitled "The Sunny South" by Katie Donelson, and vocal ensembles who sang "Whispering Winds" by composer H.A. Wollenhaupt.³⁰

Curricular programs such as elocution, music, and foreign languages encouraged women to master subject areas already socially approved by southern (and northern) society. Early evidence suggests that southern women's schools rarely challenged gender norms. Moreover, all-female institutions represented a socially accepted mode and means of women's "higher" education without challenging the already wounded Old South patriarchy. Although some frivolity and mischief occurred on-campus, students generally accepted their educational environment and "fully embraced the goals of well-roundedness" and feminized studies.³¹

William and Eliza Ward held their students to high moral standards in the early years. In fact, early catalogs promoted both urban development and moral character when they noted, "There [are] *good pavements* leading to all churches."³² The Wards personally enforced rules that ensured moral virtue. In 1866, Professor Ward, as the girls called him, put his book down during a lesson to remind a Miss Clark to "preserve her dignity" as she sat on the front row of class with her "feet protruding from the hem of her floor-length skirt."³³ In another instance that year, Ward caught several of his students in the first floor parlor in their night-gowns as they listened to the serenade of their Vanderbilt beaux. One female student recounted, "It was the fashion for our boyfriends to serenade us with guitar, banjo, and their fresh young voices.

Suddenly Dr. Ward walked in... [and] we got up those steps quicker than we had come down!"³⁴

The Wards also instituted policies that focused on Victorian notions of modesty, humility, and restraint. Students wore maroon uniforms in the winter and dresses in fall and spring. By the 1880s the "school adopted the color of blue for its year-round uniform."³⁵ Simple dress was expected, and one source admitted that student Annie Chadwell nearly cried "when the many dainty bows which held the fluffy tarleton drapery of the whole front of her dress had to come off."³⁶ Early catalogs proclaimed the school's "purpose to avoid all extravagance in dress... Positively no low neck or short sleeve dresses will be permitted on our school platform."³⁷ Ward prohibited visitors on Sunday and closely supervised the students during recreation and off campus trips. Other ritual traditions during William Ward's tenure reinforced notions of southern chivalry and decorum. For example, students filed into the chapel two-by-two and followed a similar pattern as they marched as pairs into the dining hall. At lunch certain students sat at a designated "French table" where no English could be spoken. Latin students sat with their instructors.³⁸ Another custom initially grew out of respect for the school's founders—students curtsied to Dr. and Mrs. Ward as they entered and exited the dining hall. The school's founders opened the school to promote greater academic