

achievement for its female students, and yet antebellum notions of propriety and gender endured as a centerpiece of Ward Seminary's culture.

Graduating classes at Ward Seminary grew from fourteen in 1866 to forty-seven by 1871.<sup>39</sup> The graduation program of 1871 included selected senior student essays, including titles such as "There Is a Poison Drop in Man's Purest Cup," "Low Chords," "Religion the Brightest Gem in Woman's Crown," and "The Beauties and Pleasures of the Sky." By the late 1870s tuition was up to \$200 per year, a new building was erected that provided twenty rooms, including facilities for physics and chemistry, and the faculty grew to include eighteen members.<sup>40</sup>

In 1879, another women's school merged with Ward Seminary. Located in Edgefield, Nashville's first suburb east of downtown, the school began as Mrs. Weber's Female Seminary in 1871. Later known as Edgefield Female Seminary, it consolidated with Ward Seminary and the widowed Margaret Walker (Mrs. Henri) Weber joined Ward's faculty.<sup>41</sup>

Across the United States, schools by the 1880s and 1890s were becoming more co-educational. This was true in the South as well, although southern society tended to fear that a female student endangered her future as a "lady" if she crossed into the male world of universities. The sentiment reflects historian Amy McCandless's assertion that in the South "the disagreement over educational means

and end was complicated by the plantation ideal of a lady."<sup>42</sup> Women's schools offered a safe alternative: they allowed women to learn without directly challenging the status quo. The 1885–1886 Annual Announcement states that "co-education of the sexes has been tried in many places, but it is on the decline and we do not believe it best."<sup>43</sup> The announcement asserted that the commonly held argument for coeducation as a means of improving male behavior was invalid: "They say it refines boys [to educate them with girls]... But what parent wishes to be put to such a use as refining boys, at the risk of the loss of their own [daughter's] delicate and feminine qualities."<sup>44</sup> Even so, Ward Seminary boasted of its challenging curriculum, including courses in Latin, French, mathematics (up to trigonometry), elocution, history, geography, philosophy, physiology, literature, music, art, geology, government, physical science, chemistry, and mythology. By 1886 the school even offered "post-graduate" courses in poetry, elocution, voice culture, and English.<sup>45</sup>

On July 20, 1887, the school's founding father passed away. During Dr. William E. Ward's tenure, over 3,000 young women passed through the halls of Ward Seminary, and over 800 graduated.<sup>46</sup> At the time of his death, enrollment stood at 350. His wife Eliza Hudson Ward lived until 1900.

With his departure, J.B. Hancock became principal. According to an 1893

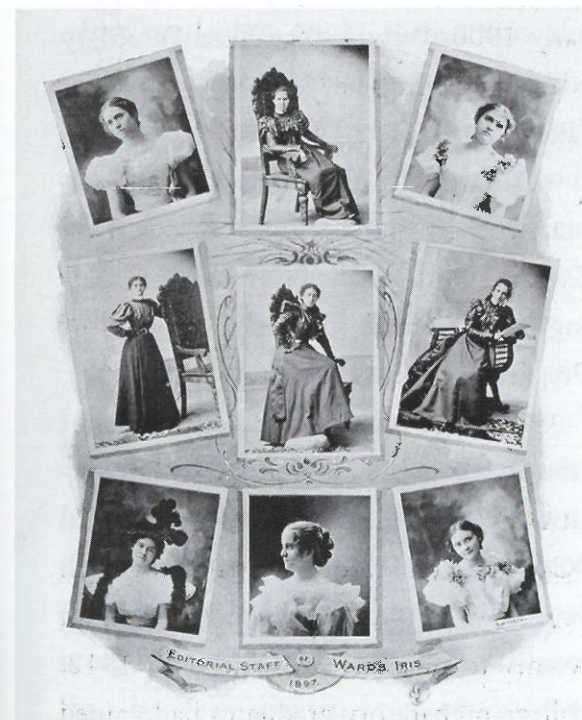
Bureau of Education report, the school's enrollment reached new heights under Hancock's leadership.<sup>47</sup> In 1891, Hancock oversaw the sale of the school to the Presbyterian Cooperative Association of Nashville.<sup>48</sup> Although finances remained solid prior to 1891, many school leaders believed that the seminary's future could expand more efficiently within a larger organizational infrastructure.

Ward Seminary had entered a pivotal time. After the four year tenure of J.B. Hancock (1887–1891), the Presbyterian Cooperative Association appointed Reverend B. H. Charles, D.D., as the head of the Ward Seminary in 1891. Charles

served only two years before John Diell Blanton was named president of Ward Seminary in 1892.<sup>49</sup>

Blanton, who hailed from Virginia, was initially hired as an instructor of mathematics and brought much needed stability and administrative leadership to the Seminary. Blanton served on the faculty at Ward for two years prior to his appointment as president, and no one predicted that his impressive tenure would span four decades. His tenure bridged the temporal and cultural divide that began with the southern belle and ended with the modern woman. Perhaps the most pivotal figure in the school's history, he presided over an all-female educational institution at a time when a modification in gender roles caused increased visibility of women in public spaces via volunteerism, activism, or professionalism. Ward Seminary encountered this cultural intersection as a school in the heart of Nashville's bustling downtown. Blanton certainly recognized the challenge of preserving elements of Old South order while preparing women for a New South reality.

Ward Seminary continued as an archetype of single-sex and gendered education through the early twentieth century. The young women, known as the "Ward ducks" in the early 1900s, marched behind John D. and Anna Miller Blanton during their daily afternoon walk just as they had with Dr. and Mrs. Ward. Students marched two-by-two downtown each day at 3 o'clock in their navy blue uniforms—



The 1897 editors of *Ward's Iris* attended the school at a time when a modification in gender roles caused increased visibility of women in public spaces. (The Harpeth Hall School Archives)