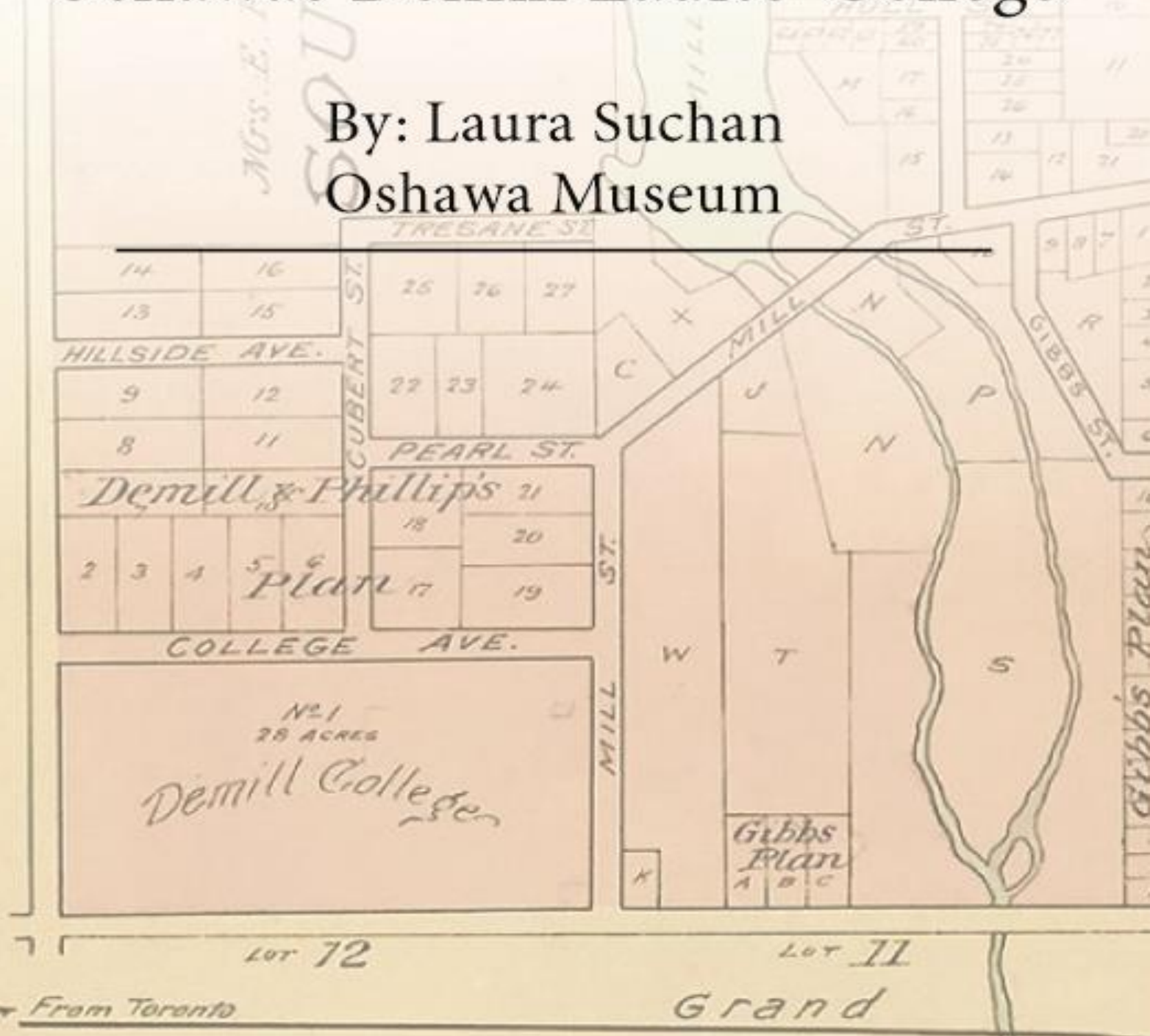


Mind, Morale & Money: Oshawa's Demill Ladies' College

By: Laura Suchan
Oshawa Museum



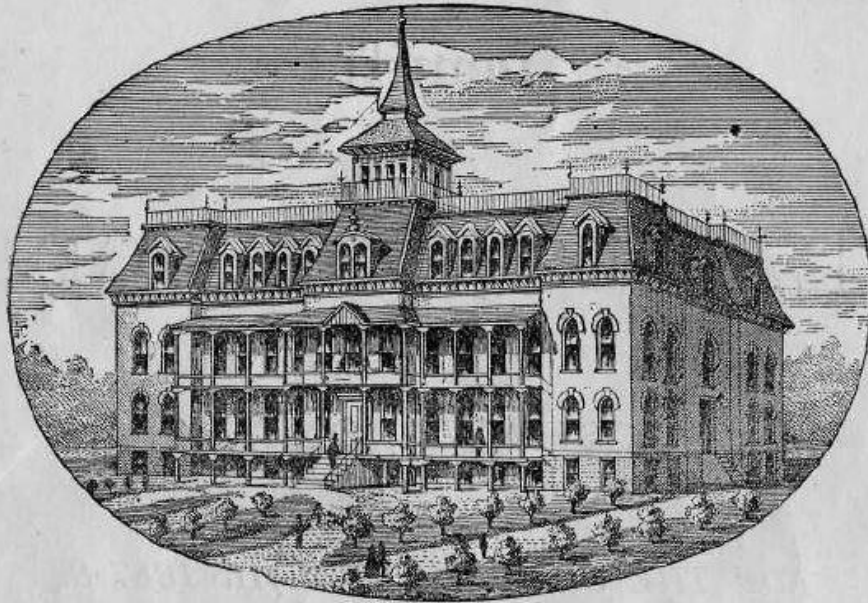
Cover image from the 1884 Chas F. Goad Fire Insurance Map, Oshawa. In the archival collection of the Oshawa Museum

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Written by: Laura Suchan

Mind, Morale & Money:
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DEMILL LADIES' COLLEGE,
OSHAWA, ONTARIO.

There is a little silver pin
Where e'er I see, it makes me grin
For all the merry, jolly days
Rise up around me as I gaze
And I shall hear be it ever so long
The strains of each rousing college song
And I think I hear as I dream the while
The tenor voice of our dear old Lyle.

- Your school friend Clara Meggs
Gananoque December 14, 1887
(From the autograph album of Lila Easton
Demill College graduate, class of 1888)¹



Figure 1 : Six graduating members of the Class of '88, who were in the same "sorority." The girls are wearing the Demill Ladies' College crescent pin which reads "We have laid stepping stone" hanging star has "'88" Upper right is Eliza Ann Easton, known as Lyle, at age 23.

Photographer: J.M. Welch, King St. West, Oshawa, Ont.

¹ In 1887, Lila Easton and Clara Meggs were both students in the Music Department. Lila Easton, autograph album, in the archival collection of the Oshawa Museum

Clara Meggs and Lila Easton were just two of the students pursuing an advanced education at Demill Ladies' College (DLC) in Oshawa, Ontario. Demill Ladies College was founded by Methodist minister Reverend A.B. De Mille (De Mille used an original spelling of the family name for his surname) and opened in 1876, at a time when there was an increasing desire amongst the middle classes for more educational opportunities for their daughters.² The purpose of the College, as stated in the 1881-1882 school calendar, was to bring the higher branches of education within the reach of the largest possible number of young girls. As women began to attend secondary schools in increasing numbers, ladies' colleges provided an alternative to the public school system, particularly for parents wishing a segregated learning environment (away from male students) for their daughters. The importance of these institutions in the educational history of women in Ontario is indicated by the increase in well funded female day and boarding schools in the province from 1 or 2 in the 1860s to 7 or 8 by the mid-1880s.³ The wealthy class could afford tutors for their daughters but for the middle class, the ladies' colleges proliferating in the province were a viable alternative.⁴ During the 1840s and 1850s in Oshawa there were at least three private ladies schools catering to daughters of the middle class. Miss Wheeler, a graduate and former teacher at the Burlington Ladies' Academy, left her position as a common school teacher to operate a ladies' boarding school. By all accounts Miss Wheeler's school was well regarded and in 1851 she is reported to have 95 girls on the school roster studying grammar, writing, geography and history.⁵ Very little is known of the other early ladies schools in Oshawa.

² De Mille explains in his publication, *In the Net*, that his ancestors were Huguenots and during a later period the surname was spelled incorrectly as Demill. He decided to use the original form of his name which was De Mille. The school name according to the calendars was Demill Ladies' College and so this is the spelling used when referring to the school.

³ R.D. Gindey and W.P.J. Miller, *Inventing Secondary Education: The Rise of the High School in Nineteenth Century Ontario*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1990), 295.

⁴ Bert Boggende, "Alone in the Province": The Cobourg Ladies' Seminary-Burlington Ladies' Academy, 1842-1851" in *Ontario History*, 89 no. 1, March 1997, 56

⁵ Education fonds, archival collection of the Oshawa Museum

Miss Leonard, a pianist, was running a school and Mrs. Dayman's school was based on the English Dame School system and offered lessons in sewing and manners.⁶

Reverend De Mille's desire was to open a female boarding school that was not encumbered with influence from a particular denomination and would offer Protestant parents, in particular, a viable educational alternative to Catholic convent schools for their daughters. De Mille's success in accomplishing what he set out to do, is reflected in the many accolades appearing in the local papers praising the school including the Toronto Mail which asked the question "... whether in the Dominion of Canada today, a home for young women can be found equal to that offered in the Demill College, whether it be considered educationally, socially, morally or religiously."⁷ Indeed the father of a DLC student expressed his worry about the state of female education in the province and was delighted to have a suitable place for his daughter to be educated, "I looked upon present style of education of young ladies as wrong and have endeavored to teach our daughters such requirements as may render them not only ornamental but also useful members of society."⁸ This idea, to make useful members of society, was shared by De Mille, who often felt that much of the education of girls (and in particular the education to be had in Convent schools) was useless and would lead to females being ill prepared to raise good Christian children. "What good would it do to have a daughter educated at a fancy academy if she couldn't cook a meal for her family when she was finished?" asked Reverend De Mille.⁹

This question of the function of female education in the late nineteenth century prompted me to take a closer look at DLC, its moral environment, curriculum, faculty and the graduates themselves. With many female colleges appearing in the province at the same time as DLC, what made Reverend De Mille so confident his educational vision was superior to that being offered at other schools? What quality of education was offered at DLC? What was its purpose? Surviving archival sources cannot provide full

⁶ Dame school were a form of private elementary school education, usually taught by women and located in their homes. Douglas Ross, *Education in Oshawa*, (Oshawa: Oshawa Board of Education, 1970) pg. 11

⁷ Toronto Mail, June 26, 1886

⁸ De Mille Ladies College Annual Calendar, 1881-1882 pg. 20

⁹ Reverend A. B. De Mille, *In the Net* (London: Morgan and Scott Ltd., 1910), pg 23

answers to these questions however some conclusions can be drawn from De Mille's own writings, newspaper accounts, annual school calendars and from looking at the lives of the students after DLC.

It was early in his career on the travelling preacher circuit that De Mille says he began to give some thought to starting his own school, the purpose of female education in general and more specifically, about the best ways to educate girls. He travelled



Figure 2: Reverend A. B. Demill

extensively visiting female schools and spent considerable time refining his vision for a female college. One of the main concerns expressed by De Mille was the lack of choice for Protestant parents who often felt sending their daughters to a convent school was the only feasible option available to them for educating their daughters. De Mille felt it was his duty to enlighten these parents to the true purpose of

Convent schools, stating, "It was one of the objects of the Church of Rome, in establishing convent schools, to bring Protestant girls as far as possible under the influence of the Church. Many who do not know may not understand how extensively the young are influenced while attending these schools."¹⁰ In order to save parents from the grief of having their daughters join the Catholic church or worse yet, enter the convent, De Mille felt compelled to begin a school of his own to fill this gap.

"I determined in some way to devote the rest of my life to seeking to rescue young Protestant girls from a similar danger, says De Mille, "I did not wish to do so. It puzzled me to explain why I should abandon a life of usefulness to plunge into the untried difficulties that would surely meet me; yet I could not but brood in bitterness of soul

¹⁰ Ibid.

Reverend Alford (Alfred) Byron De Mille

The founder and President of DLC, Alford Byron De Mille, was born July 10 1831 in Northport, Prince Edward County, Ontario (near present day Belleville) to Isaac, a farmer, and Amelia Demill. Demill's father Isaac was born in Ontario however his grandfather, Isaac Demill Sr., was a Loyalist during the American Revolution and settled in Northport after the end of that war. Demill's mother, Amelia was from Herkimer County, New York. Alfred remained on the family farm until he was 15 at which time he started a tin, stove and hardware business in nearby Shannonville, Ontario for about 5 years. He attended Victoria College in Cobourg for a short period but was forced to abandon his studies due to illness. By 1856 Demill had a calling to enter the ministry, becoming a probationer in 1860 and a Methodist minister in 1863. For 12 years Demill travelled a circuit preaching and was active in the "conversion of sinners." Alfred married Lucilla Hurd (1836 - 1897) of Raglan in 1854. Lucilla's father Elizir was a clothier and she had 4 sisters and 1 brother. Later her mother and at least 2 sisters would live with the Demills and help run the school. Most likely Lucilla's family connections in the area were a mitigating factor in Demill choosing Oshawa as the site for his school. Alfred and Lucilla had one daughter Frances (Frankie) Amelia Demill born in 1870.

It was during his time on the traveling circuit, that Demill says he began to give some thought to starting his own school, the purpose of female education in general and more specifically, about the best ways to educate girls. He dedicated most of his professional career to the education of females and also wrote and travelled extensively. His book, *In the Net*, details in depth, the disadvantages and, in Demill's opinion, dangers, of a Catholic school, or convent, education for girls. In 1904 Demill travelled aboard the *Carpathia*, to England where he lectured extensively. Alfred Demill died in Peterborough on June 11, 1913 of apoplexy (stroke) and is buried alongside his wife in Victoria Lawn Cemetery in St. Catharines.



over the fate of those young girls.”¹¹ De Mille notes his congregation tried to talk him out of the idea, “It grieved me much to reject the advice offered by my brethren in the ministry and the admonitions of many friends but I dared not disregard the commands of the Master.”¹²

Reverend De Mille knew what kind of school he wished to start and in 1873 he arrived in Oshawa and sought to bring the school and his vision, to fruition.¹³ He requested a \$3,000 bonus from the Town of Oshawa to purchase the necessary land for his school and in return De Mille promised to operate the school for at least 10 years with 50 students a year attending and operating for 9 months of the year.¹⁴ De Mille’s request for a bonus sparked a great deal of discussion, debate and even some dissension in the village. The

Ontario Reformer newspaper was vocal in its opposition of the school in general and the granting of any bonus writing at one point, “the scheme is absurd in all its bearings: and those pressing for its recognition are only raising a stumbling block to other matters much more feasible and of far greater moment.”¹⁵ Ultimately De Mille was successful in his bid and the by-law approving the bonus was carried by a substantial majority of 149 to 41. The Oshawa Vindicator noted the result of the vote was greeted with cheers and

“Hereas the Corporation of the Village of Oshawa, on the sixth day of October, one thousand eight hundred and seventy-five, passed a by-law having first submitted the same to the electors of said municipality for their sanction, intituled (sic) “A Bylaw to grant to Alfred Byron Demill, a bonus to assist him in establishing and maintaining in the Village of Oshawa, a seminary for the education of girls,” granting to said Alfred Byron Demill, a bonus of three thousand dollars in debentures of the said corporation, and the said corporation have petitioned to have the said by-law legalized, and to be authorized to issue debentures there under” From *Statutes of the Province of Ontario*,

¹¹ Ibid, pg. 16

¹² Ibid, pg. 20

¹³ De Mille does not state in any of his writings his reason for choosing Oshawa as the location of his school. Perhaps there are clues in De Mille’s personal life which prompted him to build in Oshawa. Archival records indicate De Mille married Lucilla Hurd of nearby Whitby, Ontario in 1854. The 1851 census lists Lucilla’s father Elizir, a clothier, as well as mother Phebe and 5 siblings. These family connections and familiarity with the area may have been mitigating factors in his decision.

¹⁴ Douglas Ross, *Education in Oshawa*, (Oshawa: Oshawa Board of education, 1970) pg. 155

¹⁵ Ontario Reformer, 1873

afterwards there was a procession through town, followed by speeches, music and a fireworks display.

By early 1875, construction of the school building was underway. The architect and foreman of the project was J. W. Cudlip. Unfortunately there is not much information known about the construction of the school. What information there is comes from the unpublished manuscript of Olive French, who researched the history of education in Oshawa.¹⁶ Gas and water tank pipes were installed and sometime later, steam heating was added. All the public rooms were said to be lit by gas with coal oil lamps used in the private areas. The school was completed by October 1875 and was described as being a “large and commodious building, supplied with all the modern improvements in heating, lighting and ventilation.” It was a narrow building, 150 feet long, with two stories and a mansard roof. A large balcony ran along the south side of the building. The interior rooms were noted to be “large and airy with high ceilings and well lit.” The architecture of the building was described as being “quite ugly” however it was said the ornamental trees and shrubs helped hide the unsightliness of the building.

DLC welcomed 80 students when it opened on February 1, 1876.¹⁷ The school’s 20 acres of land were perched on a hill in south Oshawa, located near present day College Hill Avenue and Park Road South. The College’s Annual Calendar, (1881- 1882) described the school’s grounds as giving a commanding view from all sides, “On the south is the broad expanse of the blue waters of Ontario, on the east is a splendid view of Oshawa, with its fine manufacturing establishments, and on the west and north an extended prospect of the country with beautiful valleys and sloping hills and beautifully dotted with the homes of yeomanry, all of which present a most enchanting scene.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Ms. French conducted her research prior to the fire which destroyed the Oshawa Times newspaper collection. Her notes are available in the archival collection of the Oshawa Museum.

¹⁷ Demill Ladies’ College, Annual Calendar, 1881-1882, archival collection of the Oshawa Museum, 4.

¹⁸ Ibid, 5.

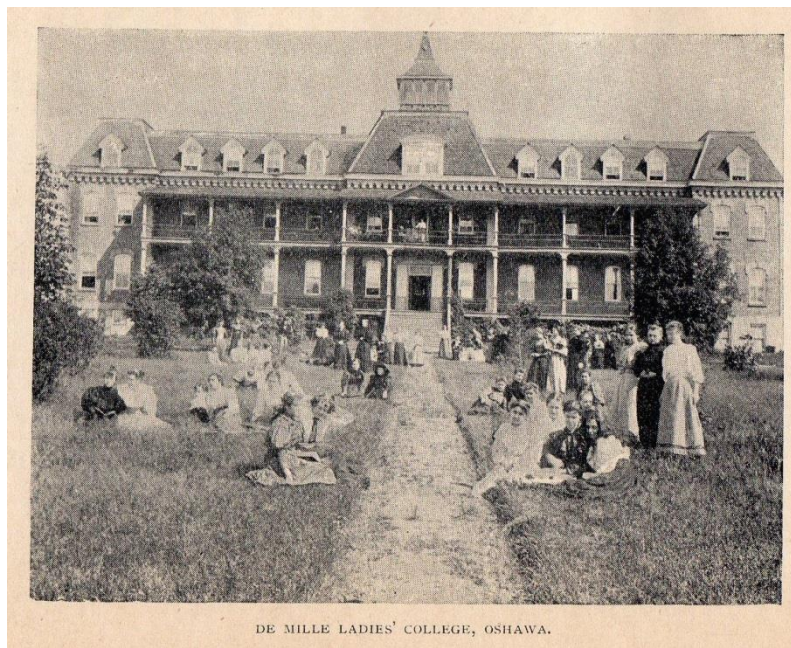


Figure 3 Demill Ladies' College as seen in Reverend de Mille's book, *In the Net*.

According to De Mille, the purpose of DLC, was to “bring the higher branches of education within the reach of the largest possible number of young girls and to add a high mental and aesthetic culture.” De Mille believed his school gave “superior advantages educationally” and wished for DLC to be considered in “the very front rank amongst educational institutions in this country.” Female students at DLC were required to take academic subjects such as reading and mathematics but added to these was training in various ornamental subjects including needlework, French, art and music. Ornamental subjects, it was suggested, were designed to prepare women for roles within the domestic or private sphere as homemakers, wives, and mothers responsible for the moral being of society. The main purpose of the ornamental branches was not to procure a vocation because after all most women in the nineteenth century were not employed but instead were a contributing factor in maintaining gender inequalities.

Private schools such as DLC which charged tuition or had denominational funding were able to provide a substantial accomplishment curriculum something which the public schools were not. One of the defining elements of a private school education for girls was the availability and extent of the ornamental subjects. In most cases ornamental and those subjects referred to as “solid” or “useful” were taken in combination at a

ladies' college and in fact "few of the students...took only academic subjects and more than 90% carry side by side with the prescribed course a very liberal course in music and art."¹⁹ Once the girls began to enter the co-educational high schools, the ornamental curriculum did not follow but instead was replaced by subjects which counted towards university matriculation exams. Courses such as art and music were left on the sidelines and others such as domestic science for the most part were left out of the curriculum totally.

Schools such as DLC afforded females in the nineteenth century the advantage of an excellent education combined with strong religious influences and well trained teachers with the purpose of developing an ideal woman. It also offered some limited opportunities to train for vocations which in some cases, could be useful after graduation. Reverend De Mille believed his vision for the college made it the pre-eminent facility of its kind in the Dominion. This vision borrowed liberally from the philosophies of Mary Lyon of Mount Holyoke Seminary in Massachusetts the first of the Seven Sister schools, and a leader in female education during the nineteenth century. Like Mount Holyoke, DLC had a minimum entrance age of 16 to ensure girls were prepared to study at this level, low tuition to make education accessible to the most possible females and the idea of the students performing the domestic chores to keep the cost of tuition and upkeep down.

Moral Environment

An important component of an education at DLC was the emphasis on the moral training of the students, a responsibility placed in the capable hands of Mrs. De Mille. Reverend De Mille, as did the other leaders of ladies' colleges at the time, stressed the importance of moral discipline as the students would one day be responsible for raising good Christian children. Although the school was non-denominational, girls were encouraged, and indeed expected, to attend religious services of their parents choosing. There were also many regulations regarding type of wardrobe expected (neat, plain and

¹⁹ Ibid, 4.

inexpensive), suggestions for appropriate extra-curricular activities (calisthenics, walking, reading), number of visits from home and correspondence (both of which should be kept to a minimum).²⁰ These regulations De Mille felt would ensure the girl's focus was kept on developing the mind and not on frivolous items. To further protect the students from demoralizing influences and local gossip, Reverend De Mille insisted all students board at the school for he felt "other influences of a social nature which will readily occur to anyone who will give the matter a moment's consideration which do not tend to develop in student's fondness for the studies they are pursuing."²¹ By refusing all day students, De Mille accepted the financial loss as part of the plan to ensure the reputation of his school was protected. "Our students have a better opportunity to pursue their studies where all board in the Institution than they could possibly have with day pupils connected with a town or city gossip and associations that involve late hours and a weakening of the student's application."²² The moral environment was such that De Mille suggested girls from the rural farms could improve their manners by attending the school. Daughters of ministers from all denominations were given special rates to attend DLC and a number of clergymen did take De Mille up on his special offer. At all times De Mille assured parents their daughters were surrounded by people of only the highest moral and religious character and that the school would take care to guard the spiritual interests of its students.²³

Faculty

A second component of the superior education available at DLC was the emphasis placed on the hiring of well educated, quality teachers. De Mille asserted that even though the tuition was kept low, he was able to secure the finest teachers. Several teachers were graduates of the prestigious Mount Holyoke Seminary and recruited

²⁰ Demill Ladies' College Annual Calendar, 1887-1888, Oshawa Public Library, Local History Room, 19.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Demill Ladies College, Annual Calendar 1886-1887. From the archival collection of the Oshawa Museum, 25

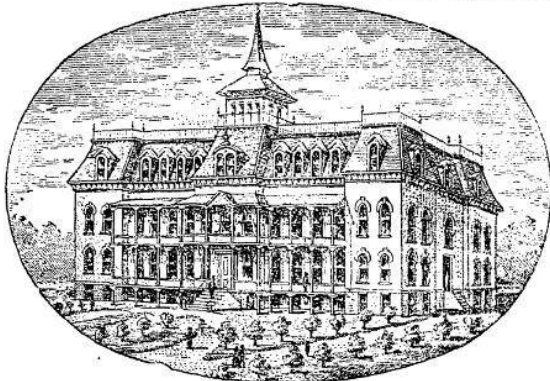
²³ Demill Ladies College, Annual Calendar 1881-1882. From the archival collection of the Oshawa Museum, 14

shortly after graduation. De Mille touted his teachers' qualifications in the school's Annual Calendars.

Miss Howland, a teacher of the classics and later principal at DLC was a Holyoke graduate and this according to De Mille, was in itself proof of her qualifications. Harriet Hinman and Mary Warner were two other Holyoke graduates as was Mary Sawyer who went on to become Dean of The Western College for Women in Ohio for 25 years.²⁴

Vincent Hunt, Director of the Musical Department at DLC, was educated at the renowned Leipzig Conservatory of Music and studied under the masters Carl Reinecke, George Papperitz and Oskar Zwintscher. He also taught for a time at the Toronto Conservatory of Music.²⁵ Professor John David Kerrison was head of the Musical

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Demill Ladies' College.

This Institution is now offering to those having DAUGHTERS or FRIENDS to EDUCATE, first-class opportunities under an

ABLE STAFF OF TEACHERS,

at lower rates than in any other Ladies' College in the Dominion of Canada. The studies included are extensive, embracing a very thorough course in ENGLISH, with the SCIENCES preparatory to MATRICULATION IN THE UNIVERSITY. The MODERN LANGUAGES, CLASSICS, VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC, the FINE ARTS, with the ornamental branches; also a course in PHYSICAL TRAINING.

Diplomas are given in ENGLISH LITERATURE, LIBERAL ARTS, MUSIC, FINE ARTS and ELOCUTION, when students are prepared to receive them, the same as other Ladies' Colleges. SPECIAL RATES TO MINISTERS of all denominations, widows and orphans. The health record the very best. A beautiful situation for the school. No day pupils admitted, which makes it a most excellent home for those attending. Has been running nearly 13 years with a good attendance. Be sure and send for calendar before making arrangements elsewhere to

REV. A. B. DEMILL, President, - OSHAWA, ONT.

Department at DLC during 1881-1882 had studied in England with John Boardman and Benedict Rolfs. The renowned elocutionist, Professor Joseph Taverner, was also a member of the DLC faculty.²⁶

Even with this impressive list of accomplishments by the faculty, there were still those that expressed serious doubts as to the quality of the teaching staff. The Oshawa

Reformer newspaper, already a vocal critic of the school, said salaries paid by De Mille

²⁴ Abbie Howland a graduate of Mount Holyoke's class of 1876, taught math at De Mille for nine years (1876-1885), Mary Warner, class of 1879, taught at De Mille for two years (1880-1882).

²⁵ Henry Godfrey, A Souvenir of Musical Toronto, (Toronto: Musical Toronto, 1897)

23. <http://archive.org/details/1897souveniromo00godfuoft>

²⁶ Elocution is the art of public speaking and includes training in pronunciation, grammar, style, and tone

were too low compared to the public school system, “We had to pay for it in our high school, and that they were efficiently taught by more competent teachers than was possible to be had for the named salary to be given to tutors in this establishment - \$150 and board.”²⁷ Considering a female teacher in Oshawa was paid a wage of \$280.00 per year in 1873, it can be argued the wages paid by De Mille were not too low if board was taken into consideration. Despite the seemingly low pay, several teachers had long

Faculty of Instruction.

REV. A. B. DEMILL,
Metaphysics and Biblical History.

MRS. A. B. DEMILL,
Principal.

MISS HINMAN, M. L. A.,
Literature, Mental Science, Dictation, and English Composition.

MISS WARNER, M. L. A.,
Natural Sciences, Mathematics, and History.

MISS HOWLAND, M. L. A.,
Classics, Logic, and Calisthenics.

MISS STEPHENSON,
Junior English Classes.

MADAME GRAUBAR,
French.

MISS WHITE,
French and German.

MR. J. DAVENPORT KERRISON,
Vocal and Instrumental Music.

MISS WELLINGTON,
Music.

MISS HURD,
Instrumental Music.

MISS LLOYD,
Wax Work, and all kinds of Fancy Work.

MISS BUTCHER,
Drawing, Crayon, Oil Painting, and Penmanship.

PROF. TAVERNER,
Elocution.

careers with the college. Miss Hurd, a music teacher was with the school in 1881 and by 1891 was classified a head teacher. The teachers themselves even expressed their satisfaction with the working conditions at DLC in their annual Mount Holyoke alumnae class letters. Abbie Howland wrote, Jan 31, 1880 “I am happy in my work and have nothing to complain of...”²⁸ Mary Eaton’s class letter from 1880 calls her years at DLC “pleasant” and Hattie Hinman’s class letter dated from 1882 states “the work has been plentiful but much pleasure has accompanied it...”²⁹ In 1882 Abbie Howland wrote “We have a very happy school here we all think...We have plenty of hard work to do though and much responsibility to bear. Nor are we free from the many anxieties and perplexities which naturally attend a teacher’s life.”³⁰

²⁷ Ontario Reformer, March 21, 1873

²⁸ Abbie Howland Class Letter 1880, Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections.

²⁹ Hattie Hinman Class Letter 1882, Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections

³⁰ Abbie Howland Class Letter 1882, Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections

Curriculum

Although the excellent teaching staff and good moral environment were important components of a DLC education, it was the broad scope of the curriculum which, according to De Mille, was the one feature which made his school unique in the Dominion. Similar in nature to the curricula at other ladies' colleges, DLC offered study in academic and collegiate streams combined with a liberal dose of ornamental study if so desired. There was also a preparatory stream for students who were not yet qualified to study at the collegiate level which included study in orthography (spelling), English grammar, composition, penmanship and Canadian history while studies in the academic stream added courses in bookkeeping, elocution (formal speaking), scripture history, analysis and geography. The Collegiate program was three years in length and included many of the courses mentioned in the academic stream but in addition offered study in Latin, French, algebra, physiology and zoology in the first year and Latin, French, English literature, geometry, astronomy, logic, ancient history, natural philosophy, natural theology, evidence of Christianity and scripture history in the second year. Senior students added studies in geology, chemistry, moral science and modern history. The textbooks used at DLC were the same as in the public school system including Harkness Latin Grammar and Reader, Potts' Euclid and Collier and Shaw English Literature. Degrees conferred were Mistress of Liberal Arts (M.L.A.) and Mistress of English Literature (M.E.L.) for studies confined to the English branch. By 1887, the latest year for which graduation information is available, DLC graduated 18 students of which 7 students had M.E.L.s.³¹

The ornamental or accomplishment branches of study included several courses of study along with the solid subjects. However ornamental instruction was in no way allowed to interfere with other subjects of greater educational importance for the purpose of ornamental work was "to furnish pleasant employment for many half hours which may otherwise be wasted."³² Tuition was based on study "in all the English branches, classics,

³¹ De Mille Ladies College Annual Calendar 1887-1888, from the archival collection of the Oshawa Museum, 6.

³² Ibid, 18

French, German, wax works and fancy needlework.”³³ Extras were defined as music, including vocal and instrumental, needlework, drawing and painting. Diplomas were awarded in instrumental music and harmony, vocal music, instrumental music, art and elocution.

From the very beginnings of the college, Reverend De Mille, emphasized the domestic roles the girls would assume upon graduation and stressed an education at DLC would properly prepare girls for this role. He suggested unhappy households were the fault of women because they lacked specific domestic training. He further claimed 90% of girls returning home from boarding school were useless.³⁴ De Mille’s idea was to include domestic training at the college level because he felt they complimented one another; “the home influence, the domestic knowledge with the necessity of being able to do all that is necessary in a well-kept home can be so interwoven in the college training.”³⁵ As students performed the necessary domestic chores at the college, De Mille argued, they were gaining meaningful experience in running a household and this combined with courses in domestic economy, digestion, food, health and habits of life ensured students were adequately prepared to assume their roles in the domestic sphere.³⁶ Having the

student perform the domestic work also cut down on the number of staff needed to run a school this size and in turn kept the tuition costs down.



Figure 4: Pillow made by Flossmary Yates at Demill College in St. Catherines. Circa 1895

³³ Ibid, 21

³⁴ Oshawa’s Female College, *Oshawa Vindicator*, August 12, 1873

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid.

Although preparation for roles in the private sphere was the expressed purpose of the education, there appears to be another, although more subtly expressed, goal of an education at Demill. This purpose was to prepare students, if warranted, for various vocational roles after graduation. Demill College advertised special classes, for those wishing to take their teaching certificates. Teaching was only one of the vocations open to females in the nineteenth century. Studies in the arts department “afforded those who are naturally gifted with the talent a rare opportunity of qualifying themselves to work independently in this sphere of art.”³⁷ Graduates of the music department were assured that upon completion of the three year course they were ready to assume teaching duties or proceed with more advanced instruction in the European conservatories. Studies in the ornamental branches were not promoted to the extent of



Figure 5: Tea time, Image of students at Demill College. Oshawa Archives

³⁷ Demill Ladies College Annual Calendar, 1881-1882, archival collection of the Oshawa Museum, pg 12.

the other branches for De Mille felt they must not interfere with the study of the more solid subjects, "The solid English branches with the language must hold a prominent place in the course of study. Proficiency in the Fine Arts is very desirable...but more important than these accomplishments are those studies which will serve to lay the foundation for a thorough English education...this means students will be better fitted to meet the requirements of future life."³⁸

The Students

Unfortunately little is known about most of the students who attended DLC however by matching the names from surviving school catalogues and graduation lists with census and family records, some information can be ascertained. At present we have the names and hometowns of over 300 DLC students and approximately 50% can be located in census or archival material.

The College attracted students from all over the province and Canada as well as the United States. Surviving class lists detail a student body representing towns and villages in New York, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan and the Northwest Territories. Although the school did not accept day students there were 6 girls (not including Reverend De Mille's 11 year old daughter) listed in the 1881 calendar as being from Oshawa. Several of these names were able to be matched with the 1881 census records. Three of the girls were well above the minimum entrance age of 16. Mary Hancock was 19 and in the preparatory stream, Florence Carswell was 21 and Letitia Annis was 22 and in the first year of the collegiate program. This was not unheard of as education scholars have noted "it was not unusual for a young girl to be taught at home and then in her early teens, to be sent to school for as short a time as a term or for as long as a number of years."³⁹ All the girls came from families of at least 5 children and the Demill students were either first or second oldest. None of their fathers were classified as professionals but occupations included farmers (Hancock and Annis) and an orator (Carswell).

³⁸ De Mille Ladies' College Annual Calendar 1886-1887, archival collection of the Oshawa Museum, 15

³⁹ Susan Houston and Alison Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 323

Since there are no surviving testimonials from the girls any suggestions as to why local parents would pay the cost of tuition for a boarding school in their home town would be speculative. What is known is DLC students received many accolades in the local press whenever they hosted recitals or art exhibitions. The reputation for producing excellent results may have been enough to convince some parents of the benefits of an education at DLC. Others such as Edward Carswell, a well known temperance lecturer and artist, may have been convinced by the strong religious influences at the school. Not one of the families could be considered upper class perhaps suggesting the females were expecting to have at least some work experience prior to marriage. The training opportunities offered in teaching or the fine arts may have been a strong impetus, especially in the cases of the older girls for an education at Demill.

Most of DLC's students however were from outside of Oshawa and some came from well-known families. Rebecca Hermine and Agnes Edith Livingston of Baden Ontario attended De Mille in 1883/1884. They were the daughters of Ontario industrialist James Livingston who operated a flaxseed business and served as a member of Provincial Parliament and in the House of Commons.⁴⁰ Rebecca and Agnes seemed to enjoy their time at DLC for in a letter to their father Rebecca states "I think I would rather stay here than go to a strange school. Being that we are acquainted and some students come not far from home."⁴¹

Some of the DLC attendees pursued roles in the public sphere after their education. Jennie M. Simpson attended the school for 3 years in the early 1880s and in 1884 she entered the College of Dentistry of the University of California. Dr. Simpson practiced dentistry in San Francisco for a number of years and held the position of visiting dentist to Children's Hospital. Blanche Lehigh MacLean spent a number of years at DLC starting in 1886 and graduated in elocution in 1892. Blanche continued her education at the Toronto Conservatory of Music where she received a voice degree after which she

⁴⁰ James Livingston's former residence, Castle Kilbride is a National Historic Site

⁴¹ Letter written by Rebecca Livingston to her father James Livingston dated February 3, 1884. Courtesy of Castle Kilbride, National Historic Site.

moved to Nova Scotia to teach elocution and calisthenics at Halifax Ladies' College. She later became Dean of Women at Acadia University. The moral discipline characteristic of an education at Demill greatly impacted Blanche for the rest of her life and "she conducted herself according to these strict moral principles."⁴² Blanche's famous grandchildren, Warren Beatty and Shirley McLaine, were both influenced professionally and personally by their grandmother MacLean. Beatty's great-aunt Katie Lehigh also attended DLC where she studied music and later became a pianoforte instructor.⁴³

"The College is doomed"- The End of Demill Ladies' College

The end of DLC was foreshadowed in the Ontario Reformer, "it will readily be seen that unless some great and unforeseen calamity befall it, there is a brilliant future in store."⁴⁴ For 20 years the town of Oshawa basked in the outstanding reputation of DLC and its excellent curriculum. The accolades ended on April 10, 1896 when fire broke out in one of the chimneys of the school.⁴⁵ Fortunately it was Easter weekend and many students were away from school visiting their homes. Newspaper reports state some students with rooms near the chimney smelled smoke earlier in the afternoon and proceeded to pack their trunks, in order to prepare for a quick evacuation. De Mille describes the cause of the fire in *In the Net*, "The iron smoke stack running from the boiler in the basement to the roof, and some distance above the top of the building, had burned out, causing live embers to be carried by the wind on to the roof of the observatory, which was covered by wooden shingles. These ignited, and as the fire was considerably above the College, it was not easy to extinguish."⁴⁶ By 7:00 p.m. an alarm was given and more than one thousand spectators arrived to watch the College as it was engulfed in flames. There was no water on the hill where the College so there was little that could be done to stop the fire from spreading. The Town hand engine was sent for but it got stuck in the mud several times on its way to the College and took more than an hour to arrive. With no water available on the hill the hand engine was of little use. The steam engine

⁴² Susan Finstad, *A Private Man*, (New York: Harmony Books, 2005) 18.

⁴³ Susan Finstad, *A Private Man*, 18

⁴⁴ Ontario Reformer, 1876

⁴⁵ De Mille, *In the Net*, 65

⁴⁶ Ibid.

was sent for but it was of little use by the time it arrived on the scene at 9 pm, for the “heart of the building had burned out and caved several times and the ends were burning furiously.”⁴⁷ Having exhausted all efforts to contain the fire, there was nothing left to do but let the College burn. A scene of devastation met De Mille upon his return from Toronto, “On my return (to the College) a scene met my gaze such as I hope to never see again. The institution which had been almost as much to us as our existence lay in ruins.”⁴⁸ Losses were reported to be between \$25,000 and \$30,000 and insurance coverage was \$20,000.⁴⁹

Fortunately for the students, De Mille was able to salvage the school year. Within sixteen days of the fire, De Mille had moved operations to temporary premises in Toronto. That year’s commencement exercises were held in the Normal School (teacher’s training college) in Toronto.

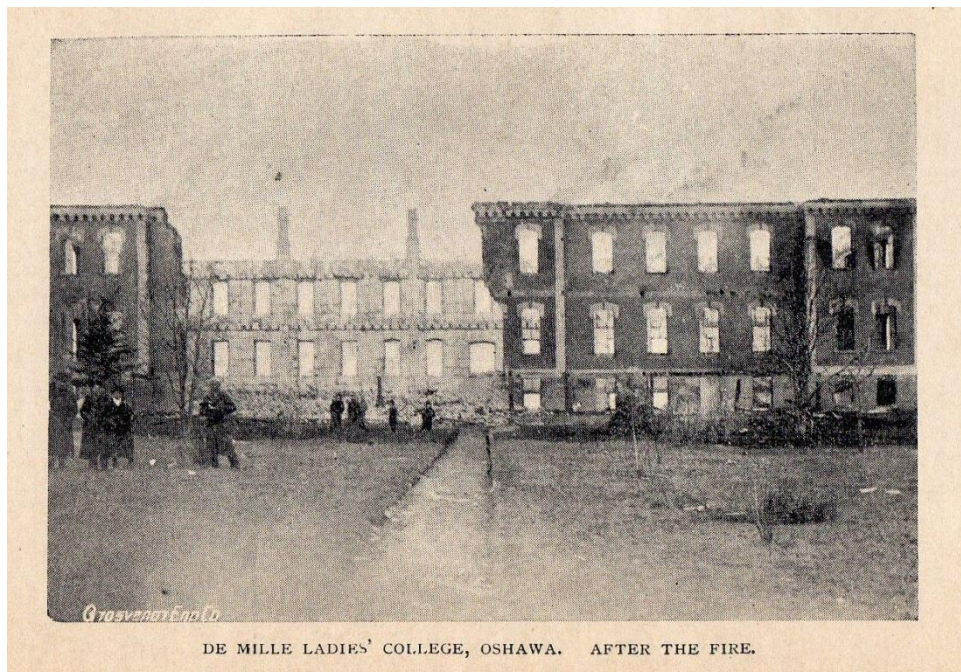


Figure 6: After the fire. From De Mille’s book *In the Net*

During the summer of 1896, public meetings were held in Oshawa and the general consensus was to encourage De Mille to rebuild. The Town of Oshawa offered to help

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

secure financial aid for this purpose however financial considerations made it more feasible to secure a building already erected. After visiting several cities and towns, De Mille made the decision to move the college to St. Catharines, Ontario where it occupied the former Sanatorium building known as Stephenson House.⁵⁰ During the ensuing years DLC suffered from declining enrollment until 1902 when its graduating class was only 3 students.⁵¹ It was another fire, at Bishop Ridley College, a preparatory school for boys also located in St. Catharines that spelled the end for DLC. De Mille's landlord allowed Bishop Ridley College to use the DLC premises until they could rebuild. De Mille recounts his frustrations at the turn of events, "the Principal (of Ridley College) persuaded the parties from whom we purchased to allow them the use of our College ...assuring them that we could get other premises in which to continue our work. That, however, was impossible. We had not recovered from the great loss sustained of our Oshawa College and the break in patronage at that time. A very expensive heating plant, with other necessary improvements that had to be made after the purchase in St. Catharines, rendered it impossible to make the payments as arranged."⁵² As a result De Mille made the tough decision to close the school knowing it would be impossible to re-open until all debts were paid.

Although De Mille's twenty-eight year career as a female educator ended with the closing of the St. Catharines campus, he continued to write books and preach about the dangers of a Catholic education for Protestant girls. He passed away in Peterborough, Ontario in 1913.

⁵⁰ *In the Net* pg 66

⁵¹ <http://www.stcatharinesstandard.ca/2017/06/02/yesterday-and-today-a-corner-with-a-history>

⁵² *In the Net* pg 22.



Figure 7: Demill Ladies College in St. Catharines.