

Phipps Union Seminary a source of pride

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Orleans County historian

Phipps Union Seminary was once a center of activity on Court House Square. It was a school for young ladies from Albion and far beyond. It was located at the spot where pioneer William McAllister built the first log cabin in Albion, where the old Eagle Tavern once stood and where the county clerk's and surrogate's office stands today.

This school was a source of culture and pride for the people of Albion from 1837 to 1875. It was also a milestone in the progress of equality for American women.

At the time, secondary education was primarily something for boys — not girls. Likewise, secondary education was by tuition because there were no free public high schools in 1837. Medina Free Academy, established in 1850, was only the third such "high school" in New York state at the time.

Phipps Union Seminary founder Miss Caroline Phipps attended the district school at Eagle Harbor, and, at only 14 years of age, taught the children at a district school at Gaines Basin. She went on to Gaines Academy and a girls school at Whitesboro. In 1833, she



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opened a school in the Eagle Tavern building.

But the industrious and ambitious young lady dreamed of greater things, namely a select school for girls.

She was determined to raise \$5,000 from local residents; appealing to more

progressive minds, the money was raised. A four-story brick building for classrooms and a dormitory was erected. Within a short time, 100 borders and 100 day-students were attending.

Later, romance entered the picture and Phipps married Henry J. Achilles of Rochester. Twice she turned the school over to other hands; twice it began to fail; and twice she returned to save it. In 1875, a fire caused some damage in the rear of the building. As a result, the school never reopened. It was at this time that the Albion Union Free School

was formed, thus providing secondary education for those who desired.

In 1882, the county bought the Phipps lot and building and tore the seminary down. This provided space for the current county clerk's office, which was built in 1882-83.

A bronze tablet mounted on the basement level of the legislative building notes the following: To mark the site of Phipps Union Female Seminary, founded in 1833, and in memory of the founder Caroline Phipps Achilles, this tablet is placed by the Seminary Association May 1913."