

Sarah Raymond Fitzwilliam (1842-1918) was born in Kendall County, Illinois on October 11, 1842.¹ Once the superintendent of the Bloomington, Illinois public schools, Sarah is considered to be the first female superintendent of a city school system in the United States. Her life was defined by her independence and drive, and in many ways, she is remembered as a woman far ahead of her time.

Sarah Raymond was the third of five children born to Jonathan and Catherine (Holt) Raymond and the only daughter. Catherine and Jonathan were married in 1831 in Massachusetts.² Just three years later in 1834, they decided to move west. The journey required several modes of transportation. They traveled by stage, the Erie Canal, a Great Lake schooner, and a “prairie schooner” (Conestoga wagon) with five yoke of oxen.³ They took shelter during the winter of 1834 in a cabin owned by John West Mason in Holderman’s Grove in Kendall County before they settled in Big Grove Township, also in Kendall County. They settled on section 27 W ½ N.E. ¼, which was about two and a half miles west of Lisbon and on the Chicago and Ottawa stage route.⁴ They were some of the first white settlers in the area and were about a mile from a community of about 800 indigenous peoples. The conditions were difficult to adjust to, and many of their crops failed and froze. However, there were lots of game, deer, turkeys, and wild hogs to hunt which was how the family survived.⁵

Sarah’s family had a highly educated background with lawyers, educators, and businessmen on both sides. Jonathan apprenticed to learn mechanics back in Massachusetts and was later elected as the Kendall County sheriff in 1856.⁶ Her brothers also went on to have esteemed careers. Lyman Hamilton Raymond was a farmer and teacher, George Washington Raymond was a Civil War captain and farmer, Charles Lincoln Raymond was a lawyer turned businessman, and Frank Chase Raymond studied medicine and ended up raising stock in Kansas and Texas.⁷

Her father, Jonathan, also helped build the first Congregational Church in northern Illinois outside of Chicago.⁸ Congregationalists were known for their abolitionist beliefs, and the Raymond family was no different. Many settlers in the area were from New England, including Onieda, New York, an area known for its ties to the abolitionist movement. In *The History of Kendall County*, Sarah wrote in detail about her family’s involvement with the Underground Railroad. She discussed their role in the Underground Railroad writing:

“They were from Massachusetts, and dyed-in-the-wool Abolitionists. From early childhood I was accustomed to see the black fugitives off and on, at my father’s residence, until Lincoln’s proclamation broke the slave’s fetters...My father and mother estimated that they has aided 200 negroes to freedom...With my young, girlish eyes I

¹ “Mrs. Fitzwilliam Dead in Chicago,” *The Pantagraph*, February 1, 1918.

² Monica Noraian. *Women’s Rights, Racial, Integration and Education from 1850-1920*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 23.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 21-24.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸ *Ibid.*

looked on and listened to the strange stories told by these dark brothers in my father's home. These stories have lived with me through these many years.⁹

Sarah's early years witnessed the horrors of enslavement, rare for many living in the northern part of the United States. This early exposure led Sarah to live a life focused on justice for all, and her primary method of doing that was through education.

Sarah spent her early days in the rural and relatively "crude" schools that were first established where she grew up.¹⁰ Her first year of school was spent in a log cabin, which was also used as a church on Sundays.¹¹ She later attended the Academy at Lisbon. The school employed teachers originally from Vermont and was said to provide the "finest corps of teachers in the West."¹² Many of the early frontier teachers, such as the ones that would have educated Sarah in Lisbon, moved out west as single women. They tended to marry later in life, but often remained active professionally.¹³ This would have been unusual for women at this time and no doubt had an influence on Sarah's view of women's work and their roles in society.

In 1856, after Sarah's father was elected as the sheriff, the family moved to Oswego, the Kendall County seat. This was also where she attended high school.¹⁴ She did not attend college directly after high school and decided to immediately work in a role that would eventually become her calling: teaching. She started her career early and some historical records suggest that she was teaching in Kendall County as early as age sixteen.¹⁵ In 1860, records show her teaching at four different schools: Austin in Fox Township, Fourth Ward, Fowler Institute in Newark, and Hollenback in a red schoolhouse.¹⁶

In 1862 at age nineteen, she enrolled at the Illinois State Normal University at Normal, Illinois (ISNU).¹⁷ At that time, the role of ISNU was to train teachers. By 1864, the Raymond family moved to Bloomington to provide better educational opportunities for their children. They ended up staying in Bloomington for the rest of their lives.¹⁸

While enrolled at ISNU, Sarah would have practiced her teaching at the Model school. The Model school allowed ISNU students to get true, hands-on teaching experience before leaving college.¹⁹ This also gave Sarah the opportunity to have a better understanding of the administration needs of a school as the students were exposed to all facets of education. Founded in 1857, ISNU was a coeducational institution meaning that, for the most part, women and men received the same access to education. Sarah would have had classes with men and would have been given the same workload.

Also, during her time at ISNU, she was assigned to be a member of the Wrightonia Society – one of two literary societies on campus (the other being the Philadelphian Society).²⁰

⁹ *History of Kendall County*. (Chicago: Munsell Publishing Company, 1914), 766-767; Lincoln's proclamation refers to the Emancipation Proclamation that went into effect on January 1, 1863 that declared enslaved people in Confederate states (states rebelling against the Union) to be free.

¹⁰ "Mrs. Fitzwilliam Dead in Chicago"

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Noraian*, 29.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 49.

Societies such as these provided what students would refer to today as “networking opportunities.” Students were exposed to poetry readings, debates, and lectures. They also provided leadership opportunities. ISNU was unique for letting women join these literary societies. Just under 50 miles away, the women at the Industrial University (later called the University of Illinois) in Urbana, Illinois were not permitted to do the same.²¹ Again, due to Sarah’s circumstances and location, she was exposed to ideas and roles for women that many others in the United States at this time would not have been.

Sarah Raymond graduated from ISNU on June 27, 1866 – four years after entering.²² At the time, the curriculum at ISNU was designed to be only three years and it is not clear why Sarah stayed for four. Many students would take time off to teach, but it seems like Sarah just extended her studies for longer.²³ After graduation, she went back to Kendall County and took a position in the English Department at the Fowler Institute for two years.²⁴

In 1868, she came back to Bloomington and began teaching in the Bloomington Public Schools, now referred to as District 87. She taught second grade at School No. 5, located at Walnut and West (today known as Roosevelt Avenue where Bent Elementary School is currently located).²⁵ The school had a reputation for difficult and rowdy students, but Sarah helped to turn the school into one of the best in the region, and became the principal after her first year of teaching.²⁶ When she began teaching, her salary was \$40 a month (the equivalent of \$884 in 2023).²⁷ By the time she was principal, her monthly wage rose to \$65 (or \$1,500 in 2023).²⁸

While Sarah was the principal of the No. 5 school, there was an increasing population of Black residents in Bloomington. In 1870, the U.S. Census showed that there were 14,590 residents in Bloomington, 235 of which were listed as “Negro,” and by 1890, those numbers increased to 20,464 and 469, respectively.²⁹ With an increase in the Black population, the question of where Black children should go to school arose multiple times. Even though Bloomington was located north of the Mason-Dixon, there were still plenty of white Bloomingtonians who did not want Black children to be educated amongst white children. The records show that the first school for Black children in Bloomington opened in 1860 on South Madison Street.³⁰ The State of Illinois did not provide funding for Black schools, but the city of Bloomington gave a very small and inequitable piece of the local property taxes to the school on South Madison. To fill the gaps in funds, the local African Methodist Episcopal Church (Wayman A.M.E.) along with the school was able to raise money to keep the school open.³¹ Still, the conditions were not equal to that of their white counterparts and, for many residents, the distance to travel to the school was considerable.³² Some Black families had their students attempt to attend the No. 5 school, but the police removed the students “somewhat violently.”³³

²¹ Ibid., 50.

²² Ibid., 53.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 67.

²⁵ Candace Summers. “Raymond a trailblazer in education,” *The Pantagraph*, May 22, 2022.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Measuringworth.com, date accessed September 12, 2024.

²⁸ Noraian, 69; Measuringworth.com, date accessed September 12, 2024.

²⁹ Ibid., 68.

³⁰ Bill Kemp. “Bloomington schools integrated decade after Civil War,” *The Pantagraph*, February 10, 2019.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Noraian, 71.

³³ “The colored children and the schools again,” *The Pantagraph*, January 26, 1871.

Sarah, a staunch abolitionist, agreed with the Black community and felt that students should not have to travel long distances to go to school. Although there was a long back-and-forth battle with the courts, Sarah didn't wait for any legal decisions and admitted the Black students to the No. 5 school.³⁴ The Bloomington courts faced several legal challenges regarding integration during this time. In June 1871, Judge Thomas Tipton resolved all the cases of public school integration together and concluded that the school board had the right to decide where the city's children should go to school.³⁵ This meant that the schools could still be segregated as long as the board provided a school for Black children and the voters needed to vote out the current school board if they wanted to see change. It wasn't until 1874 that the Illinois Supreme Court outlawed school segregation.

In 1873, Sarah became the principal at Bloomington High School, the same year the Bloomington City Directory shows her living at 507 Mason Street in Bloomington.³⁶ Her role at the high school was short-lived, however, because just one year after that, she was appointed as the superintendent for the school district.³⁷ A woman taking on this role was unheard of at the time. In fact, it is estimated that Sarah was the first woman to be superintendent of a city school system in the nation. In 1875, *The Pantagraph* reported that:

“The appointment was the first of the kind recorded, in the West at least; and the selection of Miss Sarah E. Raymond to this high post of honor was commented upon generally by the press. Since then, we have heard of the appointment of several ladies to similar positions, among others one to the superintendency of schools of Davenport, Iowa. So to Bloomington must be given the credit of making the first departure from established custom.”³⁸

The Board voted her into the role 3-2, with two members not present. While it seemed like she only got the position by one vote, the two members that were out of town did vocalize their support for Sarah.³⁹ Those who cast the dissenting votes were actually “both personal friends and admirers of Miss Raymond, and only voted as they did for the reason that from principle they preferred that the office of Superintendent should be filled by a man.”⁴⁰ This set the tone for Sarah's tenure as Bloomington's superintendent. Not only was the job in and of itself a massive undertaking, she also bore the responsibility of proving her competence despite her gender.

The City of Bloomington took a great deal of pride in its school system when Sarah took on the role of superintendent. This could be attributed to also being home to a Normal School that trained some of the state's finest teachers. In an article examining the state of the city's schools *The Pantagraph* reported in 1875:

“...it is certain that no city of its size has to-day a class of citizen who take a more lively interest in its schools, or who are more willing to bear all just burdens imposed upon them for their support and improvement. Nor is it possible to find another city of the size and importance of Bloomington in which the effects of this spirit are more plainly

³⁴ Noraian, 71.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ *Bloomington City Directory 1873*.

³⁷ Summers.

³⁸ “Among the Schools,” *The Pantagraph*, April 3, 1875.

³⁹ “The School Superintendency,” *The Pantagraph*, July 9, 1874.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

manifested in the material forms of costly, elegant and convenient buildings, and more especially in the perfection of the working of its school system and the esprit du corps that seems to animate the able body of teachers to whom the schools have been entrusted.”⁴¹

This didn’t mean that the school district was without faults. In fact, Sarah inherited a bit of a mess. There were no male teachers out of 53 employees, several accounting errors, huge financial debts, and an incoherent curriculum.⁴² She also faced the challenge of training teachers to work up to her standards, which seemed to be different than her predecessor.⁴³ However, with Sarah in charge, it seemed like the pieces of a somewhat broken system came together.

In 1875, a reporter from *The Pantagraph* went to visit the local schools and reported that the students and teachers seemed happy and engaged with their course of study and that they were “convinced that [the schools] were never in a better condition than at present.”⁴⁴ However, one of the largest issues the Sarah dealt with was building maintenance. There were issues with furnances and the price to heat the buildings was of concern. However, it was reported that in 1875 Sarah and the board secured one of the lowest prices for coal the city had seen in years.⁴⁵

Sarah also had to consider the fact that the population was growing exponentially, and the school buildings were not constructed to handle a growing student body. In 1875, there were 2,919 students enrolled with only 53 teachers.⁴⁶ This meant the city’s student to teacher ratio was 55:1. While this ratio wasn’t necessarily ideal for student learning, especially by 21st-century standards, it did mean that the school district was saving money on teacher salaries. For example, *The Pantagraph* reported that when one teacher resigned from the No. 1 building in April 1875, the students would be redistributed into existing classrooms.⁴⁷ This meant savings for the school district as they did not rehire and had one less salary to pay, but it also meant larger class sizes.

Additionally, Sarah took the time to administer a census to count the number of persons under the age of 21 residing in the city. This was important because the State of Illinois would provide a certain amount of tax money to school districts based on the amount of those under 21 living there. Sarah took it upon herself to readminister the census and found that the number previously reported (5,884) was incorrect. The amount of persons under 21 was actually 7,331 – a difference of over 1,000 people.⁴⁸ This was just one of the several small and detail-oriented changes brought upon by Sarah that worked to save the school district, and taxpayers, money. However, some of the savings were also due to the fact that Sarah made a significantly lower salary than her predecessor, a man. Her predecessor, Samuel D. Gaylord, made a yearly salary of \$2,000 (or approximately \$52,500 in 2023) while Sarah never made more than \$1,800 a year (or approximately \$62, 200 in 2023).⁴⁹

The inequities in pay never deterred Sarah from doing high-quality work. One of the ways she got the curriculum back on track was through regular meetings with teachers. These meetings were a way to get everyone on the same page and standardize the curriculum. Sarah, as

⁴¹ Among the Schools.”

⁴² Summers.

⁴³ “Among the Schools.”

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ “Our Schools: Regular Meeting of the City Board of Education Last Evening,” *The Pantagraph*, April 6, 1875.

⁴⁸ “Among the Schools.”

⁴⁹ Noraian, 86; Measuringworth.com, date accessed September 12, 2024.

the superintendent, would lead the meetings, and discuss topics such as getting parents more involved in their children's education, getting books in the classroom, and that the goal of a Bloomington public school education should be to produce "useful self-reliant citizens."⁵⁰

Sarah was re-appointed to the role of superintendent in July 1875. A petition was circulated and presented to the board that showed community investment in Sarah as superintendent. The petition was signed by 658 voters and included members of the McLean County Bar and leading businessmen.⁵¹ The teachers also had a petition that expressed their satisfaction with Sarah and urged the board to reinstate her. The petition read:

"We the undersigned teachers wish respectfully to express our opinion that Miss Sarah E. Raymond is sufficient as superintendent of our schools. We deem the harmony with which the schools have been connected as evidence of her success. Her examinations of our classes have been thorough and satisfactory."⁵²

There was a man who "had not the courage enough to face the Board himself," and had a board member present another petition asking for a man to fill the role. There was another petition present as well in favor of a male candidate.⁵³ Despite the minor detractors, Sarah was once again elected to the office of superintendent.

One small note at the end of *The Pantagraph's* article discussing Sarah's reelection read, "Miss Trotter also asked to be excused from voting for personal reasons, but changed her mind and voted." Sarah Raymond and Georgina Trotter were close personal friends. They worked together often while Georgina was on the school board. Georgina was one of the first women in the United States to serve on a school board. She was elected on April 6, 1874, even though as a woman, she did not have the right to vote.⁵⁴ However, Georgina was always a reluctant public servant and only ran due to the public's faith in her abilities. Though she did not have a desire to be in public service, Georgina could not refuse the position on the Board of Education when elected to the office. Georgina said in her letter of acceptance that a "conviction of duty and a high appreciation of your substantial and practical recognition of the rights of women compel me to accept the invitation which you have generously extended."⁵⁵ She served on the board for fifteen years (five consecutive terms), right alongside Sarah.

Sarah and Georgina fought an uphill battle to prove they were worthy of these positions to members of the community. It was unusual to see two women in such positions of power and some individuals were opposed to women (childless women for that matter), running the schools when these offices had traditionally been held by men.⁵⁶ They were stronger together and it was obvious that Sarah having such a close friend on the board allowed them to collaborate more effectively.

As superintendent, Sarah worked with the board to improve efficiency in the schools. One way she did this was by revising the curriculums for the different grade levels. Georgina also believed that streamlining the curriculum could bring about better outcomes for students and save the district money over time. In March 1875, Georgina suggested the idea of shortening the

⁵⁰ Ibid., 87.

⁵¹ "Our Schools: Special Meeting of the Board of Education Last Evening," *The Pantagraph*, July, 13, 1875.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Emily Swartz and Candace Summers, "Georgina Trotter," McLean County Museum of History, 2024, 6.

⁵⁵ Noraian, 76

⁵⁶ "The Board Election," *The Pantagraph*, April 3, 1886.

course of high school “from six to three years, or at least to a shorter time than six years.” She claimed that the course, as it was then, “was too complete—far beyond that contemplated by the law.” She stated that very few students who entered high school completed the necessary course. Georgina also noted that the incoming class of high school students for the 1874-75 school year was 75 students, but only 7 students would be graduating. She felt that if some of the coursework was moved to the ward schools that it would reduce pressure on the high school, encouraging more students to graduate and reducing expenses.⁵⁷

The board weighed the pros and cons of making such a change and a decision on whether to cut one or two years off the high school course of study still had not been reached by June that year.⁵⁸ By the July meeting, the board and Superintendent Raymond had solidified a plan to cut the high school curriculum from six years down to three years. Many of the courses that were proposed earlier to be cut remained in the new course guide, just spread out between grammar school and high school. Students were also given the option to add German and Latin at the high school level.⁵⁹ The new course guidelines were implemented for the 1875-76 school year.

The changes seemed to work and, in an effort to make public education more accessible for high school students that had to work during the day, Sarah and Georgina supported the idea of a night school. In October 1876, Georgina made a motion that the committee on school examiners be instructed to inquire into the possibility of opening an evening school. Her fellow board members wholeheartedly endorsed this idea and instructed the school examiners committee to look into the feasibility of putting the plan into action by November 1. It appears that the evening school was started, as there is mention of the appointment of new teachers for the school in December 1877.⁶⁰ While this endeavor appears to be short-lived, it illustrated the lengths Sarah would go to make education available to all that wanted to learn and the collaboration between the superintendent and the board.

In September 1877, Sarah spoke to residents through a column in *The Pantagraph* about the importance of their support in the education of their city’s children. She talked in depth about the importance of regular attendance for students, writing:

“Regularity of attendance is greatly to be desired and to be labored for earnestly if the best work of pupils is to be achieved, and our school system to be made most profitable. . . We urge it upon every parent during the coming year to give us his best effort toward regularity and promptness of attendance on the part of his child.”⁶¹

In the column, Sarah acknowledges that there was “some trouble” with new rules and regulations, but the updates were “complete and seem to fit every need.”⁶² This is one of many examples of Sarah emphasizing the role of parents in their children’s education. Years later in 1880, Sarah addressed a large audience at Washingtonian Hall in downtown Bloomington on the subject of “The Child at Home.”⁶³ It is clear that while Sarah believed in the importance of an excellent school system to educate the youth, she also knew that support was needed from all adults in a child’s life.

⁵⁷ “Our Schools,” *The Pantagraph*, March 2, 1875.

⁵⁸ “The School Bosses,” *The Pantagraph*, Jun 8, 1875.

⁵⁹ “Work Enough for All,” *The Pantagraph*, August 18, 1875; “Our Schools,” *The Pantagraph*, June 15, 1875.

⁶⁰ “Schools and Scholars,” *The Pantagraph*, December 4, 1877.

⁶¹ “Continuation of Miss Raymond’s Report,” *The Pantagraph*, September 10, 1877.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ “The City: About the Town,” *The Pantagraph*, September 6, 1880.

The changes to the curriculum seemed to make a significant difference to the quality of education in Bloomington Public Schools. By 1880, only five years after initially revamping the course offerings, Bloomington High School earned a spot on the accredited list for the Industrial University (now the University of Illinois).⁶⁴ This meant that the premier public university in the state recognized the legitimacy of a Bloomington High School education. The willingness to change what was not working and innovate for better student outcomes was finally recognized.

However, it wasn't always a pleasant experience leading the schools. While Bloomington schools experienced a time filled with many successes and improvements, there was also a particularly challenging situation and dark time during her first term on the board; when a student named Harry Bryant took his own life.

Before noon on July 2, 1876, 15-year-old Harry Bryant took his own life by shooting himself in the head in the basement of his parent's home on South Lee Street.⁶⁵ According to a special statement (given to the press) written by his mother, Mrs. Thomas Bryant, she blamed, what she called, "his school degradation" was what had killed him. "That his noble aspirations were crushed by the actions of the superintendent (Sarah Raymond), his principal, and his teacher as he prepared to enter the high school."⁶⁶ According to his mother, Harry passed the exam for entrance into high school on June 15, 1875. He examined with the class ahead of him and received a full certificate to enter high school. Mrs. Bryant stated that her son came home delighted and triumphant over his year of hard work. When the new school year began that fall, Harry appeared to be struggling with his classwork at the high school level, possibly because he was a year ahead of what he should have been. According to Mrs. Bryant, Harry's teacher, Mrs. Anderson, "poorly managed the class" and more than half of the class failed. Mrs. Bryant claimed that Mrs. Anderson did not talk to her about Harry falling behind, and that he was at threat of being put back in the ward schools. Mrs. Bryant stated that Mrs. Anderson had only warned Harry once that he was in danger of falling behind.

Unfortunately, Harry was "degraded" and sent back to the Third Ward School. According to his mother, he was humiliated and inconsolable. His new teacher, Mrs. Johnson, worked with Harry for a time to help him improve. And after working with him, Mrs. Johnson "found him entirely above grade" and that he "was far superior" to be in the ward school.⁶⁷ Despite his improvements, Harry was denied a second chance to be back in the high school ahead of his grade (denied by the Miss Dunn, the high school principal, and Superintendent Raymond). After his denial, Harry came home in utter anguish, saying he had disgraced his family and wanted to die. Mrs. Bryant assured her son that the ward school would gladly receive him and that he could continue working hard to get back into the high school. But Harry felt he would disgrace the ward school too. An additional blow to Harry was the fact that his teacher, Mrs. Johnson (who said she could work with him to get him back into the high school) was removed from her position by Superintendent Raymond. And, according to his mother, the two teachers that Harry had afterwards, did not give Harry the attention he needed, so he lost interest in his schoolwork at the ward school.⁶⁸

At the end of the school year, Harry attempted to take the exam for admission into the high school once again. But he encountered students who were four grades behind him trying to

⁶⁴ Noraian, 93.

⁶⁵ "A Boy's Suicide," *The Pantagraph*, July 3, 1876; "Harry Bryant's Suicide," *The Pantagraph*, July 18, 1876.

⁶⁶ "The Bryant Case," *The Pantagraph*, July 19, 1876.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

test into the high school. All of the degradation Harry suffered seemed to come back to him and his exam proved a failure in two studies. Despite this, he did receive his diploma and graduated to the high school. However, Harry vowed to not go to the high school based on the treatment he received the first time from that “petty high school” as he called it.

According to Mrs. Bryant, all of this was preventable. She demanded the removal of Superintendent Raymond (along with her son’s teacher Mrs. Anderson, and the high school principal, Miss Dunn). She added that she had received no “words of regret” or sympathy from Raymond, Anderson, or Dunn. And that the only person that she had heard from, was Harry’s “noble teacher,” Mrs. Johnson.⁶⁹

Two members of the Board of Education signed on for the call to hold a special meeting of the board on July 17, 1876, to hear the statement of Bryant’s parents. However, there was not a quorum of board members in attendance to hold the meeting. Board member Jacob Jacoby stated that Mrs. Bryant could give the statement to the three board members present (plus Superintendent Raymond). However, Mrs. Bryant refused to entrust the statement to the board or read it to those present at the meeting, and instead turned it over to members of the press. Georgina Trotter was not able to attend this meeting.⁷⁰

At the regular August meeting of the school board, Sarah presented a statement to the board. She called upon evidence that the boy’s doctor, Dr. William Hill, had examined Bryant two days before he took his own life. She stated that it was Dr. Hill’s opinion that Bryant had been suffering from “mental aberration,” the cause of which was not known. And it was the boy’s parents who unjustly blamed her, the schools, and the board for their son’s untimely death.⁷¹ Additionally, Sarah Raymond stated that the decision to move Bryant back to the ward school was based on his performance in class, stating that he was performing poorly. She and Bryant’s teacher were only doing what they felt was best for him. Sarah stated that she “had no feeling against Harry, but had the opposite, sympathized for him and his family.” She also stated that there had been no application made for a new high school entrance exam for Bryant. Thus, the matter appears to have been closed as no further information was presented to the school board after the September 1876 meeting.⁷²

Although the death of a student is always horrifically tragic and deeply sad, the community seemed to remain satisfied with the performance of the schools. When two school board seats, belonging to Georgina Trotter and Jacob Jacoby, were up for reelection, the city called upon them to run again. Georgina was a reluctant candidate even though her performance was praised by the public. A group of leading men of the city authored a letter calling for her to accept their nomination to run for the Board of Education again. In it, they said that her further services were indispensable to the success of Bloomington Public Schools.⁷³ Georgina, reluctantly capitulated to their will, stating that she was deeply grateful for their confidence in her abilities, and would name herself as a candidate once again.⁷⁴ In a Letter to the Editor from a resident signed “Tax-Payer,” the author pushes for voters to support both Trotter and Jacoby. He wrote, “Why then not re-reelect Mr. Jacoby and Miss Trotter? No one complains of the schools or of their management...Let every voter and tax payer understand that a change means the

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ “Harry Bryant’s Suicide.”

⁷¹ “The Harry Bryant Case Again,” *The Weekly Leader*, August 17, 1876; “The Bryant Suicide,” *The Pantagraph*, August 22, 1876.

⁷² “The Irrepressible Conflicts,” *The Pantagraph*, September 26, 1876.

⁷³ “To Jacob Jacoby, Esq. and Miss Georgiana Trotter,” *The Pantagraph*, March 31, 1880.

⁷⁴ “Miss Trotter Accepts,” *The Pantagraph*, April 3, 1880.

displacement of Miss Raymond and the substitution in her place of some man.”⁷⁵ Both Trotter and Jacoby were re-elected, thus sealing a reappointment for Sarah Raymond as well.⁷⁶

The school board worked with Sarah Raymond continued to work together to improve the schools. In addition to the before mentioned successes, their efforts added more classrooms and almost completely eliminated corporal punishment (a form punishment in which a rod, cane, or paddle was used to hit a student).⁷⁷ In the 1872-73 school year, there were 353 suspensions. This number declined yearly and there were only 20 suspensions during the 1881-82 school year.⁷⁸ Even better, during the 1882-83 school year, there were only 13.⁷⁹ Attendance numbers also drastically improved throughout Sarah’s tenure and during the 1881-82 school year, there were only 1,262 cases of tardiness for a student body of 3,447. Sarah’s performance was so excellent that she received attention from across the country. On November 23, 1881, *The Pantagraph* reported that Sarah received a job offer from the Territorial College in Seattle, Washington. The position, taking charge of the university’s Normal Department (teaching department), would have paid a higher salary than what she made as superintendent in Bloomington.⁸⁰ Despite the appealing offer, Sarah stayed in her role in Bloomington emphasizing her dedication to her community.

An increasing population meant the number of teachers had to increase to 70 (up from just over 50 less than a decade ago) in 1882.⁸¹ Due to the steady increase in Bloomington’s population, the existing schools were overcrowded. More teachers could not fix limited building space. This meant it was difficult for teachers to meet the needs of all the students and made for a challenging learning environment for the students as well. To continue to meet the educational needs of the students in Bloomington Public Schools, five school buildings were constructed between 1877 and 1888 (Market School on Mason and Market streets in 1877, Jefferson School at the corner of Jefferson and Clayton streets in 1879, School #6 was rebuilt and expanded in 1879, School #4 at Evans and Taylor streets in 1884, and the Raymond School on the 1400 block of West Olive Street in 1888).⁸² Still, even with increased needs, the school district was debt-free by 1881. Georgina Trotter, known for being a shrewd businesswoman, kept the school district out of debt during her tenure in office.⁸³

One way the debt stayed low was due to the fact that many of the expenditures remained relatively stable during Sarah’s time as superintendent. However, salaries could not stay stagnant forever. As the school board began to work on plans for the 1885-86 school year, the topic of teacher salaries came up for discussion. Salary increases were recommended to several groups of educators including high school teachers (from \$55.00 to \$57.50 per month), principals at schools number 1-4 and Jefferson School (from \$75.00 to \$80.00 per month) and raising the salary of the principal of the high school, Professor John W. Heninger’s, from \$111.11 to \$122.22

⁷⁵ “An Argument in Favor of the Re-election of the Old Board,” *The Pantagraph*, April 5, 1880.

⁷⁶ “The Election Yesterday,” *The Pantagraph*, April 6, 1880.

⁷⁷ Noraian, 89

⁷⁸ Noraian, 95.

⁷⁹ Summers.

⁸⁰ “The City: Newsy Items,” *The Pantagraph*, November 23, 1881.

⁸¹ Noraian, 95.

⁸² Brigham, William. *The Story of McLean County And Its Schools*. (Bloomington: McLean County Historical Society, 1951), 44-45.

⁸³ “Miss Trotter,” *The Daily Bulletin*, February 8, 1904

per month. When the recommendation from the committee on teachers came to the full board, board member Francis Funk was firmly opposed to any increase for teachers, except for Professor Heninger. Funk stated that “while he did not wish to oppress anyone in the matter of compensation for services,” he felt it was not proper for an increase. He stated that the cost of living was relatively cheap, and anything teachers needed they could readily buy. Georgina Trotter rebuffed Funk by stating that “to increase Prof. Heninger’s pay and not increase the pay of lady teachers recommended would be an injustice totally unworthy of the board.”⁸⁴ Unfortunately, all of the other male board members supported Funk’s stance. They felt that Heninger’s salary needed to be raised in order to not lose his services. Thus, the female teachers did not receive any raise for the coming school year.⁸⁵

Throughout her time as superintendent, Sarah would occasionally be criticized for seeming to favor women. An 1892 article in Chicago’s *Inter Ocean* wrote, “Miss Sarah E. Raymond has been superintendent of the Bloomington schools eighteen years and there is a great dissatisfaction with her management, owing to the fact of principally giving preference to women in employing teachers, all being women but two.”⁸⁶ Even the president of the school board, Jacob Jacoby, an ally of Sarah’s, also worried about gender discrepancies. In his address to the class of 1883, he lamented the small number of male graduates compared to the women.⁸⁷ More women were graduating than men on average and more women were entering college than men during this time, so Bloomington’s discrepancy was not out of the ordinary. There is no doubt that Sarah fought for women to have access to education, and she certainly employed a great deal of women. However, as she pointed out in what would be her last annual report in 1892, there were no male teachers when she was first appointed as superintendent in 1874. By the time she resigned, she’d employed at least 18 men.⁸⁸ While there were significantly more women hired in the Bloomington schools, Sarah did make a point to show that she was open to and did hire men.

Sarah was deeply invested in improved conditions for women as well as equal opportunities for education. She also understood that teaching was a way for women to earn money and develop a career to not be reliant on men. She was active in the Women’s State Teachers Association, serving as the first president. She spoke at their first meeting in 1888.⁸⁹ In her address, she spoke of the importance of women’s organizations and that women could move beyond the “sewing circle and missionary society” and that the “history, art and literary clubs have helped to raise the plane of women’s intellect.”⁹⁰ She also spoke at the Farmers’ Institute in El Paso, Illinois on the importance of education for “farm girls.”⁹¹ She argued that rural girls deserved to have access to the same level of education as girls living in cities.

⁸⁴ “Our Schools,” *The Pantagraph*, June 9, 1885.

⁸⁵ “The Teachers,” *The Pantagraph*, June 11, 1885.

⁸⁶ “Political Notes,” *Inter Ocean*, April 4, 1892.

⁸⁷ Noraian, 96.

⁸⁸ Noraian, 114.

⁸⁹ “The First Annual Meeting of the Women’s State Teachers’ Association in This City,” *The Pantagraph*, November 23, 1888.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ “Farmers’ Institute at El Paso,” *The Pantagraph*, February 12, 1890.

Another major accomplishment during Sarah's time as superintendent was the publication of her *Manual of Instruction*. First published in 1875, it was revised and republished in 1883.⁹² The 278-page document "attempted to organize, certify, and standardize how teachers and administrators performed their work."⁹³ The ideas Sarah lays out in her book reflect the common school movement – the idea that everyone, regardless of background, is entitled to an education. More than just entitled, Sarah agreed with many of her contemporaries that a functioning democracy depended on a society's ability to provide a quality education.⁹⁴ Her manual was used throughout the country and several school boards inquired about purchasing copies for their entire faculty.⁹⁵

Sarah stepped down from the superintendency in 1892 amidst personal issues and mounting criticism against Sarah and her leadership. The 1892 election, in which board seats were on the ballot, was significant because women were allowed to vote for school elections. There were candidates on the ballot that did not want to reinstate Sarah – and those candidates ended up winning. The *Chicago Tribune* picked up the story in April 1892 reporting that it was to be expected that it was inevitable that there would be some dissatisfaction in someone's performance over the course of 20 years. However, the main area of conflict had to do with the number of women in administrative roles.⁹⁶ Even with women voting, candidates who believed there were too many women employed in the schools won the election.⁹⁷ *The Bloomington Leader* wrote that women innately do not like to be governed by other women, thus it made sense that anti-Raymond board members would be voted in.⁹⁸

There are many reasons why the election panned out the way it did. One issue to note was that there was a lack of Black women who voted. Of the 1,241 women who cast ballots, only five of those ballots were from Black women.⁹⁹ Of course, we cannot know if that would have swayed the election, but it is worth considering. There were also concerns about Catholic and Protestant teachers and general school board management. While the reasons as to why the election resulted in unfavorable outcomes for Sarah are complex, gender discrimination did seem to be the root of the issue, unfortunately. However, to put all of the blame on the new women voters is rather unfair as they were still in the minority of those who voted. Despite the odds stacked against her, Sarah did secure another nomination for superintendent with a 4-3 vote in July 1892. Sarah thanked the board for the reinstatement but promptly declined the position stating that she made arrangements to move to Boston to be with family. She wished to resign in July so she could get her affairs in order and make way for a new superintendent.¹⁰⁰

After moving on from being superintendent, Sarah would go on to marry Capt. Francis J. Fitzwilliam in Boston on June 23, 1896.¹⁰¹ The couple actually met in Bloomington as

⁹² Summers.

⁹³ Noraian, 108.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Summers.

⁹⁶ "Petticoats at the Polls," *Chicago Tribune*, April 7, 1892.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Noraian, 117.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Noraian, 119.

¹⁰¹ Summers.

Fitzwilliam served as the superintendent of the First M. E. Church Sunday school for over a decade. Starting in 1879, Sarah worked alongside him as the deputy superintendent for the Sunday school – referred to as his “able and faithful assistant.”¹⁰² Fitzwilliam came to Bloomington in 1866 from Ohio with “an honorable war record.”¹⁰³ He worked in the dry goods business and was the general manager and one of the originators of the National Home Building and Loan Association.¹⁰⁴ His marriage to Sarah would be his second. After his first wife died, he moved to Bloomington. There, he opened a store on Main Street and used one of the rooms on the ground floor of Schroeder’s Opera House to store his stock of goods.¹⁰⁵ He also owned part of the building that would become the Klemm Department Store on the northwest side of the courthouse square on Jefferson Street. He sold his very successful businesses in Bloomington in 1890.¹⁰⁶

After the wedding, the couple left to travel up the eastern states and Nova Scotia, Canada. They then went up the St. Lawrence River and around the Great Lakes to Chicago. They arrived in Chicago in October and made their home there.¹⁰⁷ Fitzwilliam had large property interests in both Chicago and Southern Illinois.¹⁰⁸ Sarah also owned two successful farms in Ford County, so it was safe to say the couple did well for themselves financially.¹⁰⁹ Unfortunately, after only five years of marriage, F.J. Fitzwilliam died in Chicago at age 60 of a month-long illness with Sarah by his side. The funeral and burial took place in Bloomington at the First Methodist Church and Bloomington Cemetery (now Evergreen Memorial Cemetery), respectively.¹¹⁰

Through work, marriage, moving, and more – Sarah’s friendship with Georgina remained strong. Perhaps the most impressive work they did together was outside of the school system. Together they “worked side by side to improve the lives of others in the community through their social and professional lives.”¹¹¹ Their hard work is evident as they worked together to develop Bloomington’s public library—Withers Public Library. This library was a continuation of the first library which had been opened in 1857 in a single room on Center Street by the Ladies’ Library Association. The library relocated in 1871 to a hall at 105 West North Street, but closed in 1880 due to lack of funding.¹¹²

After Sarah Withers, another prominent woman in Bloomington, donated land to the library association in 1882, Sarah and Georgina led the efforts to secure funds and members. In March of that year, they were both elected officers of the Bloomington Library Association (with Georgina being one of the managers and Sarah serving as the president of the association) and

¹⁰² “City and County,” *The Pantagraph*, January 6, 1888.

¹⁰³ “A Great Surprise,” *The Pantagraph*, May 29, 1896.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ “F.J. Fitzwilliam is Dead,” *The Pantagraph*, December 25, 1899. Schroeder’s opera house was located where the Pantagraph Media and Heartland Bank is located today, 205 N. Main Street.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ “Marriages,” *The Pantagraph*, June 26, 1896.

¹⁰⁸ “F.J. Fitzwilliam is Dead.”

¹⁰⁹ “A Great Surprise.”

¹¹⁰ “Funeral of Capt. Fitzwilliam,” *The Pantagraph*, December 28, 1899.

¹¹¹ Monica Noraian. Master’s Thesis: *Sarah Raymond Fitzwilliam* (Illinois State University:2007)

¹¹² “Bloomington Public Library Historical Timeline,” http://www.bloomingtonlibrary.org/find/library_history/ (September 16, 2011)

they began their work.¹¹³ They also served on the soliciting committee to raise enough funds to build the library, which were initially estimated to be \$15,000 (or \$496,000 in 2023).¹¹⁴ When the cornerstone for the library was laid on May 26, 1887, the efforts of Sarah and Georgina were noted in the local newspapers, one of which stated that their “indefatigable efforts” ensured the necessary funds were raised to construct the library, and they would maintain “a warm place in the hearts of every resident of Bloomington who has a tender side for books.”¹¹⁵

By the time the cornerstone was laid, the close friends helped to raise over \$9,000.¹¹⁶ After months of construction, the public library reopened (named Withers Public Library), on December 27 and was located on the corner of East and Washington Streets. When the library opened its doors, Sarah and Georgina raised \$15,000 (though additional funds were needed because the final construction cost was \$20,500).¹¹⁷ The library remained at that location for 89 years. In 1977 a new public library opened on Olive Street in Bloomington. Today, there is a fountain dedicated to the Trotter Family in Wither’s Park, next to the site of Withers Library.¹¹⁸

That fountain was made possible by a bequest in Georgina’s brother, James’, will. When he passed away in 1907, his will left instructions “for the erection of a \$5,000 fountain in one of the city’s public parks as a memorial” to his family.¹¹⁹ The logical place for the erection of that fountain was in a lot next to Withers Library because of Georgina’s heavy involvement with the establishment of the library. Sarah Raymond Fitzwilliam served as the executrix of James’ estate. Like with any project she was given, Sarah worked hard to carry out the wishes of the family whom she was so close to.

In 1909, she secured Lorado Taft, one of the leading American sculptors of the 20th century, to design the fountain.¹²⁰ At the time, Taft was living in Chicago and teaching at the Art Institute and the University of Chicago. Sarah, who was also living in Chicago at the time, may have had contact with Taft as she was an active member of the Art Institute.¹²¹ The fountain was carved from Georgia marble, and decorated with scenes animals and Indigenous people. On the fountain’s east and west sides, Indigenous women with urns resting on their right shoulders are seen. When the fountain is in operation, water pours from the urns into basins at the base of the fountain. An Indigenous child rests to the left of each woman. The north side of the fountain features a dog and the south side a bear cub standing on its hind legs.¹²² The fountain was not carved by Taft himself, rather, assistants from his Chicago studio. The fountain was still incomplete when it was dedicated on May 30, 1911. It was completed for a cost of \$7,000 (about \$242,000 in 2023), which meant the additional \$2,000 had to be raised by the committee that

¹¹³ “Annual Meeting,” *The Pantagraph*, March 6, 1882.

¹¹⁴ “The New Library Building,” *The Pantagraph*, June 1, 1882; Measuringworth.com, date accessed August 5, 2024.

¹¹⁵ “The Library Building,” *The Weekly Leader*, May 26, 1887.

¹¹⁶ “Library Day,” *The Weekly Leader*, May 26, 1887.

¹¹⁷ “A Home At Last,” *The Weekly Pantagraph*, December 30, 1887.

¹¹⁸ “Bloomington Public Library Historical Timeline”

¹¹⁹ “Bequest Left by James Trotter,” *The Weekly Pantagraph*, February 1, 1907.

¹²⁰ “Trotter Fountain To Be By Lorado Taft,” *The Pantagraph*, July 30, 1909.

¹²¹ Noraian, 77.

¹²² Kemp, Bill. “Trotter Fountain work of Lorado Taft,” *The Pantagraph*, February 10, 2006.

was tasked with overseeing the project. Taft's assistant, Walter Zimmerman, spent two months in Bloomington completing the fountain after the dedication ceremony.¹²³

Sarah and Georgina were active members of the community and were in other clubs together as well. They were also members of the Bloomington Benevolent Society. Founded in 1884, the society was organized with the goal of helping "the poor and destitute" of Bloomington. Georgina was one of the founding members and served as treasurer that first year. Members of the society were called upon to collect money, clothing, fuel, and provisions from the citizens of Bloomington to help those who were less fortunate in the city.¹²⁴ One of the society's meetings was held in the high school building in Superintendent Sarah Raymond's office during that first year. Sarah also served in the Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Illinois Conference. She was elected president of the organization unanimously in 1888.¹²⁵ Sarah was also active in the McLean County Historical Society presenting papers on Illinois flowers and birds.¹²⁶

Georgina Trotter and Sarah Raymond Fitzwilliam had a strong and committed friendship. There is no concrete evidence, such as correspondence between the two friends exists, and one can only speculate as to the true nature of their relationship. What is known is that in addition to their long tenure on the Bloomington Board of Education together, their service on the Bloomington Library Association board, and participation in a variety of other community activities in Bloomington, Sarah accompanied Georgina to New York to bring Georgina's brother, John, home to Bloomington after he became very ill while traveling in France in 1889.¹²⁷ In an April 1886 *Pantagraph* article, the author referred to Georgina as "being the particular and personal friend of Miss Raymond, superintendent of schools for many years."¹²⁸ Another article in that same April 1886 edition of *The Pantagraph* referred to Georgina as "the bosom friend of the superintendent."¹²⁹ Sarah lived at the same address as Georgina did, 801 W. Market Street, in 1891, after the death of Sarah's husband.¹³⁰ Sarah also served as the executrix of Georgina's estate when Georgina died in 1904 and was buried in the Trotter family plot upon her death in 1918.¹³¹

Sarah E. Raymond Fitzwilliam died in her home at 4824 Vincennes Ave. in Chicago on January 31, 1918. She was 76 years old and in declining health. She spent her time in Chicago in the last years of her life where she took part in many arts and cultural societies and was very active in the Daughters of the American Revolution.¹³² She was a member of the Illinois State Historical Society, the Chicago Women's Club, the Arche Club, and the Hyde Park Travel Club.¹³³ With the Arche club, she became involved with the Art Institute of Chicago. She

¹²³ Ibid; Measuringworth.com, date accessed August 6, 2024.

¹²⁴ "Helping The Poor," *The Pantagraph*, January 25, 1884.

¹²⁵ "The Home Mission Cause," *The Weekly Leader*, September 21, 1888.

¹²⁶ "The Historical Society," *The Pantagraph*, June 9, 1893; "The Historical Society," *The Pantagraph*, December 6, 1894.

¹²⁷ "Hon. John W. Trotter Home," *The Pantagraph*, August 14, 1889.

¹²⁸ "Who is Who?" *The Pantagraph*, April 3, 1886.

¹²⁹ "The Board Election."

¹³⁰ Noraian, 78.

¹³¹ Ibid. 78-79.

¹³² "Obituary," *Chicago Tribune*, February 1, 1918.

¹³³ Noraian, 130.

traveled the world with her Bloomington friend, Madeline Funk, for about a year starting in 1912. She met the pope in Italy, celebrated Christmas in Dresden, Germany, and spent New Year's Eve in Russia. She saw ancient ruins in Egypt, the Holy Land, Greece, England, and Ireland. She even visited the birthplace of her late beloved friend, Georgina Trotter, in Ireland.¹³⁴

Before her death, Sarah began donating several hundred objects to the Chicago Art Institute, many pieces that were likely purchased during her travels.¹³⁵ She also offered her collection of books and magazines to the Bloomington Public Library. Upon her death, her will left Illinois Wesleyan University \$1,000 and The McLean County Historical Society \$500 (which would be worth approximately \$20,000 and \$10,000 respectively).¹³⁶ Sarah was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in the Trotter family plot. The Sarah Raymond School still exists on West Olive Street in Bloomington as a testament to her legacy and is the only school in the district to be named after a teacher/administrator. She is remembered for her commitment to education for all in Bloomington.

For a more in-depth examination of Sarah Raymond Fitzwilliam, see *Women's Rights, Racial Integration, and Education from 1850-1920: The Case of Sarah Raymond, the First Female Superintendent*, by Dr. Monica Cousins Noraian.

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¹³⁴ "Visited Many Odd Corners of Europe," *The Pantagraph*, November 29, 1913.

¹³⁵ Noraian, 132.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 133.