

Dickey, Sarah A. Graduate, Class of 1869

Home: Dayton Ohio.

Birth year: 1838; d. 1904

Sarah Dickey was virtually self-taught before she began teaching in Ohio at 16 years of age. She taught among the freed slaves for the Evangelical United Brethren Mission in Vicksburgh MS, 1863-65. Thereupon she returned home for a year, and then went to Mt. Holyoke in debt, and earned her way through the seminary. She returned immediately to teach the freedmen, first for the American Missionary Association in Raymond MS, 1869-70; then in the new public schools of Clinton MS, 1870-74. While there she began laying plans for a black female secondary school, Mt. Hermon Seminary, patterned precisely after Mt. Holyoke, which she opened in 1875. She remained in that school until her death in 1904; the seminary was continued by the AMA until 1924, when it was merged into Tougaloo College.

In 1872 she wrote to her Mt. Holyoke classmates of the trials of the life of the freedmen's teacher, and the courage needed to survive as long as she did: "I dare say any one of the class has done more work, and far more real good than I; but no one has had a more spicy life. Presume you would not consider much of the spice very palatable. Well, if it effected [sic] me in the least I might not feel willing to endure so much of it. Some things are a little annoying sometimes it is true, such as having a pistol fired in at ones front door, after the lamps are lit, to receive a Ku Klux warning to get out of the place within ten days, and if you are not gon [sic] at the expiration of that time, you may expect to visit your school throught [sic] bullets and brickbats, and rest under the same treatment at night, to be whooped and yelled at on the street by college boys, and last but not least, to be barred out of a store for having walked to meeting on Saturday night with one of the most respectable white citizens of the place. The above mentioned are only a very few of the spices with which the Yankee Teacher's life is seasoned." Sarah A. Dickey to "My Dear Classmates," 4 March 1872, in Correspondence File, Dickey, Sarah A., Class of 1869, Alumnae File. Mount Holyoke College Library, Archives.

From: The Freedmen's Teachers Project, 1861-1875, courtesy Dr. Ronald E. Butchart. Material on the freedmen's teachers was compiled from hundreds of different sources; if full documentation is required for any particular teacher, contact Dr. Butchart, SUNY College at Cortland, Cortland NY 13045.