

Eugenia N. Peckham (Hartwell)

The author of the poem displayed here, she was born in 1826, and attended our predecessor, the “Brockport Collegiate Institute,” from 1842-1845. This was at the very beginning of our school, when it was a private “academy.” In that era the public schools only went through 6th grade, there were no middle schools or high schools. Colleges were very few, and generally limited to men only.

Academies like the Collegiate Institute were a response to these limited offerings, and combined elements of the modern high school, prep school and college. They were a fascinating transitional form, now long gone, but they played a key role in opening greater opportunity and diversity in higher education in their day.

These were small schools. Brockport was typical, 100 or so students, and a handful of faculty and staff. Students roomed in the building along with the faculty, and very close relationships were often formed. Eugenia refers in her poem to Clara Thurston, a teacher here and a true pioneer in higher education for women, as was Miss Thurston’s close friend Mary Mortimer, another instructor, for whom Mortimer Hall is named.

The accompanying engraving that was used for many years in the school catalogs depicts the school celebrated in her poem “On Seeing a Picture of the Brockport Collegiate Institute.” This building stood approximately where Hartwell Hall is today and was torn down and replaced by it in the 1930s.

It is an interesting connection that she married a Hartwell, whose family farmed in the Parma area, and to whom Ernest Hartwell, for whom Hartwell Hall is named, is related.

Eugenia Peckham married in 1851 and died in 1854, in childbirth. After her death family members published a small collection of her poems.



ON SEEING A PICTURE OF THE BROCK-
PORT COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE

I love on these pictured walls to gaze,
And recall the scenes of other days,
When I trod its halls with footsteps free,
And had naught of grief to trouble me.
I have hoarded long, as a treasured thing,
The joys that my school-girl memories bring,
And naught on life's pathway seems so fair
As the gladsome days when my home was
 there;
When I coned the page of classic lore,
With the absent ones I may see no more,
Or wandered adown the dewy lawn,
As light of heart as the graceful fawn.
But most, of the joyous seasons there,

Do I love our room of evening prayer,
And deep does my heart in sadness swell
When I hear, in fancy, the low prayer-bell,
And the footsteps light of the happy throng
Hastening to join in the evening song,
And my soul seems borne on angels' wings
To the land whence alone true pleasure springs,
As I hear the voices of loved ones raise,
Tuning to God their grateful praise,
And hear the low tones of heartfelt prayer,
Asking of Heaven protecting care;
And feel again the accustomed kiss
Of one* whose presence alone was bliss,
On whose lip was ever some gentle word,
Sweeter than notes of summer bird
To the happy hearts who knew no care
While they that loved one's smiles might
share.

*Miss C. Thurston, Preceptress.



BROOKPORT COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE.