

Mary-Lou Breitborde and Kelly Kolodny, "The People's Schools for Teacher of the People"  
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### **The Anatomy Lesson, 1885**

Students at the Massachusetts Normal School of Art pose playfully with a skull during a drawing class in this photo dated 1885. The curricula at other publicly funded teaching colleges in Massachusetts broadened during the late nineteenth century to include subjects such as art with the stated goal of preparing well-rounded educators. Courtesy of Massachusetts College of Art and Design.

**PHOTO ESSAY**

The People's Schools  
for Teachers of the People:  
The Development of Massachusetts'  
State Teachers Colleges

MARY-LOU BREITBORDE AND KELLY KOLODNY



**Editor's Introduction:** *This essay profiles the eight Massachusetts state universities (Framingham State, Westfield State, Bridgewater State, Salem State, Worcester State, the Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, and Fitchburg State) that began as state teachers colleges. Massachusetts' teachers colleges, originally known as "normal schools," originated in 1839 with the establishment of a school in Lexington (it would later relocate to Framingham). Over the next 175 years, the state teachers colleges would expand their curricula as their student bodies grew, offering general courses of study in nearly every discipline, and eventually becoming state universities, offering graduate programs. As this essay shows, each school's history is different, but each school has a story of modest beginnings, growth, and success in providing educational opportunity to thousands of students, especially women and a number of African Americans.*

\* \* \* \* \*

From the beginning, Massachusetts state normal schools were the "people's colleges," appealing to middle class and working families as routes to higher education, social mobility and meaningful careers.<sup>1</sup> They enrolled students of any age over sixteen or seventeen, provided flexible programs for

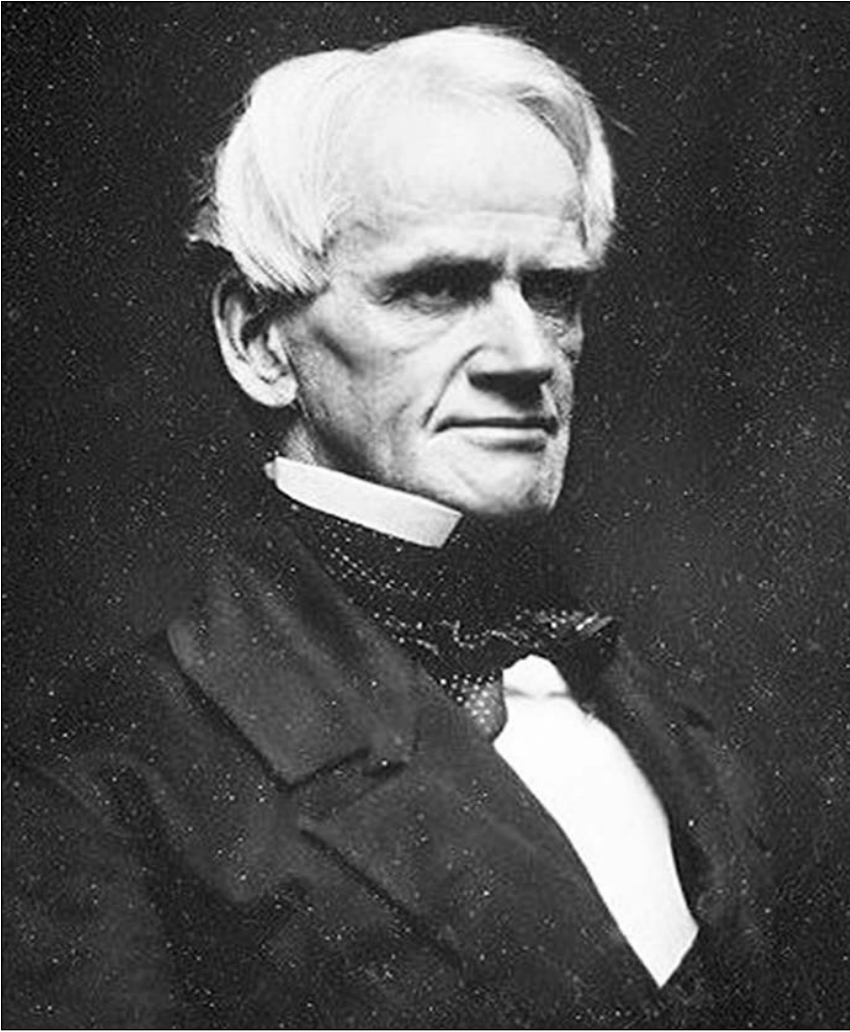
students, requiring less time for those who had previous teaching experience and more time for those who wanted an advanced program enabling them to teach at higher levels. Male students might, for example, drop in and out between terms to help on the family farm when needed. As they enrolled increasing numbers of students interested in a high-quality, low-cost higher education, one that would allow them to continue to work, take on family responsibilities and fit the vicissitudes of life into and around their educations, the curriculum expanded beyond teacher preparation to the liberal arts, to business, nursing, communication, and other professional fields. To acknowledge their broader curricula, the Massachusetts legislature changed their names several times; the State Normal Schools became State Teachers Colleges in the 1930s and comprehensive State Colleges in the 1960s. They added master's degree programs and certificates of advanced study and many became State Universities in 2010. They grew physically from one building to campuses with tall residence halls, libraries and science centers that sprawled across cities and required bicycles and shuttle buses to navigate. Throughout this expansive history they continued to offer an increasingly broad education at the fraction of the price of the private higher education institutions in the Commonwealth, enroll more of its citizens and prepare them for work in the state.

In the twentieth century, the state normal schools that had opened their first doors to the children of farmers and artisans threw them wider for successive waves of immigrants and refugees, first from eastern and southern Europe and later from virtually every country on earth. Thousands of students on their campuses grew up speaking a language other than English. Many of their students are still the first generation in their families to attend college. And just as the "normalites" managed to combine school with time to help at home on the farm or in the shop, many students at today's state colleges and universities pursue their educational goals while working part-time, sometimes managing family responsibilities as well. The GI Bill that gave educational aid to GIs returning home from World War II led to an enrollment explosion at mid-century. Today, soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan bring hard-won real-world experience into their classrooms. The Civil Rights Movement and legislation that followed added to the diversity of the communities, bringing to campus more students of color, more women working toward "non-traditional" careers, more welcome to LGBT students, and more appreciation for students whose knowledge of how they learn helped faculty improve their own teaching and helped students who planned to be teachers. Title IX ensured equal access for women from admissions to athletics and strengthened the call for respectful behavior toward all. Today's



### **The Pioneer**

The first teachers college in Massachusetts was founded in Lexington in 1839. The rendering above depicts one of the earliest facilities at Lexington. The school later moved to Framingham. Courtesy of Framingham State University, Archives and Special Collections, Framingham, MA.



campuses celebrate diversity in background and ideas, and boast climates far more welcoming than the one that warned against “that old deluder, Satan.”

In the early years of the twenty-first century, the former “normal” schools are being challenged to find new ways of teaching that prepare students to hold their own in global spheres. At home in the Commonwealth we continue to join Horace Mann’s battle to equalize education so that it might help “equalize the conditions of men.” Waves of educational reform leave

*Opposite page:*

**Framingham Normal School  
(Framingham State University)**

**Horace Mann, 1836**

Educator and education reformer Horace Mann, pictured around 1850 in a daguerreotype by Southworth & Hawes. Mann, who was born in Franklin, MA, served as Massachusetts' first Secretary of the State Board of Education and lent his considerable prestige to the campaign to create a state system of normal schools—teachers colleges—based on the European model then current.

*Below:*

**May Hall, Framingham State University, undated photo**

Success meant growth, and Framingham opened May Hall as a classroom building and library in 1889. It was named for Abby May, a Board of Education visitor to Framingham who proved generous and sympathetic to the needs of the school. The state's first normal school had moved twice since its founding, from Lexington to West Newton to its ultimate destination on Bare Hill in Framingham, 21 miles west of Boston.



*Opposite page:*

## Westfield Normal School

(Westfield State University)

### Mary E. Allen with view camera, c. 1885

Sisters Mary and Frances Allen were Westfield Normal School graduates who achieved successful careers outside education. The 1876 graduates began as teachers but became accomplished photographers—a *Ladies Home Journal* article in 1901 called them “The Foremost Women Photographers in America.” Their photography prominently featured images of children, who may have been a congenial subject for the sisters given their classroom background and exposure to progressive theories of education taught at Westfield. Frances Allen took this photo. Courtesy of Memorial Hall Museum, Deerfield, MA.

*Below:*

### Susan Payton and the Euphorians, 1894

In this photo, the members of the Euphoria student outing club gather on campus. Susan Payton is in the first row, kneeling, second from right, with her arm on another student’s shoulder. The gender mixture reflects Westfield’s status as the state’s first coeducational normal school. Payton was born into one of the Westfield’s few African-American families. After finishing the two-year course of study at the normal school, Payton moved to New Jersey, teaching school in and around Atlantic City. After moving to New York and marrying, Susan Payton Wortham would go on to write for W.E.B. DuBois’s pioneering children’s magazine, *The Brownies Book*. Wortham died a centenarian in 1975. Courtesy of Ely Library Archives, Westfield State University.









*Opposite page, clockwise from top left:*

### **Bridgewater Normal School**

**(Bridgewater State University)**

**Sarah Ann Lewis, class of 1869**

Although there had been an African American student at the Lexington Normal School in 1847, Sarah Ann Lewis was officially Massachusetts' first black student at a normal school, appearing on Bridgewater's rolls in 1867. While gender and racial bias stood in the way of a successful career, Lewis was lucky: Bridgewater Normal School had been active in the anti-slavery movement, and Fall River, Lewis's hometown, had hired her to teach before and after she graduated from the normal school.

**Abigail Morton Diaz, class of 1842**

Abigail Morton Diaz was a member of Bridgewater Normal School's first class. Committed social stances may have been bred into the lifetime educator: she was raised in an abolitionist household and lived in an experimental Transcendentalist community outside Boston. She was secretary of the Juvenile Anti-Slavery Society at age 10. As an adult single parent, Diaz became an accomplished writer of children's stories and an advocate for gender and racial equality and the rights and needs of the downtrodden.

**Shuji Isawa, class of 1878**

Bridgewater Normal School alumni have gone on to change education abroad. One of them was Shuji Isawa, who was well regarded as a pioneer in education in Japan, which was in its early days of absorbing Western ways and ideas.

**Andres Osuna, class of 1898**

Mexican Andres Osuna made his mark in the education of teachers in rural areas of Mexico. Returning to Saltillo, Coahuila, in Mexico after graduation from Bridgewater, Osuna established a normal school that traveled the country by rail to meet needs where they were especially acute. He later became Mexico's state superintendent of primary schools.



schools wrestling with perennial questions about what should be taught and how to judge whether students have learned.

Today's state college and university graduates look nothing like the first twenty-five graduates of The Normal School at Lexington (Framingham). Notebooks have been replaced with a different kind of tablet. Students no longer listen for bells that signal the beginning of classes, relying instead on electronic devices to tell them the time, work on their assignments, hold discussions and, perhaps, bring them to class "virtually." But the Massachusetts teachers schools' ideals remain much the same: they open the

*Opposite page:*

## Salem Normal School (Salem State University)

### Dr. Fannie Fern Phillips Andrews (1867–1950)

Fannie Andrews, a distinguished educator and international peace activist, entered Salem State Teachers College two years before she was eligible and graduated with honors in 1884. Andrews had introduced Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson to the idea that educators might play a key part in world peace. She would later earn a Ph.D. from Harvard and was appointed in 1934 by President Franklin Roosevelt as the U.S. delegate to an international conference on education. She was the only female delegate at the conference. Courtesy of U.S. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division (Digital ID:hec20973).

*Below:*

### The Art Club, 1923

Salem students gather around faculty member Charles Frederick Whitney, at the easel. Whitney was a graduate of the state's Normal Art School. By the time this picture was taken, Salem Normal School had become a fully coeducational institution. Even before men were admitted, Salem offered a broad curriculum that included mathematics, physical and political geography, botany, hydrostatics, optics, orthography, and art. Salem State provided a solid education—instead of the less rigorous “woman’s” education of the time—to the mostly working-class women who were its earliest enrollees. Courtesy of Salem State University Archives and Special Collections.





Teacher Training



*Opposite page, top to bottom:*

**Massachusetts Normal School of Art  
(Massachusetts College of Art and Design)**

**Frances Euphemia Thompson, undated photo**

Frances Euphemia Thompson, first row, far right, poses with her peers in this undated photo. Thompson graduated from the Massachusetts Normal School of Art in 1923, enrolling at the suggestion of Olive Giovanna Taliaferro, an MNSA alumna. Thompson would follow Taliaferro to Nashville, TN, to teach in the art department at the Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State Normal School, an institution for African Americans, taking Taliaferro's post after the latter died. Thompson returned to MNSA, or "MassArt" as it's known, in 1936 to earn a second degree in art education. In 1937, she would receive a fellowship that enabled her to travel to Europe for study and launch her on a forty-seven-year career teaching and practicing art.

**MassArt Honors Frances Euphemia Thompson, c. 1980**

In this photo from around 1980, Frances Euphemia Thompson shares a lively moment with MassArt President Jack Nolan during the dedication of the Frances Euphemia Thompson Gallery in the Longwood Building. The building is now the Schapiro Center at Beth Israel Deaconness Hospital in Boston, but MassArt is looking for another gallery to name for the much-admired Thompson.

*Opposite page, top to bottom:*

**Worcester Normal School**  
(Worcester State University)

**The Landmark on St. Ann's Hill, undated photo**

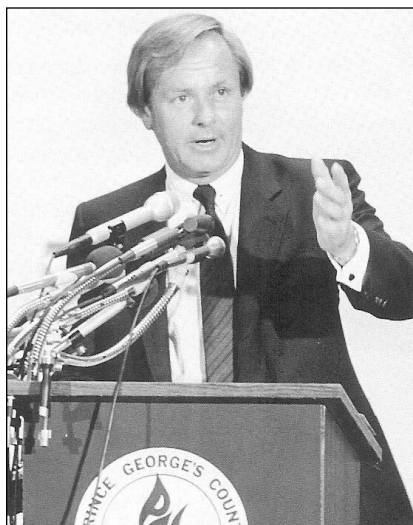
Built with a \$60,000 state appropriation, Worcester Normal School's original building, shown in an undated photo, became a prominent feature of the city's landscape. Its Gothic architecture conveys stability and authority, two timely impressions during Worcester's nineteenth-century period of industrial surge and demographic change. The city's population ballooned from 30,000 to 100,000 between 1866 and 1894. The number of school children rose by more than 17,000, and city authorities made it a priority to professionalize the educators those children would see. Worcester Normal School was established to meet that goal. Courtesy of the Worcester State University Library and Archives.

**Jennie Clough (1857–1928), undated photo**

Worcester Normal School's first African American graduate (January 1878) is pictured here with classmates in an undated photo. Clough taught in the Worcester public school system until 1893. Some of Worcester Normal School's earliest graduates were African American women. Like Clough, they would launch teaching careers in the city's diverse public schools. Worcester Normal School was coeducational, but women formed a distinct majority of its students. Male college graduates could take a special one-year course at Worcester to prepare them to teach. Teaching gave men an opportunity to rise to school leadership positions—a chance not widely available to women in the late nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Courtesy of the Worcester State University Library and Archives.







*Opposite page, clockwise from top:*

**North Adams Normal School**  
(Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts)

**Members of the North Adams Normal School  
women's basketball team, 1908**

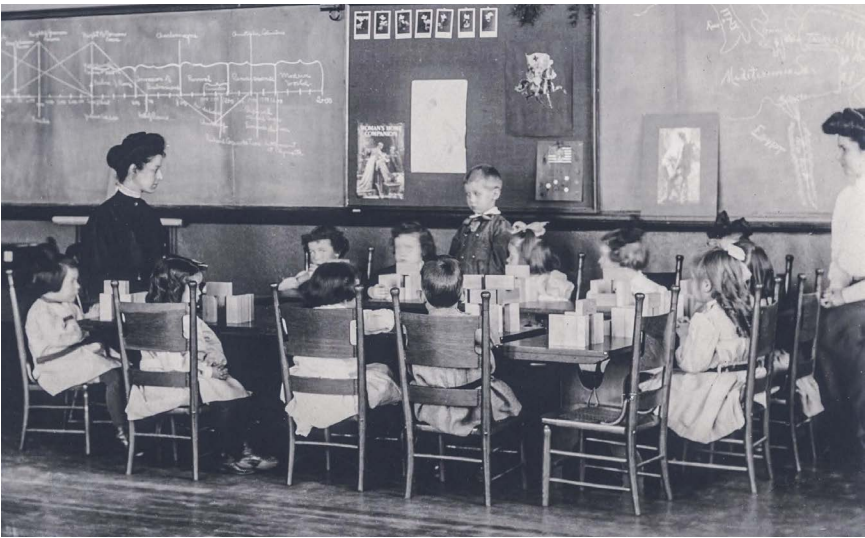
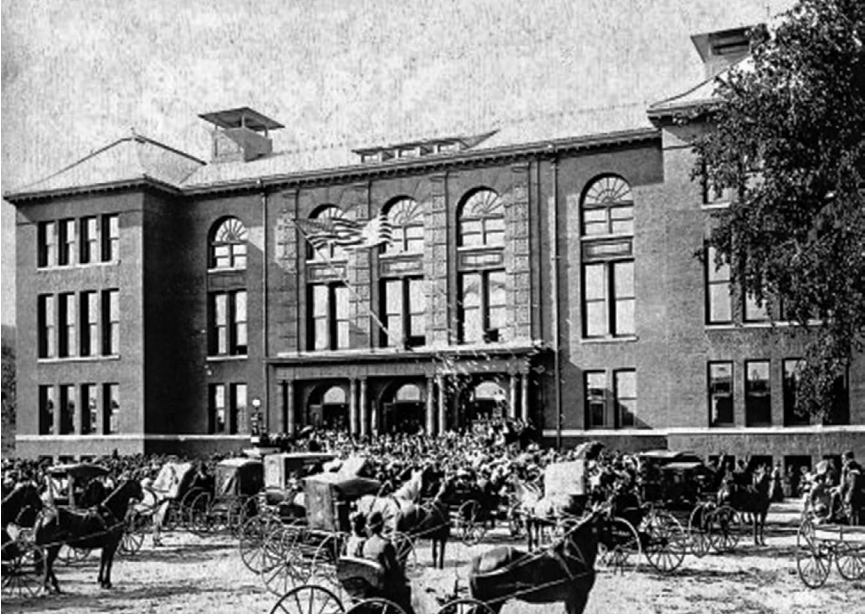
North Adams fielded a women's team for the relatively new (1891) game of basketball—which, as the picture shows, women still played in fairly formal dress (though note the athletic shoe peeking out below the long skirt on the player touching the ball on the right). Courtesy of the Freel Archives at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts.

**Dr. Helen Crowley Carr, undated photo**

Dr. Helen Crowley Carr (class of 1927) is just one graduate of North Adams Normal School who would return to make a lasting contribution to the school and community. After receiving bachelor's and master's degrees from the school (then named the State Teachers College at North Adams) in 1939 and 1941, respectively, Crowley joined Western Electric as an education and public relations specialist. She earned a Ph.D. from Fordham University in 1953 and declined an offer to be a commercial education adviser to Indonesia's minister of education. At Western Electric, Carr persuaded the company to fund a university program to steer more African American engineers to Western Electric. She also helped establish doctoral fellowships at engineering schools with a predominantly African American enrollment. The American Society for Engineering Education named the fellowships in her honor.

**Dr. John Murphy, undated photo**

North Adams native John Murphy (class of 1958) earned graduate degrees at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and had made school superintendent by age 29. He would serve as superintendent in several challenging, high-profile school districts nationwide, including Collier County, FL, in 1968, where he had the difficult task of desegregating a school in the face of community hostility. An author on education reform, Murphy became an early leader in developing programs for students in struggling communities. He received North Adams' Distinguished Alumni Award in 1975, and an honorary doctorate in pedagogy in 2004. Four of his children also graduated from North Adams State College.



*Opposite page, top to bottom:*

### **Fitchburg Normal School (Fitchburg State University)**

**Thompson Hall, 1896**

This was the first building on the Fitchburg campus. Years later, it was named for John G. Thompson, the school's first leader. A Massachusetts bill signed into law in 1894 established state normal schools in Fitchburg, North Adams, Lowell, and Barnstable County. Thompson, along with Joseph Edgerly, who campaigned energetically for the creation of the Fitchburg Normal School, saw the need for a model school where Fitchburg's teachers in training could "observe and practice." The model school was opened in 1901 and was later named for Edgerly. Fitchburg Normal School gained an early reputation for excellence and sent its graduates throughout the state to teach. It also earned an early reputation for offering educational opportunities for women, who were routinely denied admission in the early twentieth century to most other colleges and universities. Fitchburg's inaugural class consisted of 46 women. Thompson Hall is still in use today at Fitchburg State University. This photo shows the hall in its first year. Courtesy of Fitchburg State University, Archives and Special Collections.

### **The Edgerly School, 1910–1919**

Students receive instruction at Fitchburg's model and practice school, in a photo dated between 1910 and 1919. Fitchburg proved adept at shaping its course offerings to create opportunities and meet the professional needs of its teaching students. By 1901, the school offered five courses of study: a two-year elementary course, an advanced course requiring a year of supervised teaching, a kindergarten course requiring musical ability, a one-year course for experienced teachers, and a one-year course for college graduates. The "Fitchburg way" of training teachers began attracting students from farther away, necessitating construction of another new building, Miller Hall, a dormitory, built in 1903. It was named for former State Senator Joel D. Miller, who helped get legislative approval for the school. The dorm's first residents were 22 students and four teachers. Courtesy of Fitchburg State University, Archives and Special Collections.

*Opposite page, top to bottom:*

### **Bridgewater State University**

#### **Crossing the Campus, undated photo**

Students cross the campus at Bridgewater State. The university today carries on its tradition of providing a broad and deep education, but offers students improved lifestyle amenities compared with what students would have found on campus in 1840.

### **Westfield State University**

#### **A Moment in Nepal, undated photo**

Students raise the banner of Westfield State University in the mountains of Nepal. The university offers its students regular opportunities to travel abroad as part of their education.

doors of higher education to many who would not otherwise be able to step through. The twenty-first century versions of those early graduates who broke boundaries by teaching the blind, deaf and others left out of the mainstream still work to solve critical problems in creative ways, on behalf of political and social improvement. Massachusetts teachers and educational leaders still look to the former normal schools—now the state colleges and universities—for preparation, professional development, guidance and support in their work.

## **Notes**

1. Robert Brown, *The Rise and Fall of the People's Colleges: The Westfield Normal School, 1839–1914* (Westfield State College: Institute for Massachusetts Studies, 1988).

## **Acknowledgement**

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