

Perinton's Little-Known Educational Pioneer

By Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

The grave of Delphine Hanna is difficult to find. The gravestone under which she is buried at Greenvale Cemetery on East Church Street is not even hers, but rather her uncle's, Jeremiah Chadwick. A close inspection on the reverse of the stone reveals her name: Delphine Hanna, M.D.



Delphine Hanna at a young age. Photo courtesy of the Perinton Historical Society

After attending a one room schoolhouse in Perinton, Delphine Hanna enrolled in the Brockport Normal School for Teachers, from which she graduated in 1879. Her first teaching assignment was at the District No. 3 School on Turk Hill Road. By the fall of 1884 she was assigned to the Union School on West Church Street. She found teachers and students alike to be lethargic and uninspired. Her concerns led her to Dr. Dio Lewis, the famed physical culture advocate. "Del" Hanna soon came to the realization that both students and teachers needed a

physical education founded upon a scientific basis. To further her knowledge in the field, she enrolled in Dr. Dudley A. Sargent's School of Physical Training at Harvard.



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The Principal of the Women's Department at Oberlin College was supportive of physical education for women, and was intrigued by Miss Hanna's views on the subject. By the fall of 1885, an offer of employment was accepted by Miss Hanna, although no funding was available from the college for the new curriculum or for her wages. A Fairport friend, Miss Julia Dickinson, provided money for her salary and necessary physical education equipment. Delphine Hanna continued her own education, including coursework at Cornell and Oberlin College, and culminating in a degree in Medicine from the University of Michigan.

Doctor Delphine Hanna was named Director of the Women's Gymnasium and Teacher of Physiology at Oberlin College. She was appointed Director of Physical Training in 1897 and Professor of Physical Training (later Physical Education) in 1903. She continued in this position until her retirement in 1920 as Professor Emeritus. Through her leadership, Oberlin College established the first four-year program in Physical Education for women in the United States.

Her teaching career began in a one room schoolhouse in Perinton, a building which still stands today on Turk Hill Road. She went on to become the first woman professor of Physical Education in the United States, and perhaps the world. Although her story is virtually unknown in Perinton today, Doctor Delphine Hanna was a pioneer in education. She was inducted into the Michigan Hall of Fame in 1931 for her outstanding work in the field of physical education for women. Sixteen years after her death in 1941, Oberlin College established the Delphine Hanna Foundation, for the enrichment of physical education studies at the school.