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## Sibley Hall: Then and Now

Mary Lichliter

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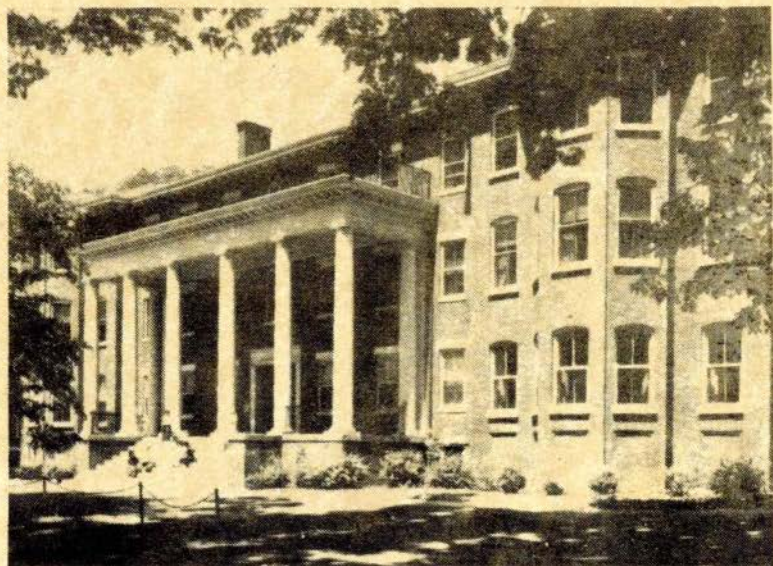


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# SIBLEY HALL

## Then and Now





Mary Easton Sibley and Major George Sibley  
Founders of the College

Sibley Hall stands as a symbol of Lindenwood College for Women—the focal point for its history and traditions. It expresses in brick and mortar the heritage which George and Mary Sibley gave to Lindenwood and Missouri. For Major George Champlin Sibley played a significant part in the history of Missouri and of the western expansion. From 1808 until 1822, except for one year when he opened a trading post at Arrow Rock, Missouri, Major Sibley was the Factor (Indian Agent) at Fort Osage on the western frontier of Missouri. There, Mary Easton Sibley went as a fifteen-year-old bride. As wife of Major Sibley, she was not only the gracious hostess to traders and travelers, but she also taught the Indian children and entertained the Indians with her piano.

Vivacious, beautiful and independent, she is portrayed in a scene from James Michener's book, *Centennial*, as a 'marvelous little wren' in a 'shimmering dress' who sat down at the piano and, having started off with a dainty Mozart melody, 'launched into a rather livelier tune, and with the left foot, began kicking an extra pedal, which activated a large bass drum. . . . As the Indians cheered, fragile Mrs. Sibley began pumping a bellows with her right knee, activating a wind instrument which played *Yankee Doodle Dandy*. . . and what with the booming drum and all of her ten fingers banging the keys as hard and as fast as possible, a veritable explosion of noise filled the salon.' It is also interesting to note that in the forthcoming television serials based on *Centennial*, the part of George Sibley will be played by an actor who is a direct descendant of the Easton family.

Fort Osage was closed in 1822. In 1825, Major Sibley was appointed one of three commissioners to 'lay out a road from Fort Osage (Missouri) to New Mexico, making treaties with the supervening tribes.' This road came to be known as the Santa Fe Trail.

As early as 1814, Major Sibley had begun buying land a mile west of St. Charles in a grove of linden trees. He called this land Linden Wood. After a completion of the Santa Fe Trail, the Sibleys moved from their home, 'Fountain Cottage,' near Fort Osage, to St. Charles. In their new home, located at 230 North Main Street, Mary Sibley began teaching in 1827—the official date for the founding of the College. In 1833, the Sibleys moved to Linden Wood and continued to conduct their school in a low rambling log cabin. Except for the year 1841, when the school was closed due to financial problems, it grew slowly and on the 24th of February, 1853, by action of the General Assembly of the State of Missouri, Lindenwood Female College was incorporated, thus making Mrs. Sibley's school the oldest Protestant women's college in the Louisiana Purchase.



Immediately, plans were underway to build a permanent building for the school. Due to the persistence and determination of the Sibleys and a gift from one of the college's great benefactors, Judge Watson of St. Charles, money was obtained to build. On July 4th, 1856, the cornerstone of Lindenwood Hall—later named Sibley Hall—was laid. At that time, Major Sibley executed a quit-claim deed, giving his land to the Presbytery of St. Louis, and stating that 'the establishment of a school at Linden Wood on a sound and lasting foundation, and on a large and liberal plan wherein female youths . . . may be properly educated has long been with me and not less so with my wife, a most cherished object.'

Major Sibley served as chairman of the building committee and with meticulous detail wrote the specifications for the St. Louis architect, I. O. Sawyer, and for the builder, Jotham Bigelow and Sons. In 1858, the Sibleys moved to a two-story brick home a short distance from the college where they lived until Major Sibley's death on January 31, 1863. Mary Sibley remained there for a number of years and later returned to Linden Wood to live in a cottage near the site of the present library.

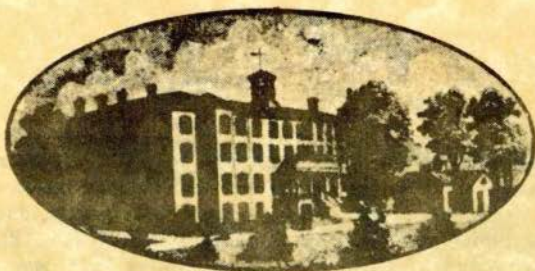
Major and Mrs. Sibley are buried in the small cemetery behind Sibley Hall. Mrs. Sibley's father, Rufus Easton, is also buried there. He, too, was an important figure in Missouri—a distinguished attorney, the first postmaster of St. Louis, a Federal Judge of the Louisiana Territory by appointment of President Jefferson, a delegate to Congress and the first Attorney General of Missouri.

#### Sibley Hall—The Structure

The original structure, now the central part of the building, was built in 1857—a rectangular, red brick building with three floors and a basement largely above ground. According to the catalog of 1860, it was 'finished in modern style with water pipes in each story and gas burners in every room.' The basement housed the kitchen, wash room and dining room. The first floor was used for an office, the living quarters of the president's family, and classrooms. The other floors were dormitory rooms for students and teachers.

In 1881, a south wing was added for increased dormitory space and a library, now part of the parlor. In 1887, the north wing, similar to the south wing, was added. The new wing provided an assembly hall, the present Sibley Chapel. The present seats are the original ones, and the stained bottle glass above the door from the main hall into the chapel is similar in design and style to those done by Louis C. Tiffany, who was working in St. Louis during that period.





The first pipe organ was installed in 1915; the present one in 1965. The last structural change in Sibley was added in 1926 when the long colonial porch was built. It is three stories high with eight white pillars 26 feet high. At that time, private baths were added and the parlor was redecorated with antique furniture of the period of the Sibleys, no piece being less than 75 years old.

In the late 1950's, the parlor was again redecorated as it is today, in the Victorian manner, keeping the antique furniture. The century-old rosewood piano was the gift of the E. J. Stegers of St. Louis and is believed to have been the first concert grand west of the Mississippi. A small cabinet organ in the parlor is believed to have belonged to Mary Sibley whose picture hangs over the fireplace. In the small parlor there is a picture of Mary Jewell, the only woman president of the school.

Sibley Hall continues as a residence for women, housing sixty-seven students, and the chapel is used regularly for recitals and occasionally for religious services and weddings. One room has been made into a small museum with pictures and mementos of the history of the college and its presidents.

### Sibley Hall—And The History Of The College

From 1857, when it was completed, until 1909, Sibley Hall was *the college*—housing the presidents and their families, teachers, students and classrooms. The Rev. A. V. C. Schenck was named the first president and on September 6, 1857, the college opened with eighty students. The next fifty years were years of struggle, with low enrollments and dwindling financial resources. The War Between the States also threatened the college, and it closed for one year because of the unsettled conditions in St. Charles County. But until her death, Mary Sibley gave of her strength and influence that the college might survive. In the words of one of Lindenwood's greatest benefactors, Colonel James Butler, 'A college with such an ancestry was not born to die.'

In 1870, the survival of the college seemed assured. The *St. Louis Democrat* reported that 'under the leadership of Dr. J. H. Nixon, the



popularity and usefulness of Lindenwood College have greatly increased. In short, Lindenwood is now equipped with all the appliances for a thorough collegiate education.' An amendment was added to the college Charter - providing that the control of the college was to be vested in the Synod of Missouri, which gave the full responsibility for the life of the college to the Synod.

As Lindenwood entered the 20th century, Dr. George Frederic Ayres was President. It was through his efforts that Lindenwood attained junior college status in 1913. Earlier in 1909, through the generosity of Andrew Carnegie, Colonel James Gay Butler and two other friends of the college, a second dormitory was built, Jubilee Hall, the present Ayres Hall.

But Colonel Butler's gift was only the beginning of his contribution to the 'newer Lindenwood.' Through his persuasion and promise of continual support, the Colonel found in Dr. John L. Roemer the president who would bring Lindenwood to its standing as a four-year college. 'Dr. Roemer is committed to the responsibility of bringing to fruition the dreams of those who gave of themselves and their means that the great southwest should have a college for young women equal to the best in the country,' said Colonel Butler.

Dr. Roemer came to Lindenwood in 1914; in 1918, the Board of Directors voted to establish a four-year curriculum and in 1921, the first four-year student was graduated. The Roemer years were times of growth and expansion. Three dormitories were built—Butler Hall, Niccolls Hall and Irwin Hall. Butler Hall also had a gymnasium and a swimming pool. In 1922, the present administration building, Roemer Hall, was built, and seventeen years later, the Lillie P. Roemer Memorial Arts Building was completed. The Centennial Year for Lindenwood, 1927, was celebrated for five days with town and gown joining to honor the founding of the college. Hundreds of alumnae and delegates from colleges and universities joined in the festivities.

The St. Louis *Globe-Democrat* reported:

With President and Mrs. John Lincoln Roemer, we join in acclaiming the 100th anniversary of the founding of this leading woman's college situated so close to St. Louis. It is a matter of civic pride to point to the well-established reputation of this institution during the past 100 years since the opening of Linden Wood, the home estate of Major and Mrs. George Sibley. We extend to Lindenwood our heartiest congratulations upon its achievement, and predict for such a well-founded institution a bright future of which St. Louis and all the surrounding territory may justly be proud.



Dr. Roemer died in August, 1940. His presidency was followed by that of Dr. Henry Morehouse Gage, who steered Lindenwood through the war years. In 1947, Dr. Franc L. McCluer, then president of Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri, and famous for having brought Winston Churchill to Fulton where he made his 'Iron Curtain' speech, was named the fourteenth president of Lindenwood College. In his acceptance speech, Dr. McCluer promised Lindenwood 'a future worthy of its history.'

New programs marked the McCluer era. A generous scholarship program brought international students to the campus each year. The college hosted several mock political conventions 'to stimulate student interest in and understanding of the political issues of the nation.' Each year a group of students enrolled in the Washington Semester to study government.

The radio station, KCLC, grew from campus broadcasting to an FM station serving the community. Continuing education programs for the adult student gave a new dimension to the college. A record resident enrollment necessitated three new dormitories: Cobbs Hall (1949), McCluer Hall (1961), and Parker Hall (1965). A chapel, the joint project of the college and the St. Charles Presbyterian Church, was built in 1957. And in 1967, the Howard I. Young Hall of Science for mathematics, chemistry, biology and physics was dedicated.

The year 1967 also began a period of dramatic changes in the college program. Under the leadership of President John Anthony Brown, a new calendar year known as 4-1-4 opened up opportunities in January for new campus programs and off-campus study in Europe, Mexico and distant parts of the United States. A coordinate men's college was established in 1969 and summer school put on a firm basis, with increasing enrollment. The name was changed to The Lindenwood Colleges. Then the Fine Arts Building and the new stables were built. The Margaret Leggat Butler Memorial Library was enlarged and renovated in 1968. A generous gift from Ross A. Jelkyl made possible the complete renovation of Roemer Auditorium, now known as Jelkyl Center for the Performing Arts.

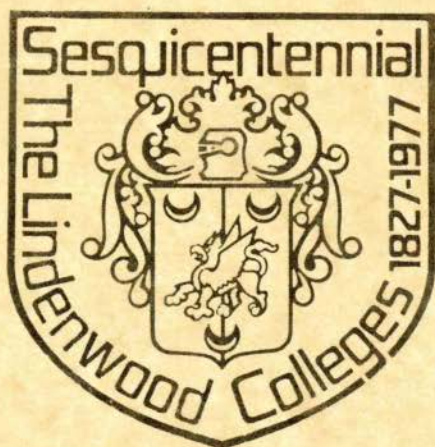
In 1974, President William Courtney Spencer assumed office. The colleges began to expand in many ways to serve the larger community. The Evening College was formally recognized as Lindenwood III, and in 1975, Lindenwood IV, the College for Individualized Education, was established. At commencement in 1976, the first graduate degrees were conferred.

In 1977, the Colleges' 150th year was celebrated with special events throughout the year, including flag raising around the world, alumni

reunions and a Sesquicentennial Fair. Sibley Hall was again the focus of attention when the Sesquicentennial events concluded with the planting of a Linden tree in front of the building which the Sibleys had built. Since then, additions to the campus include a covered riding ring and a Student Union which opened in the fall of 1978.

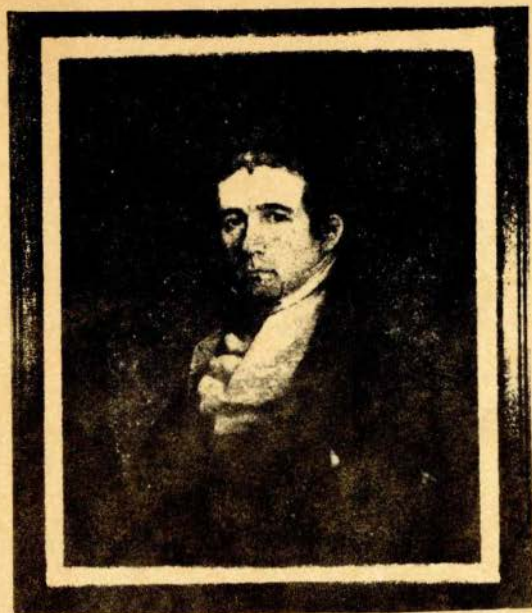
Nearly fifty years ago, Dr. Roemer addressed the college with these words: 'You cannot live on reminiscences. The past is for pleasant memories, the future for hard work. The future cannot feed upon power that is spent. There is no relationship between finished victories and victories yet to be won. Times change, means and methods change.'

In this spirit, Lindenwood today looks to the future.



by  
Mary Lichliter, Dean Emeritus  
The Lindenwood Colleges





Major George C. Sibley



Mary Easton Sibley