

THE Wells Preparatory School,
Aurora, on Cayuga Lake,
New York.

How Taylor House became
Taylor House and
Wallcourt became Wallcourt

Until 1895, Wells College maintained its own preparatory division on campus. When Wells closed the division, Sarah Yawger of Union Springs opened a new preparatory school for girls, renting the house of the late Henry Morgan. She called it “The Wells Preparatory School.”

**Right: Morgan’s house ca. 1870.
Note vinery greenhouse to left.**



Teachers.

SARAH LUDLOW YAWGER,
MATHEMATICS.

ANNA ROWENA GOLDSMITH, A. B.,
Wells College,
ENGLISH AND GERMAN.

CATHARINE ROSEBOOM SWINNERTON, A. B.,
Wells College,
LATIN AND GREEK.

REV. W. H. CASEY, M. A.,
Trinity College, Cambridge, England,
HISTORY AND ENGLISH LITERATURE.

PAUL POULIN,
University of Geneva, Switzerland,
FRENCH.

MABEL HEALEY CASEY, A. B.,
Diplomée in Music, Wells College,
PIANO.

MARJORIE RICHARDSON ANTHONY,
DRAWING.

In 1899 Miss Yawger added Anna Goldsmith, Wells 1884, to the staff. Miss Goldsmith had previously taught at All Saints' School, Sioux Falls, SD.

In addition to courses taught at the school, students attended concerts and lectures at Wells College. In 1898-9, they heard, among others, the American Romantic composer and pianist Edward MacDowell. His "Shadow Dance" was new that year.



IN 1888 YAWGHER'S School will begin its life in the most spacious and imposing of the many handsome residences in Aurora, the home of the late Mr. Henry Morgan. The grounds around it, and the near view of the lake from its windows could hardly be more beautiful than they are; and—vastly more important than these things—all the conditions in it and about it which make for health are perfect.

THE home-like character of the house and its appointments, but little changed since Mr. Morgan's time, imparts to it an air not commonly found in places of learning, and cannot fail to further the attempt to animate it with an accordant spirit, and make it, not merely a good school, but also a pleasant and comfortable home.

The elegant house provided not only a home for the students, but also room for “lawn tennis, basket ball, and almost every other out-door sport in which it is desirable that young ladies should bear a part.”



The Wells School circa 1905



This picture of the Imperial Chinese Commissioners with Secretaries and attaches was taken as the party was leaving the Walla School on the occasion of its retreat east to the school and to Walla College. The two Europeans, Miss Yang and Miss Wang, are in the foreground.

The esteem in which the school was held made it a “must-see” for the Imperial Chinese Viceroys, Commissioners and Secretaries on a tour of educational institutions.

In 1901, Miss Yawger died, leaving the school to Anna Goldsmith, who soon purchased the property from Kate Morgan Brookfield, Henry Morgan’s daughter. She took down the vine house (see above). The remaining brick wall, running next to Court Street, suggested to her the new name for the house and school: “Wallcourt, Miss Goldsmith’s School for Girls.” Anna Goldsmith “gave herself heart and soul to the task of making Wallcourt her ideal - and it was a high one - of what such an institution should be,” remembered Catherine Lowe, 1911.

In 1913, Anna Goldsmith married William Taylor of Lyons NY, a widower with one son, Myron. The picture below shows her in the Principal's study.



Another view of the study (above) looks toward the west windows and front hall. (Today, this is the library and portrait room of Taylor House.)

The north double drawing room (below) and the dining room (right) are immediately recognizable. In 1910, Anna Goldsmith added a second building, Wallcourt Hall (today known simply as Wallcourt; below right). The little rise on which it stands remains from Henry Morgan's vinery and walled garden.





The entry hall of Wallcourt is seen to the upper left, and the dining room, set for Thanksgiving, above. A boathouse and dock (left) were added before 1917.

Photograph of boathouse, January 1945, possibly by Dr. Burlington

Plays were as popular at Wallcourt School as at Wells College. Genevieve Lyon (top row, second from left) and Marguerite Hickey (to the left of the “gypsies” on the right stair post) were Aurora girls who attended Wallcourt as day students. (Circa 1914)





The "Shams," a Wallcourt intramural team, 1913. Marion Doughty, another Aurora girl, is second from left. She played right halfback.



“Mrs. Taylor believed in an all-around education for her girls. No one phase was allowed to be neglected. She was keenly interested in outdoor life, and was always an enthusiastic onlooker at hockey games or tennis matches. Intellectually she was constantly stimulating the students to higher achievements.....And as she laid stress upon physical and intellectual development, she emphasized no less the spiritual side of life, so often neglected in our modern world.”

Catherine C. Lowe, '11



Anna Goldsmith Taylor and her teaching staff, ca. 1917-18.

In August of 1921, while planning a new dormitory for the prospering school, Anna Goldsmith Taylor died unexpectedly, and the school did not long survive without her influence. In 1929, her stepson Myron C. Taylor, industrialist and later diplomat, presented the Wallcourt property to Wells College “as a perpetual memorial.” The original school, Henry Morgan’s home, was thereafter known as Taylor Hall, later Taylor House. It was the residence of Wells College presidents from 1936 to 2013. Wallcourt was used as a college dorm for many years.

The influence of the Wallcourt School, and especially of Mrs. Taylor, lived on in her students. Catherine Lowe remembered an impromptu lawn party at which “Mrs. Taylor brought together for a most enjoyable afternoon a group including a United States major, a well-known magazine writer, an attaché..., a Polish count and his wife...and last but not least the warden of Sing-Sing, who was a frequent visitor at the school, coming now to talk to us on prison reform and now to delight us with an interpretation of Gilbert and Sullivan....Hers was indeed a well-planned and well-constructed life, many-sided and with far-reaching outlooks....Her influence is ever with us, urging us constantly and unerringly ‘*en avant*’.”

The documentary and pictorial research for this display was carried out by Linda Kabelac, Assistant for Visual Resources, with Linda Schwab, Village Historian.

The next meeting of the Aurora Historical Society is Monday, Jan. 6th, 1:30 p.m. in the United Ministry lounge. All are welcome.



Anna Goldsmith Taylor