

A Bank, a Library, and a Hospital
The Legacy of Benjamin F. Harris and Julia F. Burnham
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Lesson 8: Like B.F. Harris, Julia Finley Burnham was a prominent figure in Champaign. She was born in 1839, married Albert Burnham in 1866, and died in 1894. Her husband was a wealthy lawyer, banker, and philanthropist. Their daughter, Mary Bruce Burnham, married Newton Harris, grandson of B.F. Harris. In this lesson, students will read Julia F. Burnham's obituary which appeared in the *Champaign County News* on October 29, 1894 as well as an entry written about her by J.O. Cunningham in his History of Champaign County and an excerpts from the minutes of the Women's Social and Political Science Club from 1888. As students read these documents, they will be pondering these questions: How does an individual's history reflect the history of a particular period? How does studying the life of an individual help us better understand moments in history?

Procedure:

- Divide the class into four groups. Each group will be responsible for studying all or part of a primary document and reporting back to the class.
- Each group should focus on what the document tells about life in Champaign at the time it was written.
- Students should also look for connections to national figures or events.
- In addition, students should look at the life of Julia Burnham as portrayed in the document.
- Each group will have at least one extension question to answer that will require extra research. Group members will divide the tasks as evenly as possible. Once the groups have finished their research, they will take turns sharing their findings. Information may be presented in multiple ways. Posters, skits, and interviews are encouraged. Each group member should have an active role in presenting group findings. The teacher will assess both the overall group effort as well as individual participation.
- The following questions are designed to help students as they consider the documents:

Group 1 will analyze pages 1-3 of the minutes from the Woman's Social and Political Science Club. These deal with the establishment of the club. Why was it formed? What was Mrs. A.C. Burnham's role in the club? Who was Elizabeth Cady Stanton? What does the term "women's suffrage" mean? Why was it an issue at this time? When was it no longer a point of controversy?

Group 2 will analyze pages 5 and 17 of the minutes from the Woman's Social and Political Science Club of 1888 and The Champaign Social Science Club of 1892. Page 5 deals with the club's decision to build a hospital while page 17 deals with the building of The Burnham Athenaeum, Champaign's free public library. What was Mrs. Burnham's role in these decisions? What do you think prompted her husband to donate so much money toward the projects? Mrs. H.H. Harris is also mentioned in the minutes dealing with the hospital. She was the wife of Henry Harris, Benjamin F.

Harris's son. How did the activities of Julia Burnham and Mary Harris differ from the way Benjamin F. Harris described the lives of two of his wives in his autobiography? In what ways did the role of women change as the city became more established?

Group 3 will study the obituary about Julia Burnham that appeared in the *Champaign County News* on October 29, 1894. What do you think the writer meant when he called her “a model of disinterested benevolence and Christian charity?” What were some of the concerns she tried to address? When he was discussing her health, the writer said there was “a paralytic tendency in her family.” What does this mean? What were the leading causes of death in the United States at this time? What does this source indicate about transportation in the 1890s?

Group 4 will look at two pages from the History of Champaign County by J.O. Cunningham that chronicle Julia Burnham's contributions. Which of her activities were mentioned? What indication was given that education was very important to her? Julia Burnham was educated in the public schools. What were the Champaign public schools like in the late 1800s?

Attachments:

- Pages 1, 2, 3, 5, 17 from History of the Champaign Social Science Club
- Julia Burnham Obituary
- History of Champaign County, J.O. Cunningham

Analysis of Local Primary Sources: Several primary sources were examined in this lesson. Pages from History of the Champaign Social Science Club. Mrs. Terence T. Quirke, Historian. 1894. Champaign County Historical Archives, Urbana Free Library, 210 West Green Street, Urbana, Illinois were studied as were the obituary from the *Champaign County News*, October 29, 1894 that I found in the Burnham Vertical File at the Champaign County Historical Archives, Urbana Free Library and two pages from History of Champaign County by J.O. Cunningham. Reprint of the 1905 Edition. Edited by Frederick A. Schlipf. Copyright 1984 by the Champaign County Historical Archives, Urbana Free Library.

Ties to National Primary Source: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the term “women's suffrage” as well as national health concerns were all part of this lesson.