



**Self-Guided Walking Tour  
Schaffer Library Digital Projects, Union College, 2011**

The walking tour and guide serve as a companion to the website dedicated to Mrs. Perkins, which is available on the digital galleries page of Union College’s Schaffer Library website. Anne Dunbar Potts Perkins (1835-1922) was the wife of Maurice Perkins, Professor of Chemistry at Union College from 1865 to 1901. During much of Union’s history, it was normal for faculty members to live and raise their families on campus; the Perkins family lived in the same faculty apartment in what is now known as Hale House during their entire time at Union. Mrs. Perkins, who continued to live in Hale House for another 20 years after her husband’s death, resided on campus for nearly 60 years.

The recent donation to Union College’s Schaffer Library of more than 700 letters written by Mrs. Perkins to her son Roger between 1895 and 1904 has provided important and enlightening new insights into life on campus during that time. Mrs. Perkins, nicknamed “The Duchess” by the students, had strong opinions about nearly everyone and everything at Union and freely expressed those opinions in her letters. The decade during which she wrote was an extraordinary time in Union’s history. Although the College’s financial situation was precarious, it was also a time of opportunity, when Union’s expansive pastoral campus began to assume a shape similar to the one it has today. Additionally, Mrs. Perkins’ letters reveal that while the College may only have admitted male students during her time here, the wives and daughters of the families who resided on campus were observant and lively participants in Union’s social and intellectual life.

The library website and this walking tour are based on information from Mrs. Perkins’ letters as well as Wayne Somers’ *Encyclopedia of Union College History*, published in 2003. They are intended to help

you imagine what life was like at Union from 1895 to 1904. In addition to tour information, the library website includes an interactive map of Union’s campus in Mrs. Perkins’ day, pictorial, historical and biographical background material, and further information about this Schaffer Library Digital Project.

This tour takes you to ten vantage points on the Union campus, starting at Old Chapel and ending at Mrs. Perkins’ Garden. Walking directions are included at each point.



## Start at Vantage Point 1: Old Chapel

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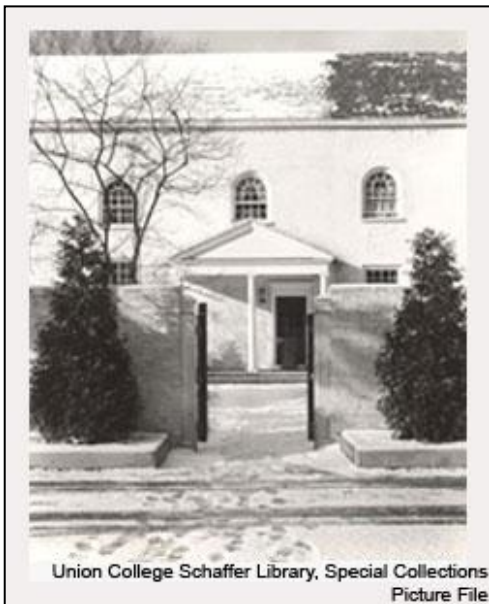
The basic shape of the central area of the Union College campus has remained the same for much of its history, but many structures are new or have been repurposed. When Mrs. Perkins lived on campus, for example, the Old Chapel building was called Geological Hall. It not only contained the chapel, which students were required to attend daily, but also science classrooms and other offices. The chapel was one of several rooms on campus used for public lectures, which Mrs. Perkins often attended. She sometimes gave lectures herself on the subject of literature, but her interests and intellectual curiosity were as varied as her observations about the day-to-day life of the College. In 1902, for example, she attended a lecture that the recently hired Charles Steinmetz gave on “Rontgen rays,” or x-rays. She also reported that Steinmetz’s classes were popular with students and that he experimented with the lights on campus, varying their colors from yellow to green to purple.



**Walk west** towards Vantage Point 2, Hale House, where Mrs. Perkins lived with her family from 1865 to 1922.

## Vantage Point 2: Hale House

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South Colonnade, built in 1815, is one of the oldest buildings on campus and was designed to match the campus plan developed by Union President Eliphalet Nott and French architect Joseph Jacques Ramée in 1813. The plan included provisions for faculty living space. Eliphalet Nott, among others, briefly lived in the two-story South Colonnade apartment before Maurice and Anne Perkins took up residence there in 1865; the Perkins occupied this house for the rest of their lives. At the time, it was common not only for faculty but also for their families to live on the Union campus, and it was here that the Perkins raised their three children, Rose, Roger, and Alice.

After Maurice Perkins died in 1901, Mrs. Perkins continued to live in South Colonnade with her daughter Rose, Rose’s husband, Union College English Professor Edward Everett Hale, Jr., and their young family. Mrs. Perkins died here in 1922.

While the building was later named in honor of her son-in-law, Mrs. Perkins was its longest resident, calling it her home for 57 years. Most of the family’s possessions were lost in a fire in 1910, but a portrait that belonged to Mrs. Perkins still hangs just inside the door as a memento of her time here. A more significant memorial of Mrs. Perkins is the surviving portion of the large garden that she maintained behind this house for over 50 years. Still called Mrs. Perkins’ Garden, it was her labor of love and one of the showpieces of the campus. It can be visited at Vantage Point 10 of this tour.

Because Mrs. Perkins grew up in an era when very few women attended college, she was largely self-educated. She was fluent in French and was particularly knowledgeable about art and literature. She gave lectures on the poets Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning for members of the community and held religion classes on Sundays for Presbyterian students at Union. When the family needed money, she completed French translations using the typewriter that she taught herself to use in 1895. She also used the same typewriter, nicknamed “The Demon,” to compose long letters to her children after they left home.



The Perkins/Hale Family, left to right: Maurice and Anne Perkins; son Roger; daughter Alice; daughter Rose Perkins Hale; son-in-law Edward Everett Hale Jr.

*Image of Maurice Perkins, Union College Schaffer Library, Special Collections Picture File; others from Charles Brush Perkins, Ancestors of Charles Brush Perkins and Maurice Perkins (Baltimore: Gateway, 1976).*

**Walk east** towards Vantage Point 3, the Nott Memorial.

### Vantage Point 3: The Nott Memorial looking east towards Schaffer Library



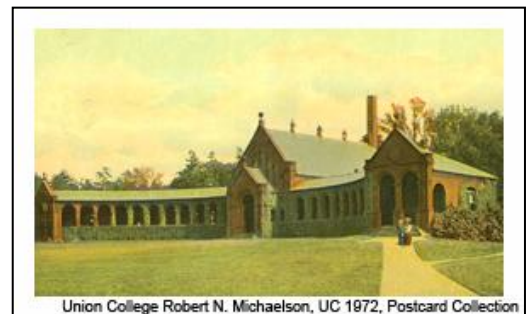
Reprinted in the *Concordiensis*, May 18, 1928

Although the Nott Memorial was and continues to be at the center of the Union College campus, it was not completed until 1877, about a decade after Maurice and Anne Perkins arrived on campus. In its early years, it was most frequently referred to as “the round building”; although it was intended to be used for alumni and other College events, it was difficult to heat and light, and therefore rarely used. Student dances were occasionally held here, but Mrs. Perkins’ letters

confirm that the icy conditions in the building left attendees feeling frozen. It was also used as a museum and boasted a collection of reproductions of classical statues. In 1903, Mrs. Perkins described a major prank, in which students took the statues out of the building and onto the athletic field to the west, setting them up as though they were they were playing baseball. Mrs. Perkins was amused, as others must have been as well, even though some of the statues were broken; the students re-staged the prank later for local reporters.

A much busier place on campus was the red brick Washburn Hall, which, from 1883 to 1963, stood just in front of where Schaffer Library now stands. During the period of Mrs. Perkins’ letters, there were no other College buildings behind Washburn Hall, only a running track and a large wooded area known as the College Grove. Like the round building, Washburn Hall had its own heating problems, but it was better designed to serve a variety of purposes; it housed classrooms,

Mrs. Perkins’ Union College 1895-1904



Union College Robert N. Michaelson, UC 1972, Postcard Collection

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administrative and faculty offices, and the library. The space set aside in Washburn for the library quickly proved inadequate, and in 1902, Mrs. Perkins sent exciting news to her son that Andrew Carnegie had donated \$40,000 to turn the Nott into a library and fix the heating problem there. Work on this project was completed in 1905.

**Walk north** towards Vantage Point 4, Philosophical Hall (now the Visual Arts Building)

#### **Vantage Point 4: Philosophical Hall (now the Visual Arts Building)**

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The classroom buildings at the time of Mrs. Perkins' letters included North Colonnade, Geological Hall (now Old Chapel), Washburn Hall, and Philosophical Hall (now the Visual Arts building). Professor Perkins' chemistry lab would have been located in Philosophical Hall; one picture from the library's Special Collections shows him standing in his lab coat in front of the door at the corner of Philosophical Hall with his students. Mrs. Perkins' letters confirm that the classrooms, like many other buildings on campus, were difficult to heat in the winter; at times, they were so cold that classes had to be canceled. Still, Philosophical Hall and North Colonnade may have been better than most. At his



own initiative, Maurice Perkins set up a three-room infirmary in North Colonnade in the 1880s to house students with contagious diseases, and the chemistry lab itself provided resources not available elsewhere. For example, Mrs. Perkins wrote that her daughter Rose had some chicken eggs that she was trying unsuccessfully to hatch in an incubator, so Professor Perkins brought them to his lab to try to hatch them there; however, the Perkins' animals were not always welcome in the classrooms. Mrs. Perkins wrote that her cat Momo once escaped the house and got into a classroom, where the professor threw it out the window; it appears that the window was on the first floor, as Momo survived unharmed.

Mrs. Perkins' letters also chronicle the College's consideration in 1895-96 of moving entirely from its present location to Albany; the idea was that it would join other parts of Union University, including Albany Law School and Albany Medical College, in a more integrated geographical area. Mrs. Perkins saw the possible advantages of the move for Union but wasn't particularly anxious to move herself. At last minute, the state funding for the relocation fell through, so the College remained in Schenectady.

**Walk north** towards Vantage Point 5, Outside Jackson's Garden

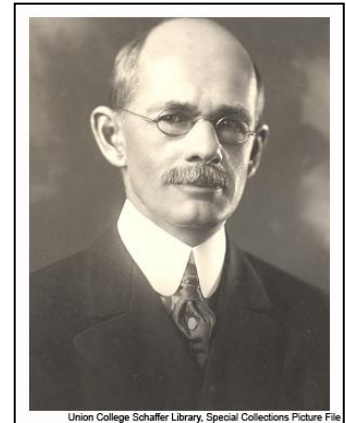
#### **Vantage Point 5: Outside Jackson's Garden**

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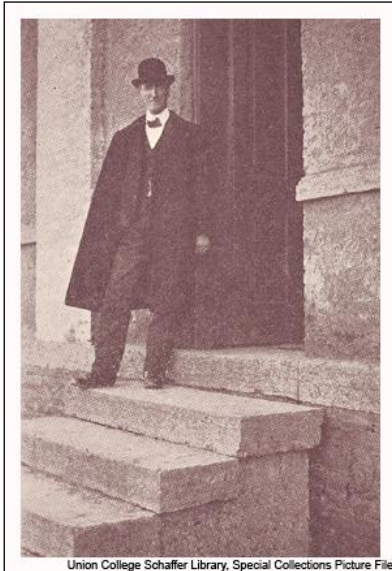
Although Jackson's Garden is the oldest surviving garden on campus and has been continuously cultivated since the 1830s, in Mrs. Perkins' day, much of this area had a somewhat wilder appearance. The formal entrance gate on this side of the garden was only erected in 1925, several years after her death. The garden was started by Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy Isaac Jackson, whose daughter Julia Jackson Benedict tended it after his death in 1877. Julia Benedict lived just a few steps away from the garden and was both a kindred spirit and rival to Mrs. Perkins (more information Mrs. Perkins' Union College 1895-1904

about Julia Benedict can be found at the next vantage point). Across the garden on Nott Street lived two others individuals who figured significantly in Mrs. Perkins' life and letters.

The first was her daughter Rose, who married Edward Everett Hale Jr., an established academic who became Professor of Rhetoric, Logic, and English at Union College in 1895. When the young couple first came to the College, they lived on the far side of Jackson's Garden in a house they called The Orchard. Their home is no longer standing, but according to Mrs. Perkins, it was the site of many entertainments for students as well as faculty. The Hales would frequently walk over to South Colonnade to visit Professor and Mrs. Perkins. The somewhat fragile condition of Jackson's Garden at the time is suggested by the fact that Mrs. Perkins worried about Rose's trips over the College Brook in the garden via a bridge that she felt was rickety and unstable.



The second person who lived on the opposite side of the garden was the colorful C. B. Pond, who was hired by College Treasurer Frank Bailey as his assistant in 1901. Union was in deep financial trouble during this time. Its debts were mounting, enrollment had fallen to less than 200 students, and Mrs. Perkins often complained that the College was unable to pay her husband and the other faculty on time.



Frank Bailey is largely credited with saving the college from financial ruin; he forced the College to operate within its income, sold off unused land, including much of College Grove to the east, to raise needed funds, and made many personal donations of his own. Bailey did not live in Schenectady, so he hired Pond as a local enforcers to make sure that his new fiscal regulations were being followed and that student bills were paid on time. Pond's rough manner made him unpopular with many residents of Union's campus, including Mrs. Perkins. He is reported to have kept a revolver on his desk when collecting bills, and Mrs. Perkins recounted one story in which he ordered that the door to the room of a student who hadn't paid his tuition in time be locked, whether the student was in it or not. Pond also upset many in the local community by overstepping his bounds and interfering in other matters. He angered Mrs. Perkins, for example, by moving a tree that she liked to a less suitable place on campus.

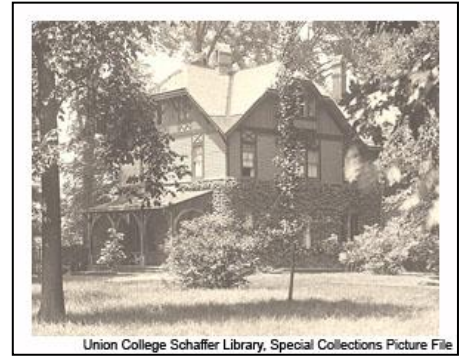
**Walk west** between Yulman Theatre and North College towards Vantage Point 6, North College / Terrace Lane.

### **Vantage Point 6: North College / Terrace Lane**

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During Mrs. Perkins' time at Union, the corner of North College on Terrace Lane, where Yulman Theatre now stands, was the site of Benedict House, a mock-Tudor home with Victorian touches. Its proprietress, Julia Jackson Benedict, was the daughter of Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy Isaac Jackson. Julia Jackson was born at Union in 1838, and married Samuel Benedict, a Union College graduate who went on to lecture in law the College, in 1865. She lived in Benedict House, which she built with her husband, until her death at the age of 87. For half her life Mrs. Benedict cared for Jackson's Garden after her father's death for nearly 50 years. This dedication had its price for the College community; Mrs. Benedict regarded Jackson's Garden as her personal property, not to be

used by students without her permission. She was even known to fire her shotgun from the balcony of her house to scare off “intruders.” Mrs. Benedict and Mrs. Perkins had much in common; they would often talk with one another about their gardens. They often argued about religion, for Mrs. Benedict was a convert to Catholicism and Mrs. Perkins a devout Presbyterian. Mrs. Perkins’ letters make clear that she found their disputes tedious and Mrs. Benedict’s general tenacity about her own opinions wearisome.



Turn to walk south along North College. What is now Wold and Messa Minerva houses were once a combination of faculty and student residences and recitation rooms. The faculty apartments were at either end of North College, with the student dormitories in between. The end closest to the Benedict house was occupied by James Truax and family. Truax, like the Perkins’ son-in-law Edward Everett Hale Jr., was a professor of English language and literature at Union, and Mrs. Perkins writes of the deep anxiety of both families in 1902, when the College’s Board of Trustees decided that, given Union’s dire financial situation at the time, it could not afford to keep both professors. Although a proposal surfaced to retain the two professors by reducing their individual salaries, eventually Truax left the College, citing reasons of health, although it is not clear whether he was persuaded or left voluntarily.



The faculty apartment at the southern end of North College was occupied by William Wells, or “Uncle Billy,” a professor of Modern Languages. He was in his eighties at the time Mrs. Perkins’ letters were written, and she suggests that his powers and presence on campus were both beginning to wane. Like the Benedicts, Wells had his home for life. In between the Truax and the Wells families, students lived in dormitories that had changed little in comfort since the building was constructed in 1813. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, steam heat, electric lighting, and improved bathrooms were installed, but neither this dormitory nor its twin in South College was adequate

for the numbers of students enrolled at the time. As we shall see later, the construction of four new fraternity houses on campus during this period relieved some of the student housing pressures.

**Continue walking south** towards Vantage Point 7, The Flagpole / South College.

### **Vantage Point 7: Flagpole / South College**

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The area immediately below the Nott Memorial, now known as Library or Rugby Field, was the main athletic field when Mrs. Perkins wrote her letters. She often wrote about Union’s athletic fortunes in her letters, which is not surprising, since she could watch the games from the windows of her home in South Colonnade. On this field, students played football and baseball; Union also participated in track and basketball during this time, and a dirt tennis court stood where Reamer Campus Center currently sits.

A major athletics controversy arose in the mid-1890s. After the football season in 1895, the faculty decided that students who were failing two or more courses should not be allowed to participate in athletics. Upset by the new policy, students decided to go on strike against the athletics program entirely, thinking that their action would shock the faculty into lifting the restriction. However, Mrs.

Perkins noted that this strategy left the students in a difficult position, the faculty being content not to have an athletics program. Eventually, the students yielded and accepted the new academic eligibility rule, but most of the spring 1896 season was missed because of the controversy.

South College was organized like North College, with faculty residences at each end and an overcrowded, uncomfortable student dormitory and recitation rooms in between. The faculty apartment at the northern end, which shared a wall with the Perkins/Hale residence in South Colonnade, was occupied at this time by the Stoller family. James Stoller was a Union graduate and a professor of Biology and Geology. His energetic young family was the source of some tension between the Stollers and Mrs. Perkins. She could often hear the children through the shared wall, and she considered the two mischievous Stoller sons not only loud and rambunctious, but also a bad influence on her grandson, Maurice Hale. Mrs. Perkins had a keen understanding of the pressures and problems of residing in campus housing. Henry Whitehorne, the professor of classics who had lived in the faculty residence at the far end of South College since at least 1873, died in his eighties in 1901, and Mrs. Perkins noted with sympathy the difficulty his family had giving up their longtime campus home.



The area to the west of campus, now occupied by parking lots, West College, Richmond, Fox, and Davidson, had no buildings on it at the beginning of the time period covered by Mrs. Perkins' letters. Instead, this open area was known as the Pasture, and it was used for the grazing of cows and sheep, many of them owned by College faculty. Students and faculty children often played tricks involving the cows; Mrs. Perkins reported that her son-in-law Edward Everett Hale Jr. was once chased across campus by a cow when he was on his way to visit her. Beginning in 1896, part of The

Pasture was turned into a rudimentary golf course patronized by Hale and President Andrew Van Vranken Raymond, although the cows provided a bit of an obstacle. During Mrs. Perkins' time, the Pasture was reduced somewhat in size during the sell-off of campus lands under the measures adopted by College Treasurer Frank Bailey.

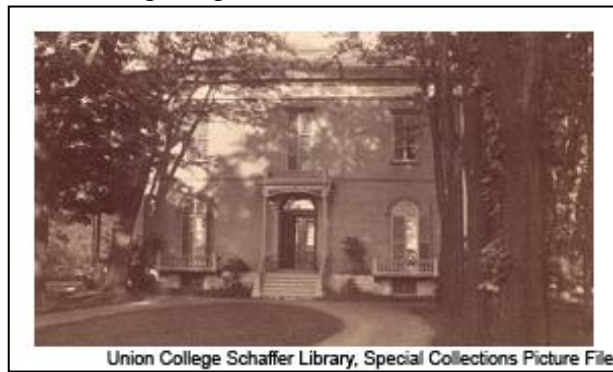
**Continue walking south** towards Vantage Point 8, The President's House / Hoffman House (now Feigenbaum Hall)

### **Vantage Point 8: The President's House / Hoffman House (now Feigenbaum Hall)**

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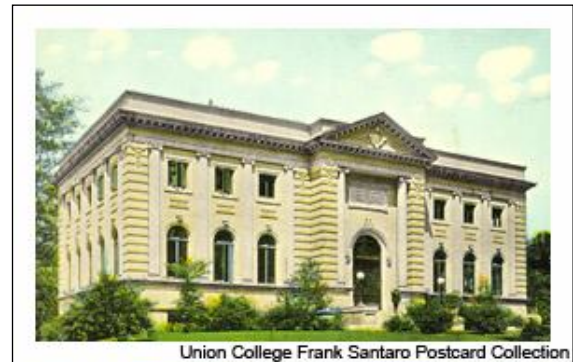
Andrew Van Vranken Raymond, a Union graduate and clergyman, was President of Union College during the decade when the Perkins letters were written. Despite the dire financial challenges faced by the College, Raymond would preside over a time that saw the College begin to establish itself on solid fiscal ground. His leadership also helped to increase enrollment and donations to the College, as well as to revitalize its curriculum through his efforts to establish connections with General Electric, start an electrical engineering program, and strengthen other academic offerings. The Perkins family knew the Raymonds well, and Mrs. Perkins would often visit Mrs. Raymond, who was not only an engaging woman and personal friend, but also someone who kept her up-to-

Mrs. Perkins' Union College 1895-1904



date on College affairs. However, it is clear that Mrs. Raymond took care to avoid sharing inside information about matters that directly affected the extended Perkins family. In 1902, the Board of Trustees was considering whether it could afford to retain both Mrs. Perkins' son-in-law and another professor in the same academic department, leaving Ms. Perkins was justifiably anxious. The Raymonds, however, appeared to have stayed out of the matter until the other professor resigned.

One of the many changes to the campus during Raymond's era was the selling of College property to the east and west in order to raise badly needed funds, establishing the footprint of the campus as it is known today. One parcel that was sold during Mrs. Perkins' time but later repurchased by the College was at the far southwest corner, where Webster House stands. This piece of land was sold in 1901 for the construction of the Schenectady public library, and Mrs. Perkins described the laying of its cornerstone in 1902. After the public library outgrew its space in 1970, the building and land were repurchased by the College; Webster is now a student residence.

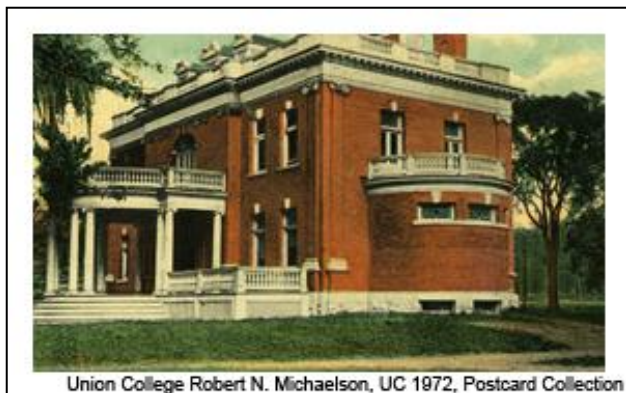


During the period of Mrs. Perkin's letters, the building now known as Feigenbaum Hall was a combined faculty residence and fraternity house. Philosophy Professor Frank Hoffman, who taught at Union for around thirty years, lived here. He was a widower but remarried during the decade of the letters; Mrs. Perkins met his new wife soon after their marriage, and the two would visit each other frequently in the following years. The house was divided vertically, and the other half of the house was occupied by Phi Gamma Delta, the fraternity that Professor Hoffman had belonged to in college. The fraternity moved out when it built its own house in 1907, but the Hoffman family continued to live there. Tragically, a raging fire broke out in the house in 1918, killing Hoffman's grandson and a nursemaid. Reconstruction of the building afterwards substantially altered its appearance.

**Walk northeast** between Silliman Hall and either Feigenbaum or North College towards Vantage Point 9, Silliman Hall, east side.

### **Vantage Point 9: Silliman Hall, east side.**

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Silliman Hall was built in 1900 as a meeting place for the YMCA and other student organizations. In her letters, Mrs. Perkins reported the donation of the money for the construction of and the dedication of the building. Its appearance pleased her, an important matter from her point of view, since she could see both the structure and events being held in Silliman Hall from her rear windows. Apparently the activity also pleased Mrs. Perkins, for she commented on how pretty the lights were as they shone from the hall during evening events. Like other buildings on

campus, Silliman often had heating problems. Mrs. Perkins reported in one of her letters that due to a widespread coal shortage in the wintertime, some buildings, including Silliman Hall, had to be closed for an extended period.

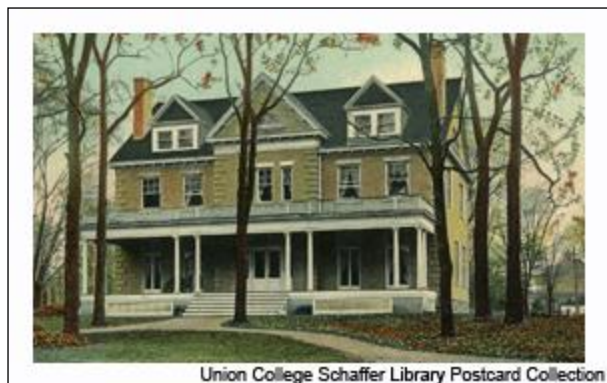


Long before Silliman was constructed, another building had stood in this general area. The modest structure had been the home of Moses Viney, longtime servant to College President Eliphalet Nott. Viney was born into slavery in Maryland, but escaped to the North and started working for Nott in 1842. Nott later secured his freedom, and Viney worked for Nott until Nott's death in 1866. Sometime afterwards, Viney moved off-campus, where he established and continued to run an independent carriage service in Schenectady until his retirement in 1901. Mrs. Perkins was one of Viney's regular customers. Although she could walk to and from her daughter's home at The Orchard on Nott Street, weight gain and other health issues made her reluctant to walk longer distances. Her solution was usually to use Moses Viney's carriage service, and her dog Flop loved to accompany her. On at least one occasion, Flop hid under Viney's feet, causing Mrs. Perkins to forget him in the carriage, and Viney had to bring him back to South Colonnade at the end of the day.



Union College Schaffer Library, Special Collections Picture File

Across Library Lane, one can also see the Ashmore House, now known as John Blair Smith House, flanked by two fraternity houses that were constructed during this general period, Alpha Delta Phi on the left, now the Grant Hall admissions building, and Sigma Phi on the right, now the Breazzano Minerva House. At the time of Mrs. Perkins' letters, the middle house was occupied by Professor of Latin Sidney Ashmore and his wife, who was one of Mrs. Perkins' closest friends. Mrs. Ashmore expressed concern about being crowded in between two fraternity houses, and Mrs. Perkins lamented the loss of the pretty open space on that end of campus, for St. John the Evangelist Roman Catholic Church was also being built at this time. Nevertheless, the Ashmores and Perkins had a good relationship with the fraternities, and all of the women would sometimes be chaperones at fraternity dances. In any case, the shortage of student dormitories on campus, which were limited to North and South Colleges at the time, made the construction of large fraternity houses on campus something of a necessity. Two other houses were also built at Union during this decade: the Chi Psi Lodge, now the Golub Minerva House, and the Kappa Alpha House, which is no longer standing. The popularity of fraternity housing was enhanced by the fact that there were no dining halls on campus at this time. This meant that many students would have to walk to downtown Schenectady for their meals. Students who belonged to fraternities, however, could eat all of their meals "at home" without having to make the trek off-campus.



Union College Schaffer Library Postcard Collection

Fraternities were a significant part of campus life during this period. A large number had been founded at Union, a majority of students belonged to one, and some Union faculty members had been in fraternities themselves while they were in college. Thus close bonds tended to form between faculty members and students over their fraternity loyalties. Mrs. Perkins reported, for example, that after the death of College Professor of Natural Philosophy John Foster, who had been a member of Sigma Phi as an undergraduate at Union, the students who were then members of Sigma

Phi stayed up all night in the chapel with his body. Mrs. Perkins herself had a particular affinity for Kappa Alpha because her son Roger had been in that fraternity when he was a student at Union. Mrs. Perkins reported the activities of all the fraternities in her letters, along with more general student-

faculty interactions. Mrs. Perkins once wrote that some students undertook to teach their professors, including Professor Perkins and President Raymond, how to ride bicycles; she greatly enjoyed the sight.

The building that is now the Becker Career Center on the left was built as the college gym, where basketball games would take place during the period of Mrs. Perkins' letters. There was also a hay loft above the gym, and the dust from the hay would cover the players. Better facilities at Alumni Gymnasium would not be built for another decade.

**Walk northeast** towards Vantage Point 10, Mrs. Perkins' Garden.

### **Vantage Point 10: Mrs. Perkins' Garden.**

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Mrs. Perkins' Garden is now greatly reduced in size from the days when she cultivated it. Begun as a vegetable patch in 1866, it was soon taken over by the flowers for which Mrs. Perkins lovingly cared until 1920, almost the entire time she was at Union. Always located on the south side of Geological Hall, now Old Chapel, it once stretched further west behind Hale House, and its beauty often attracted passers-by and campus visitors.

In her letters, Mrs. Perkins frequently wrote about her struggles and progress in the garden. Sadly, droughts often destroyed many of her plants, yet she still managed to grow tulips, lilies of the valley, irises, dahlias, and clematis, among dozens of others. (A full list of the plants Mrs. Perkins mentioned in her letters is available on the library's website.) She also wrote of her cherry tree, pear tree, and creeper plants, as well as the installation of cut stone paths in 1895 and the birds and butterflies that flew about her plantings. Incursions into her garden were not always a source of happiness for Mrs. Perkins, such as when an electric pole needed to provide lighting in the chapel was placed in an unsightly position just outside the garden in January of 1895. However, by 1900, she had covered even that eyesore with a climbing shrub.



Union College Schaffer Library, Special Collections Picture File

Every October, Mrs. Perkins would pack up her garden until the spring, but the plant room in her house provided flowers in the winter. In 1926, a few years after Mrs. Perkins's death, her daughter Rose erected a gateway and the commemorative plaque which now hangs outside the wall of the remaining garden. Before the College was gifted with her letters, Mrs. Perkins was best remembered at Union College for her garden; the vivid observations about life on campus that she recorded in her letters can now be equally appreciated as part of Union's history.



Union College Schaffer Library Postcard Collection