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Lucy Skidmore Scribner Finds The Young Women's Industrial Club—1903

There would be no Skidmore College were it not for a frail lady with a will of iron who came to Saratoga Springs in 1900 to take the healing waters, fell in love with the charms of the unique resort town, and decided to remain.

The daughter of a wealthy coal merchant and widow of publishing scion J. Blair Scribner, Lucy Scribner was almost 50 when she came to Saratoga. Deeply religious, inordinately shy, and physically restricted, she disliked frivolous parties and frowned on two of the most popular local entertainments and industries, horse racing and gambling. She decided to invest her inheritance in something more worthwhile: She would start a school where young women of the town could learn skills that would make them self-supporting in the long winter months when the giant hotels, the race track, the baths, the casinos, and the shops and restaurants catering to the resort trade were shut down, and there was little work for the untrained.

So with the help of other civic-minded neighbors, Lucy Scribner created the Young Women's Industrial

Club of Saratoga Springs, whose first curriculum was a blend of practical courses in typewriting, book-keeping, textile arts, physical education, and music and dance. Today we may snicker at the courses in sewing, shirtwaist making and millinery, but these were among the few fields in which women could manage businesses, and those courses were embedded in a broader context of creative expression and esthetic appreciation.

So it was that the club's constitution declared that its objectives were "the cultivation of such knowledge and arts as may promote [students'] well-being, physical, mental, spiritual, and ability to become self-supporting." The YWIC's constitution further declared—this in 1903—that "this Club shall be non-sectarian and open to girls and young women of good character, Protestant or Catholic, White, Negro, or Indian."

By 1908, the industrial club had 436 students, male and female, many commuting from the surrounding towns and countryside. ■