

## Edwin C. Hewett (1828-1905)

Edwin C. Hewett was born November 1, 1828 in Worcester County, Massachusetts. He was the first child of Timothy and Lavina Hewett. Hewett's father was a farmer, **wheelwright**, and plow-maker. His family belonged to the Congregationalist church. One of the core values of the church, which his parents instilled in him and his brothers and sisters, was the value of earning their livelihood by honest labor. Thus, because of his parents' beliefs, Hewett was subject to earning his own living at a young age and learned the trade of shoemaking by the age of 13. He was also educated in the **common schools** where he received his primary education.

After being a shoemaker for eight years, Hewett began to teach—taking his first position at the age of 21, making \$13 per month (which would be about \$420 in 2018). His interest in teaching came from attending an academy when he was a younger man. He went on to attend the State Normal School in Bridgewater, Massachusetts and graduated in 1852. In 1853, he became an assistant teacher at this school and taught there for four years.

It was during his time at Bridgewater that Hewett became engaged to Angeline Benton of Franklin County, Massachusetts. However, Benton and her family soon moved to Illinois and settled in the town of Sublette in Lee County. Hewett found a better paying teaching job and soon moved to Illinois and married Benton on August 23, 1857 in Lee County, Illinois. They had two children—Paul, who died in infancy; and May, who lived into adulthood.

Charles Hovey, the first president of Illinois State Normal University (ISNU) in Normal, Illinois, was recruiting teachers for the new school and somehow had heard of Hewett, probably from others who had been at Bridgewater. Having moved to Illinois to marry, when Hovey offered Hewett a position at \$1,200 a year (which would be \$36,363 in 2018), he gladly accepted the offer. In the fall of 1858, he was officially hired as a professor of history and geography at ISNU.

College was quite different during those times than it is now. While Hewett was a history and geography professor, he also, at one time or another, taught mathematics, literature, **pedagogy** (how to teach others), spelling, and psychology. He claimed later in his teaching career that he probably had every enrolled student at ISNU in at least one of his classes.

Hewett's classroom was no place to "**dawdle**." He was a man who believed in the "facts" and the "truth." He strongly encouraged his students to "pay attention and guard against uttering nonsense," and to really think before they speak or act. Hewett's character "demanded that people and things should be what they seemed and he practiced his belief in his own life." His methods of teaching would probably be difficult to accept these days. In geography the prime concerns were map drawing and definitions. No student was allowed to pass his geography class unless they "could go to the blackboard and draw freehand, to approximate scale," any of the continents, and locate countries, states, important cities, and significant physical features, such as rivers, peninsulas, and mountains.

Hewett, like many men of the time, was a known opponent of women's right to vote. He felt that voting was "essentially an unfeminine act" and that the "hand that casts the ballot must be able to use the musket in its defense. The vote and muscle must go together." The earliest known instance of Hewett speaking on this subject was March 6, 1868. He presented the lecture "Is it Best for Women to Vote?" (arguing that it was *not* best) at Normal Hall that evening. In his lecture he characterized female speakers as "**bawling** women" (possibly referring to renowned suffragist and lecturer Susan B. Anthony). The *Pantagraph* reported that his lecture against woman's suffrage was listened to attentively by a good audience, "a goodly number of whom

seemed to appreciate what the speaker said”—though it is not known how many, if any, in the audience were women.

On Friday, March 18, 1870, Hewett debated Susan B. Anthony at Schroeder’s Opera House in downtown Bloomington. The topic was “Is it best for the women of America that they should vote?”—with Hewett again arguing that it was *not* best. Tickets were 50 cents (which today would be the equivalent of about \$10), with reserved seating costing an extra 25 cents.

That evening, the opera house was filled to **capacity**—every seat, the aisles, galleries, and stage “were occupied by an intelligent and eager audience.” The streetcars “brought crowds of people from Normal,” and the trains from various railroads brought spectators from many adjoining towns.

The debate began with “ladies first,” and Anthony declared in her opening 25 minutes that women were “treated as minors—and it is always demoralizing to any body[sic] to be treated as a minor or irresponsible being. The laws are such and the conditions of society are such that women are compelled to seek marriage as a condition of support and maintenance.” In her opinion, if women were given the right to vote, it would give “her **corresponding power for protection.**” And that if women had the vote, “long neglected issues involving prison reform and prostitution, among other things, would be given their due.”

When Hewett took the stage, he argued that “women had enough to do already without the responsibility of voting. Her brain is full, her hands are full and her arms are full.” Plus, women always get what they want—“they rule by an influence that the ballot cannot equal.” Hewett went on to explain that “old oppressive laws, not only in this State, but in others, have been removed upon the demands of the women, and they were changed without the ballot in the hands of the women... Women have shown these law unjust—men have repealed them—now the law leans to the woman’s side.” In Hewett’s opinion, “there was different work for men and women to do. It was shown in every relation of life, and voting seemed to him to be peculiarly man’s work as was digging ditches, cutting wood, etc...” And, according to Hewett, a large portion of the women of the United States did not want to vote. And because they did not vote, they were “thankfully free from the **corrupting** influence of politics.”

Hewett debated Susan B. Anthony two more times while she toured Illinois. Again, Hewett took the negative, stating that women should not vote. During these debates, it was reported that Hewett stated he was sorry that it had become “necessary to discuss this subject at all.”

In 1876 Hewett was appointed President of the ISNU and served in that capacity until 1890. When Hewett became university president, he inherited a job with numerous challenges. Economic problems across the country were making it more difficult for students to afford the luxury of college, especially when many of them could find jobs in teaching without any required formal training. Hewett had his staff attend many teaching workshops to encourage those already in the field to enhance their skills. One of Hewett’s final actions as president was hiring ISNU’s first full-time librarian, Ange Vernon Milner, in 1890.

After over 38 years of marriage, Angeline Hewett died on November 21, 1895. She was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery on May 20, 1896. Hewett married for a second time on August 31, 1898 to Mrs. Helen E. Paisley. She survived Edwin by 18 years, dying of pneumonia on March 8, 1923. She is buried in the Hewett family plot at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.

Edwin Hewett was a very religious man. He was a Baptist with a license to preach, and taught Sunday school for many years at the Baptist Church in Normal. He studied the Bible and **theology** in great detail, and religion was a centerpiece in the Hewett household—both when he was a child and as an adult.

On March 31, 1905, Edwin C. Hewett passed away at his home on West Ash Street after a brief illness. Since December of the previous year, Hewett had suffered from heart trouble caused by a severe attack of pneumonia and erysipelas (a potentially serious bacterial infection of the skin), which left his heart in a weakened condition. Hewett's funeral was held the afternoon of April 3 at the Baptist Church in Normal, and he was buried at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington immediately following the service.