CHAPTER FOUR

A New Era: 1920-1930

“Can we not salute these younger people, this new era, this greater time, this better school that is to be built upon the past? I think we can, and so it is.” Jane E. Leonard, ISNS commencement dinner, 1925

Jane Leonard was not the only one who saw the 1920’s as a new era. Coming in the wake of the transformational Great War, the “roaring twenties,” brought political changes, technological innovations, and movement away from long held social mores. Changes that excited some but created considerable anxiety among others.

Women’s sustained efforts had finally led to the passage of the 19th amendment. For the first time women could vote in a national election. In the same year, Prohibition, a reform backed by women’s organizations and closely allied with women’s suffrage, went into effect, outlawing the sale of intoxicating beverages. Jane Leonard (who some say saw the achievement of both of these reforms as a personal achievement) and other female faculty and students at the normal school could look forward to a new era, where women could participate more fully in government, and have an even greater impact on the course of national events.

In this new era female and male students would challenge traditional rules of conduct including the ban on smoking, riding in cars, dancing modern dances, wearing shorter skirts, and fraternizing with the opposite sex and other other limitations on
their freedom of movement, particularly those that applied only to females.

During this period, ISNS itself was embarking on a new era. After the war young people of both genders were returning to the school. A period of unparralled economic prosperity and state laws that increased requirements for teacher certification encouraged enrollments. The number of students matriculating reached new heights. With the school recently acquired by the State, ISNS principal John Keith predicted that it was a time for growth and development and that its economic woes would be a thing of the past. Conditions were ripe for the institution to move beyond normal school to collegiate status. The Trustees minutes from 1922 record the financial health of school was rosy, and Keith predicted a “bright and rosy future” (April 8, 1922)

Towards Collegiate Status

Though normal school principals had long wished to require a high school diploma with college preparatory work for admission, (something that colleges had done for some time), the dearth of high schools in the region had made this impossible before the Great War. By 1920, high schools had become much more plentiful, and the normal schools across the state agreed to uniform admission standards which included high school graduation with college preparatory work for admission.

With students entering the normal school with high school degrees, the schools could begin to develop their curriculums with the aim of offering undergraduate degrees. In 1925, Pennsylvania normal school principals including Keith, appealed to the State Superintendent of Education to begin a joint process of revising the normal school curriculum. The proposition was approved and by 1926 a curriculum was developed.

A college-level curriculum required instructors with college training, which some at ISNS did not have. In the early years of the school, instructors sometimes were only normal school graduates and lacked even undergraduate degrees. Now there was a push to increase the credentials of the faculty. Keith achieved this by urging faculty
beyond retirement age (those most likely to not have needed credentials) to retire, and replacing them with those with higher credentials.

Between 1920 and 1927 Keith followed this path. The number of faculty with masters degrees dramatically increased and those with only a bachelors or no degree at all dramatically decreased. The size of the faculty increased too, to keep pace with program development and increasing enrollments. The number of faculty members increased from 44 in 1920, to 100 in 1927. (For more information on this process see Merryman, *History of*, 215-216)