While the Association of the Sexes rules served to keep the normal school students of different genders separated on most occasions, but the one social/educational activity where male and female students could interact, though within strict limits, was through participation in the literary societies. Literary societies were common at academic institutions during the 19th century, often had Latin names, and were typically student run. They were both academic and social in nature, and often provided forums for discussion of current events not included in the curriculum or expression of other intellectual activity including original essays, poetry, and musical performances. These student centered societies thrived at ISNS, and were encouraged by the administration, and allocated choice spaces for their meeting rooms.

Soon after the school opened, the faculty worked with students to create two societies, one for male and one for female students. The 1888 *Clionian* Yearbook explained that this decision was “based upon the old notion that ladies and gentlemen should not be members of the same society.” According to same source, this was the opinion of the faculty rather than the students and did not last long. By the start of the next semester “many students decidedly opposed to such isolation, instituted a movement which resulted in the admission of ladies to the Erodelphian Society, in the abandonment of the Ladies Literary Society, and in the organization, on October 2, 1875, of an entirely new society- the Huyghenian.” These societies flourished. In May of 1897, the Trustees’
Minutes report that the societies are not up to the “standard of excellence that should prevail.” Their remedy was to separate the females from males within the societies, with females meeting on certain nights of the week and males others. Only at public meetings held at the chapel or by special permission, the groups could meet as a whole, beginning in the fall of 1897. Students did object, appearing before the faculty at their meetings to speak against the action, but to no avail.

In spite of such strict rules, just as in the middle class households that the school wished to emulate, students found ways to get into trouble. Faculty minutes record discussion of students setting off fire crackers, getting into fights, sneaking off in pairs for picnics in the woods, and many other violations - and these are only the ones they discovered! The faculty and administration realized that providing an opportunity for sports and social life was important, not only to promote student health, but would also be likely to provide an outlet for the young peoples’ excess energy and improve behavior as well. (see Part VI for information on athletics)

Social Life

While students were expected to work hard and entertainments. Saturday evening socials were a common event and annual events such as the Washington’s Birthday party when the students and faculty dressed in colonial costume and danced period dances and costume Halloween parties were also anticipated.

Students also had an active club life that allowed them to explore areas they were interested in or indulge in some acceptable activity that was apart from the school and its work. Yearbooks for 1888 and 1897 show a wide variety of clubs from those related to national movements such as the Young Women’s Christian Temperance Union or the Knights of Labor, to those related to academic pursuits such as the Ladies Quartette Club, Ladies Lyceum Club, or Ladies Debating Club or others with intriguing names that likely were just social or related to hobbies and other
enjoyable activities such as the Lilliputian Club, the Tantalus Club, the Kodak Club and several eating clubs.

Chapter Summary

By the turn of the century, the Normal School had experienced difficult economic times but after “heroic efforts... brighter days dawned, Dame Fortune smiled and ‘Dear Old Normal’ with beating drums and streaming banners, marched on to victory.” This school of pioneers had gathered “wise instructors in love with learning ...and eager to impart it,” increasingly of the female gender. The school offered educated females employment opportunities rare for the time, and they in turn were models of “really well-informed women” who could make their own way in the world for the increasingly large number of female ISNS students.

Female graduates left the institution and took with them a belief that women as well as men had an active role to play in society. They overwhelmingly took up positions in schoolrooms and administrative offices, as teachers, principals, and superintendents in rural and urban areas. Others used their normal training as a
stepping stone to other professions and as a basis for admittance to other colleges and universities.