



43.1976.1 Site of Cowen Grove Seminary
Kosciusko County
Marker Text Review Report
07/11/2008

Marker Text

Site of Cowen Grove Seminary
1851-1876

One of the first secondary schools in the area. Built at the call of the Presbyterian Church by Robert Cowen and his wife Jane Cowen headmistress. A fire of unknown origin burned the Seminary to the ground in December, 1879.

Report:

There are very few primary resources available to substantiate the claims made on this marker. The main sources include early county histories, a letter to Jane Cowen, and articles from the *Northern Indianian*, a Warsaw newspaper.¹ Most of the claims on the marker seem to originate from a research paper submitted during the marker application process as opposed to primary resources. Further research is needed.² However, an attempt to evaluate the marker with the resources currently available follows.

No primary sources were located that call the school "Cowen Grove Seminary." In a "School Notice" published in the *Northern Indianian* on April 17, 1856, Jane Cowen refers to it as the "School in the Seminary."³ A Kosciusko County history, published in 1887, only 11 years after Jane Cowen's death and while her husband was still living, states that the "school was known as 'Mrs. Cowen's Seminary'."⁴ Another county history, published in 1919, states that the school was called "Mrs. Cowen's Seminary."⁵ A 1932 newspaper column in the *Warsaw Daily Times* reflected on events in the city "way back when" and also referred to the school as "Mrs. Cowen's Seminary."⁶

An unpublished research paper, supplied to the IHB during the application process by Miriam L. Kutz, Jane Cowen's great-granddaughter, states that "there were beautiful oak trees in abundance which gave the school part of its name."⁷ This is the only source which existed prior to the marker (and the subsequent press) that claims the name "Cowen Grove Seminary." Therefore, it is possible that Kutz and/or other family members renamed the site, or gradually started calling it "Cowen Grove," but it has not been referred to as such in any other located source before the marker process began. A 1976 *Times-Union* article states that Kutz provided "help and research in providing the material to be submitted" to the IHB.⁸

Two newspaper articles about the marker dedication ceremony and published only after the marker had been given the title "Cowen Grove Seminary," refer to the school as such, quoting the marker.⁹ However, in one of the articles the school is called "Cowen Grove" only in the article title and photo caption. In the article itself, which was written by Suzanne Ware, the



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president of the Kosciusko County History Society, she refers to the school as “Mrs. Cowen’s Seminary,” putting the name in quotations to show that it was known by this name at the time.¹⁰ A 2000 publication by the Kosciusko County Historical Society continues to list the name of the school as “Cowen’s Seminary” with no mention of “Grove.”¹¹

The marker states that the school existed 1851-1876. The county history published soon after her death states that “Mrs. Jane Cowen began a private school May 12, 1851.” Except for “a short intermission,” Jane Cowen, “taught continuously from 1851 until 1876.” The same source states “at her death, the seminary was closed.”¹² She died September 27, 1876.¹³ Thus the county history read with the obituary seems to confirm the date range cited by the marker. However, another source raises some questions.

On March 17, 1851, J. Witter wrote a letter to Jane Cowen and encouraged her to come to Warsaw and open a school. Witter mentions that “the leading men of the place” support the idea, that he inquired about a room, and that if she is not already “suited in a school,” she should review the proposal and start making arrangements. It is apparent from Witter’s letter that as of March 1851, the Cowens had not yet committed to moving to Warsaw or to starting the school. It seems unlikely that the Cowens built and opened the school in May 1851, as the county history claims, only two months after the letter of encouragement.¹⁴ However, if the school opened in the fall or winter of 1851, the marker date would still be correct.

A search of the 1851 Indiana Laws, found no mention of the incorporation of a school in Kosciusko County.¹⁵ However, Jane Cowen could have begun taking pupils that year without incorporating. Unfortunately no Kosciusko County newspapers are available at the Indiana State Library earlier than 1856 to verify this conclusion.¹⁶

The IHB marker claims that the seminary was “one of the first secondary schools in the area” and the available sources support this. In the 1851 letter, Witter tells Jane Cowen that there are about 125 potential students and only one school. He states that that school is not well attended and therefore “there is no better place in northern Indiana for such as school.” He states that the entire county has 2,500 students, but “no school higher than a common district school.” He writes, “So you see there must be in this county a large class of young ladies that ought to attend a higher school than any they have at present.” This letter can be used to indicate that the seminary was one of the first, if not the first, secondary school in the area. It also raises the question of why Witter specifically mentions “young ladies” needing a school of higher education. No other sources have been located to suggest that the school was designed for women.¹⁷ County histories also claim that the seminary was one of the first, if not the first, secondary school in the county.¹⁸



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Seminaries in some counties provided both primary and secondary education. In counties with successful primary schools, the seminaries focused solely on secondary education.¹⁹ This latter scenario appears to be the case in Warsaw. The *Northern Indianian* contains notices from several primary schools during this period. The “School Notice” issued by Jane Cowen in the *Northern Indianian* in 1856, also shows that the school was a secondary school. She announced weekly lectures on “the natural sciences and the art of teaching.” The subjects listed are English, Latin, and Algebra.²⁰ These lectures and classes are too advanced for a primary school. In addition, her obituary stated that “the last person to whom we went to school was Mrs. Jane Cowen,” implying that this was the highest level of schooling available in the area.²¹

The marker claims that the seminary was “built at the call of the Presbyterian church.” The 1887 county history states that Robert Cowen, who was still living at time of publishing, “is well remembered in connection with the building of the first Presbyterian church in 1858.”²² However, this source does not mention a Presbyterian connection in the section that discusses the seminary. This county history does however mention that “when they first went to Michigan, no school-houses being in the neighborhood, Mr. Cowen built an addition to his house, which was used for a long time for church and school purposes.”²³ Jane Cowen’s obituary states, “Mrs. Cowen was a member of the Methodist church, and retained her connection with that domination up to the close of her life.” The article says “she was of a deep religious turn, and was never absent from church.”²⁴ In the 1856 notice posted in the *Northern Indianian*, Jane Cowen states that her goal is “to infuse into their pupils a proper sense of propriety, that they may act from moral principle, rather than from any other kind of motive.”²⁵ The county history, the obituary, and the notice show the influence of religion on the Cowens’ lives and the school’s goals, but do not prove that Cowen began the school “at the call of the Presbyterian church,” especially since Jane was a devout Methodist.

Perhaps further research could reveal J. Witter’s identity and religious affiliation.²⁶ It is possible that the letter signed “J. Witter” was actually Witter J. Baxter.²⁷ Baxter’s father built mills throughout Michigan starting in the 1830s. Robert Cowen built a mill in St. Joseph County, Michigan in 1835, so perhaps they established communication.²⁸ At some point before 1848, Baxter “became a teacher and was president of an institute in Indiana.” He later returned to Michigan and became lawyer and eventually a senator. He was “a member of the Presbyterian church, and a Sabbath-school worker.”²⁹ It is possible that Witter was the Presbyterian “call” the Cowens received to build the seminary, but there is not enough information to reach a conclusion.³⁰

Much like the appearance of “grove” in the seminary name, the phrase “built at the call of the Presbyterian church” first appears in Miriam Kutz’s research paper. No other source has



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been located, either primary or secondary, that makes this claim prior to the marker text being made public. The two Warsaw papers that describe the marker dedication repeat the phrase.

The marker wording suggests that Robert Cowen built the school. However, early sources make no mention of this. Jane Cowen's obituary states that she came to Warsaw from Logansport and opened a school. The 1887 county history states, "They came to Kosciusko County, Indiana, in 1851, and Mrs. Cowen opened a school in Warsaw."³¹ In another section, the early county history states, "Mrs. Jane Cowen began a private school May 12, 1851." The 1919 county history also makes no mention of Robert's involvement.³² Again Miriam Kutz's research paper is the only mention of Robert building the school until the marker text was made public. She states that after the Cowens arrived in Warsaw, Jane taught from their home while Robert built the school. She gives no citation for this information. It is possible that Robert built the school. He had experience building mills in Michigan. However, there is not sufficient information to make the claim. The 1976 *Warsaw Times-Union* article describing the dedication repeats the claim made on the marker. The 1976 (*Kosciusko*) *Paper* article gives a lengthy description of Robert's choosing the plot of land and building the school, but provides no source for the information.³³

The marker claims that Jane Cowen served as the school's "headmistress." While it is certainly true that she was in charge, calling her the headmistress, without mentioning that she was first the founder and the only teacher, is misleading. In the school notice she refers to herself as "the Proprietor."³⁴ Her obituary mentions that she "opened a school...herself acting as principal."³⁵ The earliest county history says she "began a school...known as Mrs. Cowen's Seminary," implying her role as both founder and administrator.³⁶ Therefore, referring to her as the headmistress on the marker is not entirely incorrect, but is also not entirely correct. Some mention of her role as the founder is important.

The marker claims that "a fire of unknown origin burned the Seminary to the ground in December, 1879." A search through all the issues of the *Northern Indianian* for December 1879 through March 1880 yielded no report of the fire. The early county histories do not mention the fire. Again the first found mention of the fire was in Kutz's research paper.³⁷ Suzanne Ware, the Kosciusko County Historian, wrote in the 1976 article announcing the dedication that "only the clock and bell were saved when a disastrous (sic) fire struck down the building in December 1879."³⁸ A work published by the Kosciusko County Historical Society in 2000 states that the school "burned in the 1880s."³⁹ Further research is needed.

Finally, several sources show that the IHB missed several opportunities to discuss more diverse aspects of the area's history. The current marker only addresses issues that are important locally, without showing any statewide or national significance. If this marker was



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done under the new IHB policy concerning the importance of each marker having a state or national significance, then this marker would not have been approved. However, by shifting the focus from the school to Jane Cowen, the IHB could have a marker that fits the new criteria.

Jane Cowen's obituary states that she was "an indefatigable worker and member of the Dorcas Society in this place, an organization that sent a very large amount of needed supplies to the soldiers" during the Civil War.⁴⁰ This would show not only the role played by Indiana citizens at home during the war, but also an example of women's roles during the conflict.

A letter published in the 1851 *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention*, held in October 1850, gives insight into Jane Cowen's views on women's rights. Writing from Logansport, not long before her move to Warsaw, she cites biblical texts to show that men and women should have equal opportunities, making special note of educational opportunities. She writes that the "great evil" affecting "woman's position" is caused by the views of men in the church which are not supported by biblical texts. She states that "if the Church would allow woman the privileges that God has given her, in both the Old and New Testaments, an education equal with the male sex, and every right that belongs to her, would follow."⁴¹



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Report on Location:

A marker repair form, located in the IHB marker file, notes that the current marker was reinstalled a half block away from the site where it was originally installed. If IHB decides to take down the old and install a new marker, further research would be needed to determine the seminary's exact location. The following is a compilation of information on the school's location.

Early sources give only vague information about the seminary's location. The 1856 "School Notice" only locates the school in Warsaw.⁴² The 1857 *Indiana School Journal* locates Jane Cowen in Warsaw, Kosciusko County, Indiana.⁴³ Jane Cowen's 1876 obituary states, "Of late years she has been in charge of a private school at her residence in the southeast part of town, which was built for school purposes." The 1887 county history states, "her rooms were situated on the lot, the site now of Daniel Bitner's residence."⁴⁴

Newspaper columns written as reminiscences of the town give more information. A 1902 article in the *Warsaw Daily Times* locates the school "on Buffalo street, on the east side just where it crosses the Pittsburgh road, and either the first or second residence south of the crossing."⁴⁵ A 1932 *Warsaw Daily Times* column locates the seminary "on South Detroit Street, the grounds surrounding which comprised most of the space between South and Jefferson streets. The building of the C.W.&M. railroad cut quite a good sized tract from the east side of the Cowan estate."⁴⁶

Sources from 1970s give detailed information, but do not cite the source of this information. Miriam Kutz's paper states, "Work began on the site connected at that time to the center of Warsaw by a cow path. It was listed in the books as being 'just south of the railroad tracks' now 309-311 S. Detroit St., State Rd. 15."⁴⁷ The 1976 (Warsaw) *Times-Union* article about the marker dedication states that the school was built "at the end of a cow path (now 311 Detroit St.) proceeding from the center of downtown Warsaw."⁴⁸ The 1976 (Kosciusko) *Paper* article reporting on the dedication reads, "he (Robert) selected an area which made a perfect square at the end of a cow path from the center of Warsaw."⁴⁹

Finally, the Kosciusko County Historical Society's 2000 publication, *Moments in Times*, states that the school was "located near the intersection of what is now Winona Avenue and Detroit Street."⁵⁰ The IHB contacted the society in December 2008 for more information, a map or a photograph, but none could be located.

While later sources (Kutz's paper and those sources published after) place the seminary on Detroit street, the earliest available source to give specifics (the 1902 article in the *Warsaw Daily Times*) claims the school was on Buffalo Street. Detroit and Buffalo Streets are two streets apart with Indiana and High Streets in between them.⁵¹ Perhaps the Cowens purchased this entire plot of land. Further research is needed.



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¹ Secondary sources claim that Jane Cowen wrote for another Warsaw paper, the *Times-Union*, which began in 1854. However, the only paper existing during Jane Cowen's life that is accessible through the Indiana State Library is the *Northern Indianian*.

² "Cowen Grove Seminary Marker," *The (Kosciusko) Paper*, August 25, 1976. This secondary source mentions the existence of diaries for Jane Cowen and her daughter Semeramis (Cowen) Long. The IHB contacted the Kosciusko County Historical Society, which did not know of such a source.

³ Jane Cowen, "School Notice," *Northern Indianian*, April 17, 1856, p. 3.

⁴ "The Schools," *Biographical and Historical Record of Kosciusko County, Indiana* (Chicago, 1887) 692 (accessed December 9, 2008 through AncestryLibrary.com).

⁵ L. W. Royse, *A Standard History of Kosciusko County* (Chicago, 1919), 258.

⁶ "Our Town and Others, 'Way Back When'," *Warsaw Daily Times*, February 11, 1932 (accessed December 2, 2008 through yesteryear.clunette.com).

⁷ Miriam L. Kutz. "Cowen Grove Seminary, 1851-1876," unpublished paper, received June 2, 1976, Indiana Historical Bureau, (Marker File 43.1976.1); Suzanne Ware, "Marker Placed on Site of Cowen Grove Seminary," *The (Warsaw, Indiana) Times-Union*, July 15, 1976, p. 8. Ware states that Kutz was the great-granddaughter of Jane Cowen and lived on the site of the school in a house built in 1905.

⁸ Ware, 8. This 1976 *Times-Union* article states that Kutz provided "help and research in providing the material to be submitted" to the IHB.

⁹ *Ibid.*; "Cowen Grove Seminary Marker," *The (Kosciusko) Paper*, August 25, 1976, p. 28.

¹⁰ Ware, 8.

¹¹ David L. Coplen, *Moments in Tim*, (Mt. Vernon, Indiana, 2000), 86-87.

¹² "The Schools," *Biographical and Historical Record of Kosciusko County, Indiana* (Chicago, 1887) 692 (accessed December 9, 2008 through AncestryLibrary.com). This county history states, "At her death the seminary was closed and has not since been reopened."

Marion W. Coplen, "Our County History," *Warsaw Times-Union*, April 27, 1954 (accessed December 11, 2008 through <http://yesteryear.clunette.com>). In this secondary source, Coplen claims that the school continued after Jane Cowen's death, but does not cite a source.

U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census (1880), Schedule 1, Population, Corporation of Silver Lake, Kosciusko County, Indiana*, p. 2.; Cowen, 3. It is possible that Jane's daughter Semeremus (Cowen) Long continued the school for a while after Jane's death (although no



other sources claim this). However, it would probably not have been for long. By 1880 Semeremus lived in Silver Lake, Indiana. This town was also in Kosciusko County but it seems unlikely that she would live there and be able to run a private school that boards some of its students and promises “special care...to furnish those coming from a deistance with proper places of boarding, where they would be protected with parental care.” Also, there was a residence adjacent to the school, where she would likely be living if she kept the school open.

¹³ “Death of Mrs. Cowen,” *Northern Indianian*, October 12, 1876, p. 3.

¹⁴ Letter, J. Witter to Jane Cowen, March 17, 1851, reprinted in “Marker Placed on Site of Cowen Grove Seminary,” (Warsaw, Indiana) *Times-Union*, July 15, 1976, p. 8; *Biographical and Historical Record of Kosciusko County, Indiana* (Chicago, 1887) 631-2 (accessed December 9, 2008 through AncestryLibrary.com); The county history states that when she began the school “her rooms were situated on the lot, the site now of Daniel Bittner’s residence” and that rooms were added as the school grew. Several sources claim that Robert Cowen built the two story school. Therefore, the Cowens could have moved into an existing residence and immediately opened up a room as a school in May 1851, perhaps while Robert built the two story school. However, many such conjectures could be made. The date given by the county history could be wrong, or perhaps Robert did not build a school and they simply moved into a building and opened the school. There is not enough evidence to reach a definitive conclusion.

¹⁵ *Laws of Indiana*, 1851.

¹⁶ The *Northern Indianian* is available from 1856-58 and 1860-82. For this paper the entire year of 1862 and all of 1876 were thoroughly searched, along with December 1879 through March 1880. This yielded only the 1856 school notice and the 1876 obituary.

¹⁷ Letter, J. Witter to Jane Cowen, March 17, 1851.

¹⁸ “The Schools,” 692. This 1887 county history states that “Judge Rodgers” taught the first school in the “old court-house” and later “Harmon engaged in teaching.” Rodgers then hired J.A. Funk in 1844. Then Jane Cowen began her school.

Royse, 165, 258. In this 1919 county history, Royse describes several of the early schools, but they all seem to be primary. He mentions that “all the schools from 1836 to 1853 were subscription schools.” He writes that the “first definite account” of a Warsaw school on Fort Wayne street taught by J. A. Funk at the request of Judge Rodgers in the 1840s. Funk was succeeded in the 1850s by “Mr. Clark.” Royse writes that “Mrs. Jane Cowen also started her school about this time.”

¹⁹ Richard G. Boone, *A History of Education in Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1941), 48-9.

²⁰ Cowen, 3.



²¹ "Death of Mrs. Cowen," 3.

²² *Biographical and Historical Record of Kosciusko County, Indiana*, 631-2.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ "Death of Mrs. Cowen," 3.

²⁵ Cowen, 3.

²⁶ Letter, J. Witter to Jane Cowen, March 17, 1851.

²⁷ "Annual Meeting, 1888, Minutes" *Historical Collections and Researches made by the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society*, (Lansing, Michigan, 1908), 5.

²⁸ *Biographical and Historical Record of Kosciusko County, Indiana* (Chicago, 1887) 631-2 (accessed December 9, 2008 through AncestryLibrary.com).

²⁹ "Annual Meeting, 1888, Minutes," 5.

³⁰ The letter to Jane Cowen was from a "J. Witter" in Mishawaka, which is in Elkhart County. However, a Search of several Elkhart County histories resulted in no findings for the last name Witter. A general search of Michigan and Indiana county histories did produce some Witters, but they were affiliated with the German Baptist Church. Therefore, it seems likely that Witter was indeed a first and not a surname.

³¹ *Biographical and Historical Record of Kosciusko County, Indiana*, 632.

³² Royse, 165, 258.

³³ "Cowen Grove Seminary Marker," The 1976 article claims: "In 1851 Robert Cowen came on horseback to Warsaw to select land on which to build the school...He selected an area which made a perfect square at the end of a cow path from the center of Warsaw. After clearing away the 'redbrush' from the land which he had purchased, he built a two story structure, a secondary school..." There is no indication where this information came from.

³⁴ Cowen, 3.

³⁵ "Death of Mrs. Cowen," 3.

³⁶ "The Schools," 692.

³⁷ Kutz, 4.



³⁸ Ware, 8.

³⁹ Coplen, 86-87.

⁴⁰ "Death of Mrs. Cowen," 3.

⁴¹ "Extracts of a Letter from Jane Cowen," *The Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention* (Boston, 1851) 69-70 (accessed December 2, 2008 through GoogleBooks).

⁴² Cowen, 3.

⁴³ Indiana State Teachers Association, "Teachers' Directory," *Indiana School Journal* (Indianapolis, 1857), 6.

⁴⁴ "The Schools," 692.

⁴⁵ "Early Times in Kosciusko: Incidents and Anecdotes of Pioneer Days and the Early Settlement of this Region," *Warsaw Daily Times*, February 15, 1902 (accessed December 2, 2008 through yesteryear.clunette.com).

⁴⁶ "Our Town and Others 'Way Back When'."

⁴⁷ Kutz, 2.

⁴⁸ Ware, 8.

⁴⁹ "Cowen Grove Seminary Marker," 28.

⁵⁰ Coplen, 99.

⁵¹ *Indiana Historical Atlas*, (Chicago, 1876), 40.