More Than a Blind Woman: Principal Teacher Miss Hannah Guillan and her Contributions to the Georgia Academy for The Blind, 1852-1898

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Introduction and Purpose

While researching the history of special education in the United States, particularly in the South, I (the first author)[1] stumbled upon *Origin and History of the Georgia Academy for the Blind* written in 1887.[2] The "book" was rather mundane and appeared to be little more than a compilation of the minutes of the board of trustees. Although it was not the kind of artifact I was looking for, the forward, which was written by the principal of the school at that time, caught my attention and I read it for no reason other than general curiosity. To my surprise, the tone in his introduction to the history made it clear that the compilation of historical artifacts was a labor but not necessarily one of love. The compilation was put together at the request of the board of trustees. One can only surmise from his tone that he was less than pleased with the assignment. Amused by the introduction, I continued reading the first few pages and was introduced to Miss Hannah Guillan,[3] the first teacher of the Georgia Academy for the Blind. Although my research at the time was centered around the experience of students with disabilities in the American South during the 1980 and 1990s, I could not help but wonder about her experience as a teacher. How does a school decide upon the first teacher to hire? Noting

that Miss Guillan was referred to as the Principal Teacher, I also wondered about the difference between the principal, Principal Teacher, and whether there existed another layer at the school simply referred to as teacher.

Subsequently, I hastily scribbled down Hannah Guillan's name on a scrap of paper that I tucked into a book. I also scrawled *Origin and History* in my notes so I could find her later and she would not be lost in the pages of history. Her name remained there, untouched, until one day while organizing books in my office, it fluttered to the floor. The rest, as they say, is history. Hannah Guillan became a curiosity I could not seem to shake. She made her way into my conversation with a colleague who had published educational biographies and sparked her curiosity as well. We decided to find out who she was, where she came from, and how she was selected to be the Principal Teacher of the Georgia Academy for the Blind in the mid-nineteenth century. The school was established in 1851 when opportunities for women were limited, and opportunities for blind individuals almost non-existent. We believed we found, not only an important teacher, but a woman who by all accounts should share credit for the early success of the school. Yet, documents and written materials about her were scarce. Thus, we began our search to reconstruct the life of Miss Hannah Guillan; we put together pieces of the puzzle to establish the context, mission, and practices of nineteenth century American schools for the blind, and specifically to evaluate her contributions to the Georgia Academy for the Blind.

The aim of this educational biography is to share what we have learned about the life and work of a nineteenth century teacher, Hannah Guillan, who was integral to the history and success of the founding and functioning of the Georgia Academy for the Blind. Using a variety of primary and secondary sources found in local and national libraries, we constructed a brief educational biography that pieces together Guillan's contributions to the Georgia Academy for the Blind in the 19th century and her importance as one of the longest serving teachers of the blind in US history. Almost completely unknown, and certainly unheralded, Guillan's story adds to the history of education canon, particularly as it relates to history of education for students with disabilities.

Theoretical Framework

Our theoretical framework is guided by Craig Kridel's scholarship on writing educational biography, as well as Linda Morice and Laurel Puchner's work in *Life Stories*, and Joan Wallach Scott's writings on the politics of gender in history. We specifically focused on historical biography, which can highlight the importance of little-known individuals who worked to improve society,[4] and

the stories of contributors with disabilities, like women and other members of traditionally marginalized groups, who have been largely neglected. Guillan's experiences as a woman with disabilities makes her story important to tell, yet is also a likely culprit for her anonymity.

Kridel argues that educational biographies are increasingly valued resources in educational research.[5] In a recent book on life writing methods, Mulvihill and Swaminathan include biography as one of five genres of life writing,[6] and Nigel Hamilton's *How to do Biography* provides a blueprint for the process of writing biography so that the writing is meaningful.[7] James Garraty, a biography scholar, offered a three-tiered typology of biographical subjects. He separated them into categories of people rendered significant by the times, agential actors instrumental in making change, and subjects shaped more by outside forces. We categorize our work on Hannah Guillan in the second-tier of Garraty's framework, as someone who changed the course of events, as she helped to establish a school for the blind where none previously existed.[8]

This biography also constitutes part of the new disability history that not only highlights disabled individuals' contributions to the past, but also serves as a means to refute justification for inequalities in educational opportunity.[9] Guillan's educational biography is consequential and meaningful. Her work as a blind person, woman, and educator for blind students in the nineteenth century reveals a triumph over multiple levels of adversity. Few have ever heard of Hannah Guillan or know of her effort to advance the education of the blind in Georgia. Gender is also an important reason that her story has been neglected historically.[10] In this study, we faced the additional challenge of writing about a 19th century female educator about whom little documentation existed. In many ways, the challenge was like writing about other women in history, including enslaved women such as Sally Hemings, where she left no trail of written documents. Hemings biographer Annette Gordon-Reed had to rely on materials that pertained to context in which Hemings lived and worked.[11] As biographers of Guillan, we faced this similar hurdle.

Indeed, gender has been neglected as a theoretical lens in much educational research, because of a false belief that gender equity has been achieved. Certainly, this misperception is challenged through stories such as *I am Malala*, but the failure to achieve gender equity is not simply relegated to women living in other countries or women who lived more than a century ago.[12] Authors Sadker, Sadker, and Zittleman have found that the educational system in the US still fails at fairness, thus hurting both boys and girls.[13] Yet, there is an important historical legacy of gender expectations to consider that likely impacted Guillan's educational leadership, particularly in the South. Specifically, we turned to historical works on 19th century women educational leaders, such as

Kathryn Kish Sklar's *Women's Rights Emerges within the Antislavery Movement, 1830-18070*, and Sara Case's *Leaders of Their Race: Educating Black and White Women in the New South* in order to understand societal expectations placed on women in the 19th century.[14] Sklar provides context for the origins of the women's movement, noting that it arose from the female abolitionists, such as southerners Sarah and Angelina Grimké, who dared to violate customs and speak publicly about the horrors of enslavement. Focusing on the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Case explores the role that education played in reshaping women's identities in the New South. Gender identity operated in complex ways, particularly after the Civil War when the region faced economic ruin and many women were obligated to become wage earners. Guillan faced similar obstacles. These challenges include customs related to women in the South, as well as the economic struggles the school experienced both during and after the Civil War. Thus, we seek to uncover and elevate Hannah Guillan's story to demonstrate the importance of her educational work as a blind woman in the 19th century American South, but also as a Principal Teacher and leader in the education of blind students.

Data Sources

We consulted several primary and secondary sources to construct Guillan's life, as no archival papers, books, or articles about her life exist. Few documents exist about her earliest years. Written documentation only truly begins when she becomes a student at the Pennsylvania Institution for the Education of the Blind. We located the early annual reports of the managers of the Pennsylvania school using Google Books to learn what we could about her early years. The annual reports constitute primary source material, but we also examined secondary literature on the education of the blind. These books include: *Overbrook School for the Blind* by Edithy Willoughby, *Crusader for Light* by Elisabeth D. Freund, and *The History of Special Education* by Margaret Winzer. The only contemporary book on the Georgia Academy for the Blind was written by Otis H. Stephens, a former student.[15] This book provided historical context and corroborated the primary source records from the Georgia General Assembly (Georgia's legislative body - the minutes from 1851-1887) that we examined to learn about the founding of and origins of the school.

In addition to searching the literature on schools for the blind, we also examined secondary source histories of the state of Georgia and the city of Macon, as well as journal articles in the *Georgia Historical Quarterly* to understand the context in which Hannah Guillan worked. In the wake of COVID-19's closure of archives around the country and limitations on travel,

the internet became a valuable tool to aid us in locating archival materials such as reports submitted to the state of Georgia on the Georgia Academy for the Blind. Using Google and library databases such as Archives Grid, Jstor, and ProQuest's Historic Newspapers as our guides, we located the Georgia Academy for the Blind's Board of Trustees records and traced our way through the maze of stories about locals who attended the school. One article mentioned a local resident, Thomas Ridgeway, who graduated from the Georgia Academy for the Blind in 1962 and later returned to teach music and math full time until 1999. In the article, Ridgeway tells a story passed down to him from Macon residents about the origins of the school that predates the board records we located in the archives.[16] Because we wanted to know if he had heard of Miss Guillan or knew of local resources, we tracked down Mr. Ridgeway through a former resident of Macon who mentioned him in personal blog entry that we found online. We emailed the blog's author who passed our phone number along to Mr. Ridgeway. His knowledge of Hannah's life matched our research. He shared with us that everyone associated with the school knew Guillan's name because she taught at the school longer than any other teacher.[17] Putting the puzzle together during a pandemic became an even greater challenge. We shared our resources over Zoom, discussing our ideas for evaluating the significance of her life and determining reasons she has been overlooked. We drew on our knowledge from respective areas of specialization, special education history/disability studies and US education history.

While the internet was helpful, we also relied on email and mail correspondence in our research. We reached out to an archivist at Middle Georgia Regional Library in Macon, near where the school is located, and obtained further documents and records pertaining to the school and to her life. After locating an image of her grave marker on the website of Riverside Cemetery in Macon, we contacted their records department and confirmed that no living relatives were known. Based on an obituary held by the cemetery, the archivist we worked with at Middle Georgia Regional Library assisted us in locating several nineteenth century local newspaper articles that reported on the school and on Hannah Guillan. Nineteenth century US Census data also informed our understanding. We consulted local Macon historians and read histories of the region in the nineteenth century. We searched a vast array of resources, and followed every trail, as so little had been recorded about her life.

Historical Context

The Establishment of Schools for the Blind in the United States and Teacher Training

Schools for the Blind in the United States are traced to 1826 when a man named John D. Fischer spent time interested in the instruction of blind students while studying as a medical student in Paris. He returned to his home city of Boston to begin the New England Asylum for Instruction of the Blind.[18] This institution was the first school for the blind in the United States.

While in Paris, Dr. Fischer had visited the National Institution for Blind Youth where he was inspired by the young children facing blindness who were learning to read and understand mathematics and geography from raised-type books. He spoke of these memories and soon gained the support of the Boston Society and many prominent Boston citizens, including Horace Mann, who would later become Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education; a blind historian named William Prescott; and Colonial Thomas H. Perkins, a well-known China trade merchant. Together, this group of men persuaded the Massachusetts legislature to sign an act to incorporate the New England Asylum for the Instruction for the Blind on March 2, 1829; Colonial Thomas Perkins would eventually donate his mansion on Pearl Street to house the growing school that would eventually become known as the Perkins Institute.[19]

The second school for the Blind was opened in New York in 1831 as The New York Institute for the Education of the Blind by William Akerly, a former physician of the Institute for the Deaf. The school began in a single-row home in lower Manhattan but was relocated a few years later to Thirty-Fourth Street and Ninth avenue.[20] The school later became what is now known as the New York Institute for Special Education. One year following the establishment of the school in New York during the same year that it enrolled its first students,[21] the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, now called Overbrook School for the Blind, opened in 1832. The school's first headmaster was Julius Friedlander who died just five years later.[22] There were close ties between the schools in Pennsylvania and the New England Asylum for the Instruction of the Blind; the third headmaster of Perkins would later become the Director of Overbrook in 1891. The Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind published America's first embossed book for the blind, *The Gospel of Mark*,[23] and the first magazine for the blind, *Lux en Tenebrae*.[24]

The establishment of these schools was important to the context of Guillan's life in creating opportunities for education and eventually for employment. Preparing teachers to teach institutionalized children with disabilities, such as those who were blind, deaf, or labeled as mentally retarded, emerged during the late eighteenth century based on the methods of Valentin Haüy, Charles Michel de l'Epée, and Edouard Seguin. In the US, Thomas Hopkins Galludet developed successful in-service training for teachers of the deaf a bit later in the early nineteenth century. Samuel Gridley Howe, a physician who was

appointed the first director of the New England Asylum for the Education of the Blind, adapted Galludet's practices on teaching deaf students, and applied these practices to develop experienced teachers of the blind; teaching was largely learned through apprenticeship in existing schools following basic education.[25] Howe felt strongly that the most promising blind students should become teachers and at the time, even the most academically prepared blind students were not allowed to teach in the common schools because they could not see to supervise students.[26] Until a special education training program for teachers of blind students began at Teachers College, Columbia University in 1884, apprenticeship was the sole means of education for teachers of the blind.[27] For disabled women, especially who were largely seen as holding a passive role in society, schools for the blind provided an education but also a pathway to employment and self-sufficiency.

The Georgia Academy for the Blind: The Early Origins, 1851-1852

A meeting to establish the Georgia School for the Blind was announced in an advertisement dated April 5, 1851, in *The Georgia Citizen and The Macon Telegraph*. With two-thirds of the states already having an institution for the blind, the establishment of a similar institution in Georgia was suggested as an effort to "redeem" Georgia's character by showing interest in the "intellectual training" of youth who were "equally as interesting and unfortunate" as those labeled deaf, dumb, and insane who already had established institutions across the state. The advertisement assured citizens that minds of the blind could be "cultivated to the highest degree of refinement" and that they were just as "capable" of enjoying "the pleasures of society."[28] A sum of $802 was raised and considered sufficient to proceed with the Academy's establishment. They purchased books in braille, a piano, and other necessary "apparatus".[29] Walter S. Fortescue, a graduate of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Blind and the University of Pennsylvania, a man who was blind himself, was named principal.[30] The following January, Miss Guillan, a former classmate of Mr. Fortescue, was named the school's female teacher.[31]

Much of the early historic record explains Mr. Fortescue's involvement and credentials for the position as principal of Georgia's first school for the blind. He was described as a well-educated gentleman, despite his own blindness, who was introduced by a colleague of one of the local doctors in town. Walter Fortescue was described as possessing character and qualifications to undertake the important task of educating those who, like himself, were deprived of the blessing of sight.[32] Beyond the brief mention of the appointment of Hannah Guillan, the historical record did not provide any additional information

regarding her appointment, background, or why they selected her. Given the several pages of explanation regarding Walter Fortescue, the missing background and information about Guillan was a striking contrast.

Georgia and Macon History in the Nineteenth Century

As we searched for information about Miss Guillan, we wondered about how the school's placement in Macon, Georgia, in the southern US, impacted the lives of its teachers and students. British and eventually American claim to the land permitted individuals to immigrate to cities like Macon. The earliest inhabitants of the land known today as Georgia came from Asia.[33] These Paleo-Indian people carved their existence through hunting and gathering and as time progressed the Mississippian Indian culture became dominant.[34] In the post-Columbian era, Spanish slave traders were the first Europeans to land in Georgia. In 1526, Lucas Vasquez de Ayllon, attempted to establish a permanent settlement on the Georgia coast called San Miguel de Gaudelupe, thought to be near Sapelo.[35] The settlement quickly failed, but as the Spanish explored the region, they brought disease that has been estimated to have killed 90 percent of the Indigenous people living in the area. European powers such as the French, British, and Spanish fought amongst each other for dominance in the region. But, the British eventually won claim to the land, and in 1732, James Oglethorpe, one of twenty Trustees for Establishing the Colony of Georgia, was granted a charter to settle the land.[36] The first settlement was thus established in February 1733 at Savannah. Interestingly, the early laws banned slavery, hard alcohol, Blacks, Roman Catholics, liquor dealers, and lawyers.[37] The colony became part of the United States of America in 1783.[38] In the post-Revolutionary era, the White population grew rapidly because of the lottery system that virtually gave away for free three-quarters of the state to white males. This early history served as the context for Hannah Guillan's arrival in Macon, Georgia.

Located in central Georgia at the head of the Ocmulgee River, Macon was established fairly early in modern Georgia history. The city resides in Bibby County, created in December 9, 1822, and was the fifty-fifth county to be established in the state, of a present-day total of 161.[39] A bill to support common schools narrowly failed in 1822, leading to establishing a dual system of publicly supported schools for indigent white students and academies for wealthy white students. The invention in 1793 of the cotton gin shifted the state's plantation economy from tobacco to short staple cotton, rapidly. Thus, the revitalization of the institution of slavery followed.[40] The cotton kingdom emerged, and cities along navigable rivers arose to facilitate the transportation of this important crop. Enslavement in Georgia, and in Macon, in particular,

increased and few escaped.[41] The Crafts who did successfully escape from slavery in Georgia eventually wrote their narrative, *Running a Thousand Miles to Freedom*.[42]

Macon, the state's fifth largest city by the 1850s, was an important cotton center, but its economy was diversified. It was connected by railroad to Savannah, Columbus, Chattanooga, Nashville, and the Midwest.[43] Because of its location, Macon also had easy access to the steamboat and to the Savannah port, thus Macon became a true center of commerce by the mid-nineteenth century. In 1853, Macon added streetlights to its public works and laid 4 miles of gas lines in order to install 60 ornate street lights. Cotton plantations surrounded the city, and Black people performed much of the labor both in and out of the city. Even the city itself owned enslaved people who assisted in its maintenance.[44]

Hannah Guillan arrived in Macon just as the streetlights were being planned and erected and as commerce blossomed. Macon also had several churches as well as schools and colleges early in its history. Touted as the "City of Churches," houses of worship and educational opportunities shaped Macon and revealed the community's priorities.[45] Georgia Female College (today Wesleyan College) was founded in 1836 in Macon and was one of the first colleges for women in the United States.[46] Mercer Institute (today Mercer University) opened its collegiate department in 1837. The Georgia Academy for the Blind, established in 1851, was a part of the rapid building of schools in the city of Macon. By 1860, Macon's population included 5,396 whites, 2,828 slaves, and 22 free colored.[47] Many of the city's residents, Hannah Guillan among them, were of northern or foreign birth. The Irish potato famine in the 1840s had led to a surge in Irish immigration to America, and Macon was one of many locations where they migrated—causing some resentment among "locals".

However, the Civil War from 1861-1865 interrupted life in Macon as well as life for faculty and students at the Georgia Academy for the Blind. Indeed, the minutes of the board of trustees lapse during part of the Civil War. The school had steadily changed locations until a cornerstone for a permanent structure was erected in 1858. By January 1860, the school building was sufficiently finished so that teachers and students could move into the new location.[48] But, the war almost immediately disrupted operations. The significant upheaval threatened the academy's very existence. For example, the secretary of the board, Robert A. Smith, was charged with overseeing the running of the academy, Robert A. Smith, joined the Confederate army. He was killed in battle in Virginia in 1862, thus the Board had to secure his replacement. Notes collected from Principal W. D. Williams indicate that in 1863, the academy building had to be temporarily converted into a hospital for wounded soldiers.[49] For their safety, the school and the faculty and students were moved to Fort Valley, Georgia

in December of 1863.[50] Union General William Tecumseh Sherman spared Macon from direct demolition, but chaos from war certainly impacted the town of Macon as well as the school. For example, the Confederacy erected a small manufacturing plant in Macon for ammunitions that was confiscated by the Union government. Southern resentment ran high. As historian Mary Lane noted, "Sherman was on his despicable march to the sea...Milledgeville was on the line of march, therefore...Macon was the capital of the state during the month of February, 1865."[51]

The war almost led to the Academy for the Blind's permanent closure. On May 11, 1865, the board determined that the principal should send the students home and close the school as soon as practicable. But, on May 18th the decision was reversed and it was determined that the school would continue. The change apparently resulted from the decision of Union military General James Harrison Wilson (who had defeated Nathan Bedford Forrest on his raid through Alabama and Georgia) to provide rations to the school. By September 1865, the academy building no longer functioned as a military hospital, but the roof had been damaged considerably and required a significant sum of money for repairs. The sale of school furniture had been invested in Confederate bonds, which had become worthless. Thus, money was borrowed to restore the facilities; the Principal and his assistant, Miss Hannah Guillan, secured debt in order to restore the building.[52] Eventually, the state repaid the debt.

Hannah Guillan's Biographical Narrative

Hannah Guillan worked throughout her career at the Georgia Academy for the Blind, and like many people in Macon in the mid-nineteenth century, she was of foreign birth. She was born in England in 1820; at a very early age, she lost both of her parents and was sent to live with a family residing in the mountains of Pennsylvania who assigned her to "menial" work in poor weather conditions. As a result, Hannah believed her vision was impaired by the loss of one eye and nearly all of the vision in the other.[53] The exact cause of her parents' deaths and her relationship to the Pennsylvania family with whom she lived is unknown. After the loss of her sight and out of concern for her working conditions, a traveling preacher acquainted with the family arranged for her to attend the Institution for the Education of the Blind in Philadelphia. Hannah became the 16th student of Julius Friedlander, the school's founder,[54] and was admitted to the school on May 16th, 1834.[55] During her time as a student, Hannah began to attend the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia.[56] At school she studied music, handicrafts, the alphabet, arithmetic, and geography, while also attending to "domestic matters" for the houses where both female

and male students lived.[57] According to Frielander's personal letters, which his great neice Elisabeth D. Freund later translated and published in his personal history, Hannah learned the alphabet from wooden blocks with raised Roman letters. This was a precursor to learning to read embossed print. She learned to write using both a slate and pencil and paper in the same "common longhand" as other children; geography was taught with handmade maps with "pricked" state outlines that were then filled "with a solution of gum arabic" that dried and created a hard relief. Hannah learned arithmetic problems "first without written symbols, then by using moveable metallic type."[58]

Hannah studied hard and proved herself a committed pupil; as testimony to her hard work, she eventually became an assistant at the Philadelphia school where she had been educated.[59] As previously noted, this practice was common for blind students who demonstrated a command of their academic subjects; the Philadelphia school proudly offered "industrious" female students reduced room and board in exchange for work at the school following their formal instruction.[60] Hannah worked at the school until some years later when Mr. W. S. Fortescue, who had been one of her classmates in Philadelphia, was appointed principal of the Georgia Academy for the Blind. He called upon Hannah to come to Georgia and serve as the Principal Teacher for the school.[61] Friedlander's letters indicate that students at the school would usually travel by "mail-coach" and "when girls were going on the trip" they were also accompanied by a matron.[62] It is speculative, but we believe Hannah Guillan, age 24, would have travelled the same way when she came to Georgia in 1852.[63]

The early years at the school were likely full of change as the school was establishing itself, building its student enrollment, and hiring faculty to teach the curriculum. The school moved from location to location during this time until the permanent structure was erected in 1858. When the school opened, it had 4 students in total, but by 1852 enrollment increased to 13 students, and by 1858 the student body had increased to 27 students.[64] The school faced a number of changes in the Principal position. Mr. Fortescue resigned near the end of 1853, and several successors followed over the next three years.[65] During 1855, Mr. Henry Dutton was Acting Principal but took leave due to illness and Mr. May Horn was appointed, though he served as Principal only that year. The next year Mr. W. N. Chaudoin was appointed but also served for just one year.[66] From 1856-1857, we know from annual reports that Miss Guillan served as the school's Acting Principal with assistance from Mr. Ezra Hall, the school's music teacher. Although she was capable of directing the Academy, she was not offered the permanent position of Principal, likely because she had not attended college and perhaps because of her gender.[67] Instead, Guillan served as Principal Teacher, a position that allowed for the school Principal or

Director to serve as a figurehead and manage the financial and political needs of the school. Generally speaking, the principalship at this point in history was not purely administrative;[68] however, for a state-funded institution that served a small subset of the student population, having someone to remain on-site to support teachers and students while the principal met with members of the board of directors and community donors was essential.[69] We know from the board minutes that the Principal of the Georgia Academy for the Blind was in fact a political and largely administrative position. By January 1860, the school building was sufficiently finished so that teachers and students could move into the new location.[70]

On numerous occasions in the academy's early history, Guillan accompanied her students on trips to the Georgia state capital in Milledgeville. In addition to making requests for public funds to help construct more buildings and obtain needed finances, Guillan also wanted to demonstrate to legislators that the public monies were well spent and that students at the school could exhibit several achievements.[71] Much of the purpose in educating blind individuals in the nineteenth century centered on demonstration of independence and self-sufficiency, and while it may appear patronizing in a contemporary context, this goal served as a primary motivation in the willingness of public officials to allocate state funds to support schools for the blind.

Miss Guillan taught numerous courses throughout her career at the academy. She offered instruction in, "spelling, reading raised print, writing, English grammar, English composition, rhetoric, geography, ancient and modern history, arithmetic, algebra, [and] natural and moral philosophy."[72] All the faculty, staff, and students lived on the premises with the exception of the term of summer vacations. The institution provided free room and board to students unable to pay, and eventually dropped tuition entirely as the school became fully state supported. Teacher and administrator salaries were low even for the time period, but justified because the school offered room and board.[73]

As noted in the earlier section on Georgia and Macon history, the Civil War interrupted the operations of the school to the point where it nearly closed its doors permanently. The school was forced to move to Fort Valley, Georgia to escape General Sherman's March to the Sea. While Principal Williams supported the Confederacy, we found no records of Miss Guillan's allegiance, other than her clear and unyielding support for the Georgia Academy for the Blind. She helped to facilitate the relocation of 23 pupils during the war, and not only fulfilled teaching duties, but also served as the Matron.[74] When the school returned to the Macon location in September 1865 after the Civil War had ended, it became one of the first schools to admit blinded war veterans. During that same academic year, both Mr. Williams and Miss Guillan secured debt

from their personal resources for the Trustees to be able to keep the academy afloat.[75] The academy endured in large part because of the dedication of these two leaders, as well as their willingness to operate within a frugal budget. By 1873, student enrollment increased to 47; by 1876 it reached 57; and by 1898, the year Guillan passed away, it totaled 117.[76] After Reconstruction ended in 1877 and Jim Crow segregation became the norm in southern schools, the Georgia Academy for the Blind opened a "Colored" division at the beginning of the 1882-83 academic year. It is more than a bit peculiar to maintain separate schools based upon race for students and faculty who had severely limited or no vision.

By the 1880s Principal Williams' reports to the trustees, not only indicated the courses in which students enrolled, but also noted some of the textbooks in use. For example, in Arithmetic, students completed, *Sanford's Common School Arithmetic* as well as *Stanford's Intermediate Arithmetic*. Other classes included English composition, English grammar, natural philosophy, chemistry, astronomy, physical geography, "heathen mythology", zoology, "wonders in Insect Life", natural history, common school history, "raised maps and the globe", Mitchell's Geography, Monteith's Geography, reading raised print books, spelling, etymology, music, point type writing, and pencil writing.[77] In accord with customs for expected female roles in southern society, each female student was trained in domestic work, and had the opportunity to study handicrafts of ornamental nature. Older students participated in social and literary clubs, as also was customary in the nineteenth century school curricula.

Hannah Guillan taught at the school for 46 years; she served as female teacher, Principal Teacher, governess, teacher in the literary department, interim principal, matron, and Principal Teacher of the literary department. According to the 1870 United States Census, Guillan owned real estate in the area; a memorial her students wrote shortly after her death refer her moral character, contributions to the field, and her philanthropy and its positive impact on humanity.[78] From her hiring until her death, reports to the board of trustees and the governor frequently mentioned Guillan's contribution to the school in topics ranging from physical and financial management to instruction. Guillan's name is mentioned more than 70 times in 45 years of records. At her funeral, the trustees of the school served as pallbearers – a high praise for her work.[79] Within the records of the board of trustees, W. J. Williams provided a tribute following her death in 1898; she was described as "the life and soul of the Academy for the Blind in Georgia" and as having a graceful character and showing an "abundance of charity and benevolence."[80] Hannah Guillan was an essential part of the establishment and school operations, but her dedication to her students and the mission of educating blind students was

how she was known by those who loved her and learned from her. To date, Hannah has been the longest serving teacher at the Georgia Academy for the Blind.[81]

Conclusion and Scholarly Significance of Miss Hannah Guillan's Story

In *Gender and the Politics of History*, Joan Wallach Scott points out that the call for a history of women over the last few decades has resulted in the publication of numerous books and journal articles, and even conferences to contribute to the production of new knowledge about women in history.[82] Despite the amount of work, the range and diversity of topics covered in the field has made identifying a single interpretive or theoretical stance difficult. However, she argues that the body of work has enabled historians to identify common problems and dimensions that exist in women's history as we construct women as historical subjects. In this piece, we aimed to do just that – to position Hannah Guillan as an agent in the narrative of the Georgia Academy for the Blind despite little documentation of her day-to-day life as a teacher.[83]

While the history of the antebellum South is typically characterized by the polarization of northern abolitionists and southern pro-slavery advocates, in her work on the politics of education in the South, Rebecca Montgomery points out that there was also a strong movement towards a more socially activist state being led by middle-class southern white women, largely through their participation in women's clubs and organizations.[84] Although Hannah was an educated white woman, being unmarried, blind, and working to earn her own income were likely social deterrents to participation in gender-based social activities common to the era. Instead, the intersection of her identities led Guillan to support and influence the institution through her contribution as Principal Teacher. It is likely that Hannah's disability, as well as her gender, was a factor in her historical exclusion. We concur with contemporary thinking in the field of disability studies. Variation and human difference is not a problem for individuals to overcome, but a socially constructed category like race, class, and gender, that is ripe for historical analysis.[85] In addition to her identity as a women in the Civil War era, as a result of her disability, Hannah would also have faced social marginalization because of her blindness.

Introducing Hannah Guillan to the history of education also illustrates the power of educational biography, especially when it is serves as an exemplar of possibilities as well as the vitality of the human spirit in the face of adversity. Although Hannah Guillan was a blind woman, her experience undoubtedly connected her to her students. Her blindness afforded her a prosperous and, all evidence suggests, fulfilling career as a teacher. Although her inability to

see directed her path in life, within the walls for the Georgia Academy for the Blind, Miss Guillan was among those who believed in the probability of success given a proper education.

Hannah Guillan impacted the lives of her students through her dedication to the field of blind education; her story serves as exemplar of achieving fulfillment in service to others. We intentionally sought to narrate the story of a little-known woman who, disabled herself, educated students with disabilities, thus making significant early contributions to the field of blind education. Sharing biographies like Guillan's, can change the narrative and outlook for students with disabilities who some assume have limited capacity for independence. When shared with in-service teachers, narratives such as these break the cyclical reproduction of ableist notions about students with disabilities. Guillan did as anyone else would do, studied and sought work in an area of interest – it is not remarkable that she was blind and could do this work, it is remarkable that she found a place where nineteenth-century society permitted her to use her strengths to improve educational outcomes for other children. In fact, Guillan's exceptional contributions merit attention. As Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky point out in the introduction to *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, the persistent pathologizing of disability has resulted in histories about people with disability rather than history that positions them as historical actors.[86] Thus, teaching educational biography that includes details of women like Hannah Guillan can aid in preparing contemporary educators for work in the diversity of P-12 schools, can provide students with disabilities the opportunity to see themselves represented in history, and can shatter stereotypes pertaining to both gender and disability.

The story of Hannah Guillan began in the archives but we want to underscore that only because her work was integral to the history of Georgia Academy for the Blind, was it recorded at all and kept for us to discover. Nonetheless, finding information about her contributions still proved extremely challenging. Guillan's opportunities were seriously limited because of both her disability and her gender. However, her disability also provided her purpose and an opportunity to teach students who faced the same challenges she encountered. We found that much of the record on the history of blind education is dominated biographies of leaders in the field, such as Samuel Gridley Howe, and not much attention is paid to blind female teachers of the blind. Joana Pearce has labeled these biographies of leaders, "hagiographies of sighted male educators and superintendents that may describe the coursework set in schools but do not examine the purpose of the coursework in the greater goals of institutions".[87]

Guillan's gender may have limited her opportunities among others facing

blindness within the Georgia Academy for the Blind community. She arrived at the academy in 1852, just four years after Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton organized the Seneca Falls Convention. Social norms in nineteenth century female society have been labeled the "cult of domesticity" as women typically operated within the private sphere, whereas men dominated the public sphere that included public records.[88] Not only did women lack the franchise, upon marriage their property became their husband's, they could not sue in court, nor could they run for public office to change discriminatory laws. Educational opportunities were limited, as most colleges did not permit women to attend. Ironically, Macon proved to be the location of the first female college (present day Wesleyan), which opened in 1836. But the female colleges that arose in the mid-nineteenth century were not designed to educate poor blind women, they generally catered to wealthy white able-bodied women. But Macon, a southern center of commerce, churches, and educational institutions, offered Guillan an important professional opportunity and a purpose to dedicate her life to achieving. We hope that by publishing what we have uncovered about Guillan's life and contributions to the Georgia Academy for the Blind, she will move from the periphery of the school's history to gain recognition as one of the school's most important contributors. While substantial gaps in historical knowledge about Guillan remain that we hope to address in future research, this historical account emphasizes the significance of an educator within the context of the Civil War-torn South during a time when women, including those with disabilities, were rarely recognized as agents of educational progress.

Notes

[1]As the opening to this piece recounts the experience of the first author's introduction to Hannah Guillan, we will use first person "I" in reference to the 1st author where appropriate in the article.

[2]Georgia Academy for the Blind, *Origin and History of the Georgia Academy for the Blind, with documents from the beginning*, 1851 to 1887 (Macon: J.W. Burke and Company, 1887).

[3]We refer to Hannah as "Miss" rather than "Ms." throughout this piece as this title was the common references for unmarried women during this period.

[4]Craig Kridel, *Writing Educational Biography: Explorations in Qualitative Research* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998); Linda Morice and Laurel Puchner, *Life Stories: Exploring Issues in Educational History Through Biography* (Charlotte: Info Age Publishing, 2014); Debbie Mauldin Cotrell, *Pioneer Woman Educator: The Progressive Spirit of Annie Webb Blanton* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993); Kate Rousmaniere, *Citizen Teacher: The Life and Leadership of Margaret Haley* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2005); Joyce Antler, *Lucy Sprague Mitchell: The Making of a Modern Woman* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987); Chara Haeussler Bohan, *Go to the Sources: Lucy Maynard Salmon and the Teaching of History* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004); Patricia Carter, *"Everybody's Paid but the Teacher": The Teaching Profession and the Women's Movement* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002); Alan

Sadnovnik and Susan Semel, *Founding Mothers and Others: Women Educational Leaders during the Progressive Era* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

[5]Kridel, xii.

[6]Dolana Mogadime, "Book Review: Critical Approaches to Life Writing Methods in Qualitative Research," *Vitae Scholasticae* 34, no. 2 (2017): 127.

[7]Nigel Hamilton, *How to Do Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

[8]Edward A. Janak, "Adventitiously Blind, Advantageously Political: John Eldred Swearingen and Social Definitions of Disability in Progressive-Era South Carolina," In L. Morice and L. Puchner (eds.) *Life Stories: Exploring Issues in Educational History through Biography* (Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2014), 86.

[9]Jason Ellis and Kate Rousmaniere, "Professor Bailyn, Meet Professor Baynton: The "New Disability History" of Education. *History of Education Quarterly*, 60(3): 285-288.

[10]Chara Haeussler Bohan, Gender and feminist scholarship: A dynamic theoretical framework living on the edges. In M. M. Manfra & C. M. Bolick (Eds.). *Handbook of social studies research*. (pp. 227–253). (Boston, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017). https://www.wiley.com/en-us/The+Wiley+Handbook+of+Social+Studies+Research-p-9781118787076

[11]Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemings of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009).

[12]Malala Yousafzai, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*, (New York: Little Brown, 2013).

[13] David Sadker, Myra Sadker, and Karen R. Zittleman, *Still Failing at Fairness: How Gender Bias Cheats Girls and Boys in Schools and What We Can Do About it* (New York, Scribner, 2009).

[14]Sarah Case, *Leaders of Their Race: Educating Black and White Women in the New South*. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

[15] Otis Stephens, Jr., *In Touch with Learning: A History of the Georgia Academy for the Blind* (Knoxville, TN: Author, 2011).

[16]"Just Curious: Why is the Georgia Academy for the Blind Located in Macon," 13WMAZ, updated October 26, 2017, https://www.13wmaz.com/article/news/local/just-curious-why-is-the-georgia-academy-for-the-blind-located-in-macon/486247690.

[17]Thomas Harper Ridgeway, personal communication, March 6, 2021. From the conversation with Mr. Ridgeway, we adopted our pronunciation of Hannah's last name. Early in our research we pronounced her name "Gwe-lun" based on pronunciation tools found via the internet but after hearing Mr. Ridgeway's speak of her, we adopted his pronunciation "Gil-lun" to honor the way that locals, residents, and attendees of the Georgia Academy for the Blind refer to her.

[18]Margaret A. Winzer, *The History of Special Education: From Isolation to Integration*, (Washington D.C.: Galludet University Press, 1993), 104.

[19]Website for the Perkins School for the Blind Archive. "Overbrook School for the Blind". Watertown, MA, https://www.flickr.com/photos/perkinsarchive/collections/72157634307460806/.

[20]"Limitations of the Blind Almost Removed by Education at the New-York Institute" *New York Times* (New York, NY), May 13, 1887; see also "A Brief History of NYISE" https://www.nyise.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=391515&type=d&pREC_ID=922947

[21]"A Brief History of NYISE" https://www.nyise.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=391515&type=d&pREC_ID=922947

[22]Elisabeth D. Freund, *Crusader for Light: Julius R. Friedlander, Founder of the Overbrook School for the Blind*, 1832. (Philadelphia: Dorrance & Co., 1959), 92–93.

[23]Edith Willoughby, *Overbrook School for the Blind*. (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2007), 12.

[24]Willoughby, 7.

[25]Winzer, *The History of Special Education*, 233.

[26]Winzer, *The History of Special Education*, 229-245; The Perkins Institution for the Blind. *1856 Annual Report of the Trustees of the Perkins Institution and the Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind to the Corporation*. (Cambridge: 1856. https://archives.lib.state.ma.us/bitstream/handle/2452/782271/ocm20865882-1856.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

[27]Winzer, *The History of Special Education*, 233.

[28]Georgia Academy for the Blind, *Origin and History of the Georgia Academy for the Blind, with documents from the beginning, 1851 to 1887* (Macon: J.W. Burke and Company, 1887), 6-8.

[29]Georgia Academy for the Blind, *Origin and History*, 7.

[30]Georgia Academy for the Bind, *Origin and History*, 9.

[31]Georgia Academy for the Blind, *Origin and History*, 11.

[32]Georgia Academy for the Blind, *Origin and History*, 6.

[33]Christopher Meyers and David Williams, *Georgia: A Brief History* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2012), 1.

[34]Meyers and Williams, *Georgia: A Brief History*, 3.

[35]Meyers and Williams, *Georgia: A Brief History*, 4-5.

[36]Norman Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia, 2nd ed.* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990).

[37]Bartley, *Modern Georgia*, 2-3.

[38]Bartley, *Modern Georgia*, 8-10.

[39]Meyers and Williams, *Georgia: A Brief History*, 257.

[40]Bartley, *Modern Georgia*, 14-15.

[41]Stephen Wallace Taylor and Mathew Jennings, *Images of America: Macon* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2013): 19.

[42]Stephen Wallace Taylor and Mathew Jennings, *Images of America: Macon*, 28; William and Ellen Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom: Or, The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2014/1860).

[43]J. A. Owens, "Georgia by Gaslight: Glimpses of Macon from the letters of the City Gaslight Superintendent, 1859-1862," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 76, no. 3 (2012): 675-694.

[44]Stephen Wallace Taylor and Mathew Jennings, *Images of America: Macon*, 19.

[45]Stephen Wallace Taylor and Mathew Jennings, *Images of America: Macon*, 109.

[46]Mary Lane, "Macon: An Historical Retrospect," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 5, no. 3 (1921): 20-34.

[47]Owens, "Georgia by Gaslight," 679.

[48]Georgia Academy for the Blind, *Origin and History*, 20.

[49]Georgia Academy for the Blind, *Origin and History*, 20.

[50]Georgia Academy for the Blind, *Origin and History*, 21-22.

[51]Lane, "Macon," 33.

[52]Georgia Academy for the Blind, *Origin and History*, 23.

[53]Georgia Academy for the Bind, *Origin and History*, 17; Otis Stephens, *In Touch with Learning: A History of the Georgia Academy for the Blind* (Knoxville: Otis Stephens, 2011), 7.

[54]Willoughby, *Overbrook School for the Blind*, 114.

[55]Pennsylvania Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Fourth Annual Report of the Managers* (Philadelphia: John C. Clark, 1852), 13-17. It should be noted that female students were offered a reduced rate as they were seen as "less productive" than their male counterparts who were able to remain at the school without the cost of room and board in exchange for work.

[56]"Miss Guillon Dead," *Macon Telegraph* (Macon, Ga), June 2, 1898.

[57]Elisabeth D. Freund, *Crusader for Light*, 86 -87.

[58]Freund, 86.

[59]Georgia Academy for the Blind, *Origin and History*, 17; Pennsylvania Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Twelfth Annual Report of the Managers*, (Philadelphia: Brown, Bicking, & Guilbert, 1840), 6.

[60]Pennsylvania Institution for the Education of the Blind, *Nineteenth Annual Report of the Managers* (Philadelphia: Brown, Bicking, & Guilbert, 1840), 9.

[61]Georgia Academy for the Blind, *Origin and History*, 17.

[62]Elisabeth D. Freund, *Crusader for Light*, 84-85.

[63]Edith Willoughby, *Overbrook School for the Blind*, 114; Otis Stephens, *In Touch with Learning: A History of the Georgia Academy for the Blind*, 6.

[64]Stephens, 6-7.

[65]Stephens, 8.

[66]*Origin and History*, 29.

[67]Stephens, 8.

[68]Kate Rousmaniere, *The Principal's Office: A Social History of the American School Principal*, (New York: SUNY Press, 2013), 8-9.

[69]For a comprehensive look at the history of the principalship, see Kate Rousmaniere, *The Principal's Office: A Social History of the American School Principal*, 2013.

[70]*History of Georgia Academy for the Blind*, 20.

[71]Stephens, 10-13.

[72]Stephens, 15, as cited in William D. Williams, *First Annual Report to the Trustees*, October 24, 1858.

[73]Stephens, 18.

[74]Stephens, 25.

[75]Stephens, 30.

[76]Stephens, 49; 81.

[77]Stephens, 73-74.

[78]"Miss Hannah Guillan," *Macon Telegraph* (Macon, Ga), June 19, 1898.

[79]"Miss Guillon Buried," *Macon Telegraph* (Macon, Ga), June 3, 1898.

[80]*Origin and History*, 17.

[81]Thomas Ridgeway, Phone Conversation with first author, March 6, 2021.

[82]Debbie Mauldin Cotrell, *Pioneer Woman Educator: The Progressive Spirit of Annie Webb Blanton* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993); Kate Rousmaniere, *Citizen Teacher: The Life and Leadership of Margaret Haley* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2005); Joyce Antler, *Lucy Sprague Mitchell: The Making of a Modern Woman* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987); Chara Haeussler Bohan, *Go to the Sources: Lucy Maynard Salmon and the Teaching of History* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004); Patricia Carter, *"Everybody's Paid but the Teacher": The Teaching Profession and the Women's Movement* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002); Alan Sadnovnik and Susan Semel, *Founding Mothers and Others: Women Educational Leaders during the Progressive Era* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

[83]Christine Woyshner, *The National PTA, Race, and Civic Engagement, 1897-1970*, (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University, 2009).

[84]Rebecca S. Montgomery, *The Politics of Education in the New South: Women and Reform in Georgia, 1890-1930*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); Christine Woyshner, *The National PTA, Race, and Civic Engagement, 1897-1970*, (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University, 2009).

[85]Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, "Disability History: From the Margins to the Mainstream," in *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, ed. P. K. Longmore and L. Umansky. (New York: New York University, 2001), 8.

[85]Longmore and Umansky, 8.

[87]Joanna L. Pearce, "To give light where He made all dark": Educating the Blind about the Natural World and God in Nineteenth-Century North America. *History of Education Quarterly*, 60, no. 3 (August 2020), 297.

[88]Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978); Carroll, Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," in (Eds.) Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck, *A Heritage of Her Own: Toward a New Social History of American Women*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 311-342.