

Mary E. Shaw (1850-1905)

Flushing Educator and Philanthropist

Mary Elizabeth Hood Shaw was born in Pennsylvania in 1850. Little is known of her early life. She married the journalist and politician John W.A. Shaw in 1873. (Sources: 3, 8; marriage record, below). Her name was generally given as Mary E. Shaw, but has also been recorded as Mary Shaw, Mrs. John W.A. Shaw, Mary Ann Shaw, and Mary Elizabeth Shaw.

By 1890, she was well established in Flushing as the highly regarded principal of the Colored School and was also a teacher at the Night School. She resigned in 1894. (Sources: 1, 3, 8, 9, 11, 13)

The Colored School was established as a free and integrated school by the Flushing Female Association, a Quaker women's organization, and was later absorbed into the public school system as a segregated school. (Sources: 2, 4)

Later in life, Shaw inherited a substantial sum from her benefactor, Catharine Ann Ten Eyck, and became a philanthropist through her own will, leaving \$38,750 to the Tuskegee Institute (Sources: 7, 10, 14)

(Image: Source 20)

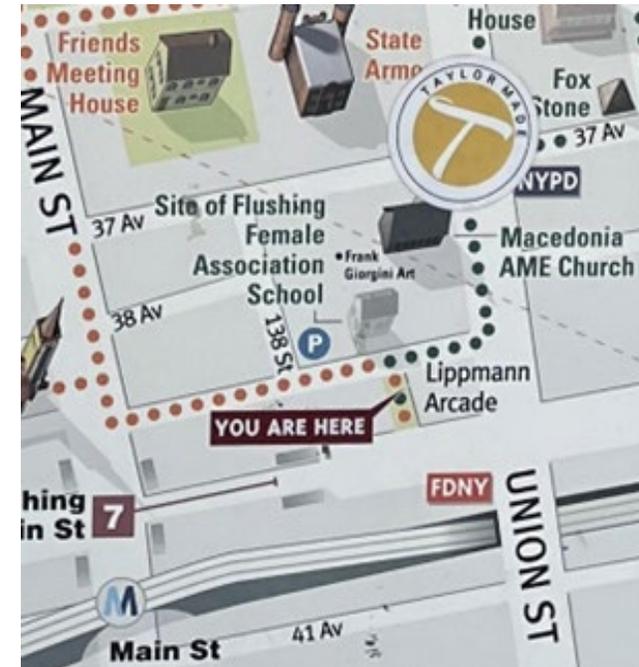


Flushing Colored School Liberty Street

The brick schoolhouse was located on Liberty Street between Main Street and Union Street. This photograph shows the schoolhouse in 1922, approximately 30 years after Shaw's era. (Sources: 21)



By the time this photograph was taken, the street had been renamed Lincoln Avenue. Today less than half of the street survives, as 38th Avenue. This image shows the locations of the Colored School and Macedonia AME Zion Church. (Sources: 19)



Mary E. Shaw in the 1880 Federal Census

Source: FamilySearch

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GYBX-96FV?view=index&personArk=%2Fark%3A%2F61903%2F1%3A1%3AMZFQ-VT7&action=view>

Page: 356

Line: 25

Age: 29

Occupation: School Teacher

Place of Birth: Pennsylvania

Mary E. Shaw: Marriage Record

Source: Ancestry.com

Mary E Hood

in the New York, New York, U.S., Extracted Marriage Index, 1866-1937



Detail

Source

Name

Mary E Hood

Gender

Female

Marriage Date

23 Dec 1873

Marriage Place

Manhattan, New York, USA

Certificate Number

8694

Mary E. Shaw as in the Local Press. I

*Newtown Register, January 30,
1890, 3:3*

In Flushing village a night school for colored people – two evenings in the week has just been opened under the auspices of the Flushing Female Ass. and under the intermediate instruction of **Mrs. Shaw** and is free to all who wish to attend. (Sources: 13)

Brooklyn Daily Eagle, June 28, 1890, 1:1

The Flushing Colored School, of which Mrs. **Mary E. Shaw**, wife of the well known Democratic orator, John W. A. Shaw, is principal, held its graduating exercises in the Flushing opera house Thursday evening, and the pupils, under the direction of Mrs. Shaw and her assistants, the misses Lena Smith and Nellie Van Nostrand, made a most excellent showing, carrying out a lengthy and interesting programme in a manner that was thoroughly enjoyed by an audience of over five hundred people. At the conclusion of the exercises Superintendent John Holley Clarke, of the Flushing high school, presented diplomas to the following graduates: Calvin Cuffee, Joseph Dedrick, Benjamin Jackson, and Edward Ketcham. (Sources: 8)

Mary E. Shaw in the Local Press. II

Brooklyn Daily Eagle, January 31, 1894, 3:4

A legacy for Mrs. Shaw: A Flushing School Teacher Falls Heir to \$60,000

Mrs. Mary E. Shaw, of Flushing, has fallen heir to an estate worth \$60,000. It was bequeathed to her by the late Mrs. Catharine Ten Eyck, of 109 Macdougall Street, New York, who died some months ago.

Mrs. Shaw is a highly refined and educated colored woman. For years she was Principal of Grammar School No. 2 (colored). J.W.A. Shaw, her husband, is now in Europe.

(Sources: 10)

Mary E. Shaw and the Inheritance from Catharine Ann Ten Eyck

Brooklyn Daily Eagle. January 31, 1894: 9:4

Mrs. Shaw Inherits a Fortune: Flushing's Colored Principal Tenders her Resignation (Source: 9)

Mrs. M.E. Shaw, for many years principal of the Flushing colored school, has inherited a fortune from the late Mrs. Ten Eyck and tendered her resignation to the board of education last night. About December 1 Mrs. Shaw was granted a leave of absence for two months and her resignation is explained in a letter as follows:

New York, January 29, 1894.

Mrs. Ten Eyck was nearly 80 years old. Her husband, Joseph Ten Eyck, died six years ago, aged 80. Years ago they kept an oyster and chop house in New street. It was there they first commenced to save. They afterward kept a place in Broadway, corner of Prince street. Mr. Ten Eyck's health failing, they bought a peach farm in New Jersey, on which they lived sixteen years. Returning to this city in 1863, Mr. Ten Eyck catered for the best people, such as the Everts, Sloanes, Posts, etc., besides serving the lunch in the Delaware and Lackawanna [sic] building. By the will of Joseph Ten Eyck, I received \$5,000. By the will of the late Catherine [sic] Ten Eyck, which was admitted to probate December 11, 1893, after giving away \$16,500, all the rest of the estate, including the house, furniture and plate of 100 Macdougall street Mrs. Ten Eyck gave to me. I am not a relative, but they had known me since I was a child. I was married from their house and they were as dear to me as my own parents. The estate is worth about \$75,000.

Mrs. Shaw is the wife of **John W.A. Shaw**, a somewhat eccentric colored man who kept a restaurant on Broadway, Flushing, some years ago and who was something of a stump speaker. He attracted attention at local Democratic meetings not only because he was eloquent but because of his politics, which were emphatically Democratic. The couple have not lived together for the past few years, he having taken up residence in London.

Mrs. Shaw is a woman of considerable education and is generally respected in Flushing, where many of her friends are pleased at her good luck: [sic]

[Note: In the legal records, the name is spelled **Catharine Ann Ten Eyck**. Lackawanna = Lackawanna.]

Mary E. Shaw: Obituary

The New York Age, March 24, 1905, 4

*Black newspaper; preceded by *The New York Globe* and *The New York Freedman*

Death of Mrs. Mary E. Shaw (Sources: 15)

Philadelphia, March 15--Mrs. **Mary E. Shaw** died Friday, at Olney near here, and her funeral was held Sunday at St. Philip's P. E. Church, New York. She was the **daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Lewis J.L. Hood**.

She was very well known as a teacher, and had taught school at White Plains, N.Y., in Delaware, New York city, and after her marriage to **John W.A. Shaw**, in South Carolina, Georgia, Indiana and finally in Flushing. Her only child, Miss **Ethel Shaw**, whom she educated with great care, died some years ago at Tuskegee, Ala., where she had obtained her first position as a teacher at the Tuskegee Institute.

Notes: The report was likely published in a Philadelphia newspaper on March 15 and reprinted in New York on March 24. The Friday before March 15 was March 10, which matches the date of death in the court case contesting Shaw's will. (Sources: 7)

Olney is now a neighborhood in the north of Philadelphia, but in the 19th century was a separate town.

The funeral was held at St. Philip's Protestant Episcopal Church in Harlem.

The name of Shaw's mother is given in the obituary as **Mrs. Lewis J.L. Hood**, but in Shaw's will she is named as **Sarah A. Porter** (the name of her second husband). (Sources: 7)

Ethel Shaw was a graduate of the progressive and integrated West Newton English and Classical School (also known as the Allen School) in Massachusetts and became a teacher at Tuskegee Institute during the presidency of Booker T. Washington. (Sources: 6)

Mary E. Shaw as a Philanthropist

The relationship between **Mary E. Shaw** and her benefactor, the wealthy New York widow **Catharine Ann ten Eyck**, was clearly close, given the terms of ten Eyck's will. She named Shaw the administrator of her estate, arranged for a secure income for her lifetime, and specified that no additional persons besides Shaw could be buried in the ten Eyck family plot in Cypress Hills Cemetery (Brooklyn). A notice in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on March 11, 1905 indicates that Shaw was indeed buried there. (Sources: 19)

Ten Eyck's generosity carried forward into Shaw's own will, as the basis for gifts of \$1,000 each to the **Flushing Free Library** (today the Queens Borough Public Library), for the purchase of reference books, and to the **Hospital and Dispensary of the Town of Flushing**.

The legacy of \$38,750 under Shaw's will to the **Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute** (today Tuskegee University) derived in part from the remainders of \$10,000 trusts made to two individuals. The first was to Shaw's mother, **Sarah A. Porter** (\$10,000 remaining). The second was to **Annie Johnson**, a friend (\$5,000 of the original \$10,000). Shaw's will stated that these gifts were a memorial tribute to her daughter **Ethel Shaw**, to be used as a scholarship fund for female students.

Mary E. Shaw died on March 10, 1905. She bequeathed her household goods to her mother. She left just \$50 to her husband, **John W.A. Shaw**. He was named as a party in a 1907 New York Supreme Court case against the Farmer's Loan Trust Company, chosen by Mary E. Shaw as the executor of her estate. The terms of the will were held to be valid.

(Sources: 7)

Mary E. Shaw's Will in the Newspapers

The New York Age, April 20, 1905, 1:5

*Black newspaper; preceded by *The New York Globe* and *The New York Freedman*

Mrs. Shaw Left Tuskegee \$38,750 (Source: 15)

Mrs. Mary E. Shaw, who died at Olney, Pa. on March 10, left by her will, which was probated here on March 10, \$38,750 to the Tuskegee Institute.

Her estate amounts to \$47,000, of which \$35,000 is in cash and the remainder in real estate. Her interest in Tuskegee Institute was due in part to the fact that her daughter was a teacher at the school and died there. Her gift is the largest that the Institute has ever received from an Afro-American.

Mary E. Shaw's Will Contested. I

The New York Age, June 13, 1907, 6:4

*Black newspaper; preceded by *The New York Globe* and *The New York Freedman*

Tuskegee Gets Shaw Estate: Booker T. Washington Hears the Jury's Verdict on the Bench (Sources: 16)

Dr. Booker T. Washington sat on the bench with Justice Dayton in the Supreme Court Monday while a jury was out determining whether or not Mrs. Mary E. Shaw, wife of John W.A. Shaw, the well-known writer and politician, was of sound and disposing mind when she made a will four years ago, leaving the bulk of her estate to the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute.

The jury was out only a few minutes before returning a verdict upholding Mrs. Shaw's will, and Mr. Washington left the court room very much pleased. He had expected to be a witness, but was not called. Mary Powell and a number of cousins of Mrs. Shaw contested the will, alleging that after Mrs. Shaw inherited some \$50,000 from Mrs. Catharine Anne Ten Eyck, her friend, Mrs. Shaw took to entertaining lavishly. Other actions of Mrs. Shaw the relatives denounced as plain indications of her insanity, especially as her will ignored them.

Mrs. Shaw made a will bequeathing to her mother, Sarah A. Porter, the income from \$10,000 for life, on the mother's death half of the \$10,000 to go to Ada Fisher, a friend, and half to Tuskegee. This bequest was to be a memorial to Mrs. Shaw's daughter Ethel, who died at Tuskegee. Another trust fund of \$10,000, set aside to provide an income for Miss Annie Johnson, another friend, reverts to Tuskegee, to be added to the Ethel Shaw memorial fund.

All the residuary estate, save bequests of \$1,000 to the Flushing Free Library, \$2,000 to St. Philp's church and \$1,000 to the Hospital and Dispensary of Flushing, was left to Tuskegee.

The subscribing witnesses to the will testified that Mrs. Shaw was quite sane and normal when she declared it to be her last will and testament.

[Notes: The spelling in the legal records is Catharine Ann Ten Eyck. This case was heard in the New York State Supreme Court of Appeals. See Sources: 7. Booker T. Washington was President of Tuskegee from 1881-1915.]

Mary E. Shaw's Will Contested. II

Emporia Gazette, August 7, 1907, 3:5

Fails to Buy Social Rank: Woman Spends \$100,000 in Vain Effort to Break Into Society (Source: 12)

New York, Aug. 7 – The Farmer's Loan and Trust Company, trustee under the last will of Catherine Ann Ten Eyck [sic], who died in 1893, is seeking to have the estate partitioned. Alfred C. Cowan, of 203 Broadway, is opposing on behalf of eight defendants who will contest the will of Mary E. Shaw, one of the legatees under the Ten Eyck will. The contest has brought out a strange story of squandered money, hallucinations, and the futile effort of the colored woman to break into European society.

Mrs. Ten Eyck was a mulatto. Her husband, who had been a servant of the old Dutch Ten Eycks, accumulated as a caterer \$150,000 before the civil war [sic]. He was accounted the wealthiest colored man in the north. His wife had served in the Holcomb and the Enoch families. When he died he bequeathed his entire estate to her.

Among Mrs. Ten Eyck's servants was Mary E. Shaw, for whom she developed a strong affection, and whom she made her residuary legatee with authority to dispose of the estate by will to such 'person or persons' as she should see fit.

In possession of property, Mary Shaw announced that she was fitted for higher society than that of Minetta Lane and Macdougall Street; that she was in fact a queen and would have to go to Europe to be recognized. It came out at hearing before the surrogate that she was addicted to brandy and that she had left her husband and went abroad with John Mazet, a West Indian negro.

Lawyer Cohen says that Mary spent not far from \$100,000 in storming the citadels of fashion in London, Paris, Berlin, and Vienna, but the citadels remained intact, and Mary returned to America in broken health. She made a will bequeathing \$50 to her husband, John William A. Shaw, and the remainder of the trust estate to friends, relatives, the Tuskegee Institute, and other institutions.

Lawyer Cohen filed yesterday a brief of 6,000 words, with forty-nine authorities, in which he contends that a "person" is not a corporation; that Mrs. Shaw's will did not, therefore, comply with the terms of Mrs. Ten Eyck's, and he even attacks the validity of the charter of Booker Washington's educational institution.

[Notes: The spelling in the Supreme Court appeal is *Catharine Ten Eyck*. See Sources: 7. No sources can be found that shed light upon the accusations in this vitriolic report, versions of which were widely reprinted.]

Mary E. Shaw's Will Contested. III

New York Age, August 15, 1907, 6:2

*Black newspaper; preceded by *The New York Globe* and *The New York Freedman*

Shaw Will Case Before Court: Ten Eyck Heirs Are Still Fighting the Shaw Will Case (Sources: 17)

Lawyer Alfred C. Cowan, of 206 Broadway, New York city, who represents the Ten Eyck heirs in the contest that they are making to overthrow the will of Mary E. Shaw, filed briefs on the 30th instant, in which some very interesting legal points are involved.

Catherine Ann Ten Eyck [sic] died in 1893, and gave Mary E. Shaw the interest in her property for life, with the power to dispose of it to such person, or persons as she might choose by will. The heirs contend that Mary E. Shaw did not properly exercise the power which was reposed in her by the terms of the Ten Eyck will, that Mrs. Shaw did not have the right under the Ten Eyck will, to give the property to corporations, when the Ten Eyck will said she could give it to "person or persons."

Second, that the bequest made to the Tuskegee Normal school [sic] was contrary to the statutes of this State, at the death of Mrs. Ten Eyck, in 1893, to the effect, that a foreign corporation could not take real estate by devise in this State at that time, and the fact that that disability imposed on foreign corporations by the statutes of this State having been removed by the passage of an act passed in 1894, giving a foreign corporation the right to take and hold real property in this State by devise, cannot be taken advantage of by the Tuskegee Institute, as that disability was removed after the death of Mrs. Ten Eyck, or in other words, it being "*ex post facto* law" and thereby does not affect devises made before its passage.

Third. That by the terms of Mrs. Ten Eyck's will, Mrs. Shaw did not take the fee, neither did Mrs. Ten Eyck intend that she should take the fee in her estate, but only the interest for life of the fee and the net profits therefrom. On the other hand, the heirs maintain that they took a vested remainder and not a contingent remainder, subject, however, to being divested by Mrs. Shaw upon her properly exercising the power conferred upon her by Mrs. Ten Eyck.

Fourth. If their contention should not be sustained they claim the right to raise the question that Mrs. Shaw left a living husband and that she gave [gave] more than half of the estate to corporations, in violation of the Laws of 1860, of the State of New York. That there is no decision, in this or any other State, holding person or persons and a corporation are the same, or synonymous terms.

[Notes: The spelling in the Supreme court appeal is *Catharine Ann Ten Eyck*. See Sources: 7.]

Acknowledgement

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the historian Hope McCaffrey, who kindly provided the marriage record and Freedman's Savings Bank record, and who generously led me to additional sources that she had discovered in her own research on Mary E. Shaw.

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- (7) *Farmers' Loan Trust Co. v. Shaw*, 56 Misc. 201, 107 N.Y.S. 837 (N.Y. Sup. Ct. 1907). https://books.google.com/books?id=_crP4uMFz_kC

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(11) *Brooklyn Times*. "Mrs. Shaw Resigns—Superintendent Cook Goes out of Office Today." January 31, 1894, 3:4.

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(14) *New York Age*. "Mrs. Shaw Left Tuskegee \$38,750." April 20, 1905, 1:5.

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[Note: Newspapers.com requires sign-in, available at many libraries.]

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Images

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