Women in Education

Most of the teachers in the public schools were women, but the principals of the large grammar schools were men until the innovation of hiring the first woman of a large public grammar school was made in 1891.

Willard Primary School
This school faced Dana Square. It was built in 1870 and demolished 1957 when the new Morse school was built.

Morse Grammar School
was built in 1891 on the corner of Brookline and Allston Streets.
(1t moved to Memorial Drive and Granite Street in 1957).
The school included both elementary and upper grades, a total of 500 pupils. The School Committee hired a woman principal which was an unusual move for a large Grammar School. The Superintendent of Schools defended his choice:

first graduating class 1892

Webster Primary School
On Upton Street, it was closed as Webster and became Graham and Parks in 1982.

Mary A. Townsend was hired as principal of Morse School in 1891 after teaching in all the grades at Webster for seven years. She remained principal of Morse for twenty years until 1918 when she and her assistant principal and friend Mary Towle retired.

The Howard Industrial School For Colored Freedwomen And Children
Established in 1865 in Cambridgeport, it stood at 585-587 Sydney Street (on corner of Putnam then Walnut Street). During the first two years, over 200 former slaves came from the Virginia and Maryland areas to Cambridge and found domestic positions.

Anna Lowell (later Woodbury) (1833-1909), raised in Cambridge, established the school and served as first matron with Charlotte Towne as teacher and Ellen F. Dascomb as housekeeper. The photo (below left) shows Anna Lowell as nurse at Armorey Hospital in Washington during the Civil War. Two of her brothers died as soldiers in that war. She later married and established a "Mission" cooking school for African-American girls in Washington D.C. in the 1880s and established cooking classes in the public schools there.

Educational Television
WGBH-TV went on the air at 5:20 p.m. on May 2, 1955. It was originally located at 84 Massachusetts Avenue (later the location of Stratton Student Center of MIT). A fire destroyed the studies of WGBH in 1961. Women involved in WGBH in the 1950s, included early art director Lilly Hollander and Mary Lela Grimes. Mary Lela Grimes, (later Sherburne), hosted the early science program series "Discovery". She created a similar program for Michigan and Chicago public television in the 1960s.