



Susan Lincoln Tolman Mills, (1825-1912), was born in Vermont. During her lifetime she was an American missionary and educator who, with her husband, established what would become the first U.S. women's college on the west coast.

Susan Tolman graduated in 1845 from Mount Holyoke Female Seminary (now Mount Holyoke College) in Massachusetts, and remained there as a teacher until her 1848 marriage to Cyrus T. Mills, a Presbyterian missionary. Following their marriage, the new Mr. and Mrs. Mills sailed immediately to Sri Lanka (then known as Ceylon) and for six year Susan assisted her husband in his work as principal of Batticotta College, teaching domestic skills classes to local girls, and helped supervise several day schools.

In 1854, in very poor health, the couple returned to Massachusetts. By 1860 they had fully recovered and traveled to the Hawaiian Islands, where Cyrus Mills became president of Oahu College for children of missionaries. Susan Mills became a teacher in the school.

She introduced calisthenics for girls and brought her Mount Holyoke experience to bear in emphasizing the sciences. Her husband's ill health forced them to leave Hawaii in 1864 and settle in California.

In 1865, they bought the Young Ladies Seminary in Benicia and set about remaking it into a girls' school of high standing. In 1871 the school moved to a more attractive and accessible site a few miles from Oakland and renamed Mills Seminary. It soon featured the imposing Seminary Hall (now Mills Hall) as its principal building. Susan served as principal of the seminary until her husband's death in April 1884. At that time, she took on the additional duties of board member and acting president.

The school became Mills College in 1885 and was the first women's college on the Pacific Coast and Susan continued as principal until 1890, when she was elected president of the college. During her 19 years as president, she worked tirelessly to raise standards and secure recognition for the school.

Mills retired in 1909. She died in 1912 in Oakland, California.