When did it become acceptable for women to study math?

The first woman that was listed as being a mathematician was Pythagora’s wife, Theano (539 B.C0. Pythagoras was a feminist philosopher and encouraged women to study. There were several women in his school and after his death Theano and her daughters continued to teach.

Several hundreds of years passed and the next women mentioned with any credit was Hypatia (370 B.C.-415 B.C). She was taught by her father who wanted her to be the perfect human and taught her in all areas. This included the arts, sciences, literature and mathematics as well as physical exercises. Rowing, climbing horseback riding etc were few of the activities she did. She became a beautiful teacher and lecturer. During her life, Christianity came in to play and those that were studying and teaching the math and science were considered pagan and persecuted. She was friends with a political figure and talked with him about the sciences. The religious leader did not like this influence and sent out a mob to persecute her. She was killed by beating and tearing her flesh off her body and burned. She invented the hydroscope (to see under water) and the astrolabe (to gain the altitude of the sun).

Throughout time there have been many other women who have contributed and studied math but were not allowed to either hold a job which used math or to get a degree from a university.

Many of the women I researched came from wealthy families and the primary person to push the women to study were their fathers. If not, then there was a male influence of some sort to help them achieve their success. Many of the women were not allowed to go to any higher level school and in the renaissance period some even felt that the noble daughters should not be educated.

In looking at when many women were achieving success in math, the numbers increased dramatically in the 1700’s and even more through the 1800’s and beyond.

Two colleges that were devoted to women were the Newnham college (est. 1871) in Cambridge, England and Bryn Mawr College (est1885) in PA. Newnham college however did not give women degrees until 1947.
When the World Wars broke out (both 1 and 2) the women who did attend college were needed help with war efforts and after the wars were over, they found that it was harder to find a spot in the lecture hall because of all the men coming home and wanting to get an education.

In 1931 Florence Nightengale Dave (named after Florence Nightengale) could not get job in an accounting position even though she was the most qualified.

In 1926 Marie Louise-Dubreil Jacotin took 2nd in an entrance test but was named 21st after all the men were listed first.

Marie Sophie Germain used a male pen name when writing to Gauss and Lagrange about her mathematical findings to other so they would respond to her.

In 1927 ….Lotz was the only girl in most of her classes in the university.

Many of the women who studied mathematics did so in seclusion or with special tutors.

Gabrielle Emile Le Tonnelier de Breteuil Marquise du Chatelet n(1706-1749) was born to nobility and sent to school for the purpose of becoming a wife.

She was very interested in math and continued her education on her own. She married at 19 and had 3 kids (1 died young). Her husband traveled so she was left alone and took on many lovers. Many men did not want women to be educated but sought the intellectuals to talk with. Gabrielle met Voltaire and eventually took up together at her husband house in Lorraine because of a book that Voltaire published. The lived together for 16 years while traveling back and forth and having visitor. They studied and learned everyday most of the day. She became pregnant from a different lover but was determined to finish the interpretation of Newtons third book of Principia before she delivered her daughter. After delivery and after the book was done, she died at 43 along with her daughter.

Women have had many obstacles throughout history in studying and teaching mathematics. There have been many advances in the womens influences and math and there are many to come :-}
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