The Derne Street School opened in 1821 on the corner of Derne and Temple Streets. The original school was in a three story building with two entrances. It was a co-educational school where girls were allowed to attend half-time. Boys entered on Derne Street; girls on Temple Street. Despite near equal attendance, only boys could go on to attend Latin School at age 10. The Derne Street School was also the location of the first English Classical School.

In 1824, The Derne Street School was supposed to move to Pinkney Street, but English Classical moved to that location instead and the Derne Street School was renamed the Bowdoin School after Governor James Bowdoin. The Bowdoin School went through a major institutional change in 1830, and began only to educate girls, whereas boys were enrolled in the nearby Mayhew School on Hawkins Street. Bowdoin remained a girl’s school until 1847 when it was temporarily moved to Tremont Street due to the construction of a reservoir along Derne Street.

William M. Evarts, Bowdoin’s most famous graduate, enrolled in the school in 1925 at the age of seven. Evarts won the Franklin Medal in 1828 for academic achievement. The top student in his class, he went on to attend Latin School and Yale. Evarts served as the Attorney General under Andrew Johnson, Secretary of State in 1877, and served in the Rutherford B. Hayes administration for four years.