

March 2, 2015

Women quietly do extraordinary things every day. To help shed light on the resilience and strength of Hoosier women and celebrate their accomplishments and contributions to history we are releasing an article every day in the month of March. These articles showcase how women have moved Indiana and our country forward and who inspire others to do great things in their own lives.

Women in Indiana have an important role to play. You can make a difference by:

- Learning more about the issues affecting women in Indiana.
- Voicing your opinion on issues important to you
- Serving as an advocate for women
- Mentoring another woman
- Join ICW's mailing list or social media outlets to be notified of upcoming events, programs and resources available to women

Go to www.in.gov/icw to learn more about the Indiana Commission for Women and their current initiatives.

Women's History Month 2015

Telling 31 stories in 31 days this March.

Helen Gougar (1843-1907)

Helen Gougar, a suffragist from Indiana, was recognized as a pioneer in the field of law for her effort and dedication to the struggle for women's voting rights. She was one of the first women in Indiana to argue before the Indiana Supreme Court, arguing on her own behalf in a case appealing the denial of her right to vote in the 1894 election. The case was filed in the Tippecanoe Superior Court in 1895, the same day Gougar was admitted to the bar.

Born in Hillsdale County, Michigan, in 1843, Helen Mar Jackson moved to Lafayette, Indiana, in 1860, with her brother and three uncles. In 1863, she married Lafayette attorney John Gougar. She then became her husband's law apprentice and wrote a weekly column in the *Lafayette Courier*. In the 1880s, she owned and operated another weekly newspaper, *Our Herald*.

Gougar claimed she was converted to the cause of women's suffrage when she learned of the death of a mother of four in 1878 from domestic violence (IMH Staff, 2012). Though Gougar had been for these victims, she came to the conclusion that incidents like it convinced her it would be more effective to "vote it away." (IMH Staff, 2012)

Helen Gougar began to work tirelessly on the Suffrage Movement. In 1884, she traveled to Kansas to lead the drafting of a municipal suffrage bill, which later became law in 1887 after being introduced in the Kansas Legislature in 1885. The bill passed two years later in 1887. In 1894, Gougar encouraged the women of Indiana to join her in attempting to vote in the November election. She was accompanied by her husband and several supporters but was denied the right to vote. Gougar then sued the Tippecanoe County election board for its refusal to allow her to vote in the 1894 election. She argued that because she was a citizen, the [Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution](#) ensured her right to vote regardless of language in the Indiana State Constitution limiting the franchise to males twenty-one and older.

In the [Indiana Supreme Court findings](#), Justice Hackney wrote,

We are not prepared to say, under existing social conditions, considering the marked intellectual advancements of women since the adoption of the present constitution, that the elective franchise should not be given up. There are many questions to be settled by the ballot which would enlarge the sphere of freedom, would advance the morals and lighten the burdens of humanity... Whatever the personal views of the judges upon the advisability of extending the franchise to women, all are agreed that under the present constitution, it cannot be extended to them. (Gougar v. Timberlake, 1896)

Helen Gougar died in 1907 in Lafayette, Indiana – well before women achieved the right to vote. However, her legacy to advancing the Suffrage Movement in Indiana was honored in November 2014, when an Indiana Historical Marker was dedicated in Tippecanoe County to her efforts.

Sources:

Gougar Family Monument and Tombstones
(<http://www.ingenweb.org/intippecanoe/Gougar.html>)

Gougar v. Timberlake
(<http://www.in.gov/judiciary/citc/files/gougar-gougar-v-morse.pdf>)

Helen Gougar Timeline
(<http://www.in.gov/judiciary/citc/files/gougar-timeline.pdf>)

Indiana Courts in the Classroom
(<http://www.in.gov/judiciary/citc/3298.htm>)
Indiana Female "Firsts" in the Legal Profession
(<http://www.in.gov/judiciary/citc/museum/female-firsts/>)

Indiana Magazine of History (5 March 2012).
<http://indianapublicmedia.org/momentofindianahistory/helen-gougar-foot-soldier-suffrage/>

Library of Congress
(<http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/14thamendment.html>)

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