

Catharine Waugh McCulloch
Suffragist, Attorney, Women's Rights Activist

The National Collaborative for Women's History Sites is creating the National Votes for Women Trail to highlight each state's role in the struggle to achieve passage of the 19th amendment. In the next few months, we will feature the Illinois women who will be honored with a marker on the Trail. This month we feature Evanstonian Catharine Waugh McCulloch.

Catharine Waugh McCulloch was a lawyer, suffragist, political activist, and supporter of women's rights. She was one of the first women in the U.S. to serve as a Justice of the Peace (1907-1913). McCulloch served as Chair of the Legislative Committee of the Illinois Equal Suffrage Association for 22 years, and later as its President. She also served as legal advisor (1904-1911) and vice-president (1910-1911) of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. She was President of the Women's Democratic Club of Illinois and Legal Counsel to the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Catharine McCulloch Park was named in her honor by the City of Evanston in 1975. The Votes for Women Trail marker will be installed in the park some time in 2021.

Catharine Waugh McCulloch was born in 1862 in Ransomville, New York to Susan Gouger and Abraham Waugh. In 1867 the family moved to Illinois near Rockford, and Catharine spent her childhood there. McCulloch attended Rockford Female Seminary (now Rockford College). In 1885, she enrolled in Union College of Law (later Northwestern University's law school) in Chicago, graduating in 1886. After her graduation, it was a challenge for McCulloch to find a position at an established law firm. She returned to Rockford in 1887 and opened her own law practice.

McCulloch's client base consisted of women experiencing problems relating to lack of legal status: wage discrimination, divorce, probate, child custody, and spouse abuse. Through representing women with these issues, she emerged as a leading figure among the advocates for the women's rights movement and a leading advocate of women's suffrage in Illinois. In 1890 she married Frank McCulloch, whom she had met in law school. The couple moved to Evanston and opened a law partnership in Chicago where they continued to work on women's rights. Along with being the mother of four children, McCulloch continued her suffrage advocacy and her law practice.

In 1893 McCulloch wrote and introduced a bill to give Illinois women the right to vote. She framed the legislation so it neatly sidestepped restrictions in the state Constitution, allowing women to vote on a partial ballot that would include presidential electors and other government officers. This strategy of working for a partial ballot was influential in suffrage strategy

throughout the U.S. For the next 20 years, McCulloch led the charge for passage of this bill.

In 1904 McCulloch was elected president of the Illinois Equal Suffrage Association (IESA). In 1907 she was elected Justice of the Peace in Evanston (and reelected in 1909), making her the first woman elected to that office in Illinois. She also served as legal advisor (1904-1911) and vice-president (1910-1911) of the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

In 1913, McCulloch's legislation granting Illinois women the right to vote on a partial ballot finally passed, making Illinois the first state east of the Mississippi to give women the right to vote. McCulloch worked hard to defend the 1913 law from legal challenges and, though she had worked hard for state suffrage, she became a staunch supporter of the passage of a federal amendment. She was an integral part of the national campaign for passage of the 19th Amendment and celebrated when Illinois became the first state to ratify it in June 1919 and when it passed and became law in August 1920.

After ratification of the 19th Amendment, McCulloch chaired the League of Women Voters' Committee on Uniform Laws Concerning Women and was active in the League of Women Voters of Illinois. She also continued her work for women's legal rights, including authoring a bill that strengthened rape laws and raised the age of consent in Illinois. She was the author of numerous pamphlets, plays, and books about women's rights, and co-authored *A Manual of the Law of Will Contest in Illinois* (1929) with her husband. McCulloch died in Evanston in 1945.

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