

## **Effie Henderson (1859-1938)**

Effie Henderson was born on October 29, 1859, in Towanda, Illinois. Her parents, Franklin and Sarah (Metcalf) Henderson, played a big part in her decision to become a lawyer. Franklin was involved in politics and worked for justice, while Sarah was supportive and loving. Effie was one of seven children, five of whom survived to adulthood.

When she was young, Effie moved from Towanda to Bloomington. In 1877, at the age of 18, she and her brother Frank enrolled as law students at Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington. It was unusual for women to go to university in the late 1800s. Most women who worked outside the home had jobs like being house servants, factory workers, teachers, or nurses. And once married, they had to give up their jobs to remain home to care for their families. Effie, however, studied literature and law. Her brother Frank graduated in 1881, but Effie got sick during her senior year and had to delay her graduation. She finally graduated on June 14, 1892, with a law degree. She was the only woman in her class of thirteen students and gave a speech titled "The Star that Rose in the West." Effie was only the second woman to earn a law degree from Illinois Wesleyan, with the first being Marietta Brown Reed Shay in 1879. Illinois Wesleyan was one of only four colleges in Illinois that allowed women to study law at the time.

On June 14, 1892, Effie became the 37th woman to be admitted to the Illinois Bar Association, and soon opened her own law practice. She mainly worked in real estate law and was involved in at least three cases heard by the Illinois Supreme Court. She continued practicing law in Bloomington for the next eleven years.

Effie also became involved in a significant case about women's right to vote in 1892. She petitioned a judge to force the McLean County Clerk to allow women to vote in a local election. Effie and other women believed they had the right to vote since they were legal voters in Illinois. They argued that the county clerk should provide ballots for all legal voters, including women. At the time, women in Illinois had limited voting rights, only being allowed to vote for school officials. The county clerk said he would provide ballots, but only if a court ordered it. He also said women would need to use separate ballots since they could only vote for school officials. The judge agreed with the clerk and ruled that women could vote in the election but had to bring their own ballots. Though Effie lost the case, it helped pave the way for women's full voting rights later on.

Besides her law practice, Effie was active in her community. She was a member of the Bloomington Women's Club, where she shared her love of literature. At one meeting she presented an essay on "The Ramayana," an ancient Sanskrit story. Effie also loved music and was involved in the Amateur Musical Club, which had strict membership rules and held public concerts. She was also part of the Oratorio Society and helped organize a music festival in 1903. Effie was a lifelong member of Grace Methodist Episcopal Church.

In 1903, Effie gave up her law practice to care for her mother, who was suffering from paralysis. After her mother, father, and brother Frank all passed away, Effie moved to Long Beach, California, and reopened her law practice, working in real estate. This was a bold move for an unmarried woman at the time.

Effie Henderson passed away on February 4, 1938, at her Long Beach home after a short illness. She never married and had no children. Her body was returned to Bloomington, where she was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in the Henderson family plot.