

Florence Stevens Kaywood (1864-1928)

Florence (Stevens) Kaywood was born on October 8, 1864 to William and Sarah (Shields) Stevens in Bloomington. She was the second of five children born to the couple. Kaywood's parents were both immigrants to the United States. Her father was born in England and her mother was born in Ireland.

Kaywood attended Bloomington public schools along with her siblings. She was a good student and was even praised for never having been absent or tardy during the 1878-1879 school year. It is not known if she graduated from high school, or whether she attended classes at Illinois State University, but she did teach school for one year before she got married.

On July 13, 1886, Florence married Harris F. Kaywood. Harris (or Harry as he was sometimes known) was born in May 1851. Not much is known about Harris before 1885, but at that time he was living in Lafayette, Indiana and working for the Lake Erie and Western Railroad (L. E. & W.) as a brakeman. The couple had four children: Edward, Edith, Marie, and another son who died at the age of five. The marriage, however, does not seem to have been a happy one.

By 1899, Florence had left the couple's home in Leoni, Michigan and was again living in Bloomington, without Harris. Florence retained **custody** of the couple's children, and seems to have made a living by running a **boarding house** at her home at 406 W. Olive Street for a number of years.

After her return to Bloomington, Kaywood became involved in the community, particularly through faith-based organizations. She joined the local Bethlehem Rebekah Lodge No. 32, which was the women's branch of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF). The Rebekah Degree, initially known as the Daughters of Rebekah, was created in 1851, and made the IOOF the first fraternal organization in the United States to accept men and women. The name comes from the Biblical Rebekah. The group encourages its members to be active in civic life and to do charitable work in their community, while also aiming to help members expand their social circle and live a fulfilling life. Kaywood continued to be a very active member of the lodge until just a few years before her death.

Kaywood was listed as a boarding house keeper in the 1899 City Directory and the 1900 United States Federal Census. But from 1902 until 1911, no occupation was listed for her in city directories (the 1910 census, however, does list her occupation as "**laundress**"). She definitely reentered the **workforce** on May 2, 1910, when the Bloomington City Council **appointed** her **police matron**. A new state law in 1897 **mandated** the creation of the position for all cities in Illinois with a population of over 16,000.

A *Pantagraph* article published at the time the City of Bloomington was looking to hire an official police matron stated that an applicant should be, "a woman of at least thirty-five years, of good moral character and have been resident of the city of Bloomington at least one year before the date of her appointment and shall have reasonable experience in nursing and caring for the sick and **distressed**." As police matron, Kaywood was required to work on-call for the police department, assisting them when women and children had been arrested by the police or were held at the jail. Generally, the women Kaywood would have had to assist were arrested for "drunkenness, fighting, **adultery**, stealing, ... etc..." She would search the **detainees**, clothe them if necessary, stay with them overnight in the jail, and provide basic first aid if they were ill.

Kaywood was first confirmed as police matron in May 1910, and was re-appointed to the position every year until her death in 1928. Since Bloomington police did not arrest women frequently during this period of time, the city decided it was better to pay her only for each night

she worked, rather than a flat monthly wage. Initially her pay was \$2.50 a night (about \$67.00 in 2019), and increased to \$4.00 (about \$59.00 in 2019) shortly afterwards in August 1919.

Kaywood provided assistance to the police department above and beyond what was regularly expected of her position. One such instance was on October 11, 1919, when Kaywood was called to assist with caring for a repeat offender—Jessie Schultz. When Schultz was arrested again the following week for being “disorderly,” she attempted to commit suicide by hanging herself in her jail cell. Kaywood noticed what Schultz was doing and opened the cell, and prevented Schultz from committing suicide.

The job of police matron was also closely associated with Christian missionary work and the **Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU)**. The Bloomington chapter of the WCTU played an important role in pressuring the city to create a police matron position. Kaywood herself was a member of the WCTU in Bloomington, which made her the perfect candidate to give talks at WCTU meetings on the **penal** system and how the system could be **reformed** to better **rehabilitate** those women in it.

In 1927, Kaywood attempted to resign as police matron as a result of her failing health, but city authorities waited to accept her resignation with the hope that her health would recover. She may have turned to a **patent medicine** called Pepgen, with the hope of improving her health. In March 1924 Kaywood provided **testimonial** for the drug in the *Pantagraph*, claiming it cured her **indigestion** and high blood pressure. Interestingly, given Kaywood’s WCTU membership and her endorsement of the drug, the packaging plainly stated it contained 12 percent alcohol. This may help explain the drug’s general popularity, as it was marketed during the **Prohibition era**; but it also may demonstrate how poor Kaywood’s health was that she was willing to go back on her commitment to **abstain** from alcohol.

Kaywood was eventually admitted to St. Joseph’s Hospital in Bloomington for a “minor operation” to be performed on February 2, 1928. While recovering from surgery, it seems her health took a sudden turn for the worse, and she died on February 15, 1928 at the age of 63 while still at St. Joseph’s Hospital.

Florence Kaywood was buried the next day at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery. Many friends, family, and community members were in attendance at her funeral.

Discussion Question: What question would you like to ask Kaywood about her role as a police matron? What advice do you think Kaywood gave to her daughter? How do you think the jail system is different today than when Kaywood was police matron?