

Education Passports: Two Extraordinary Lake County Women



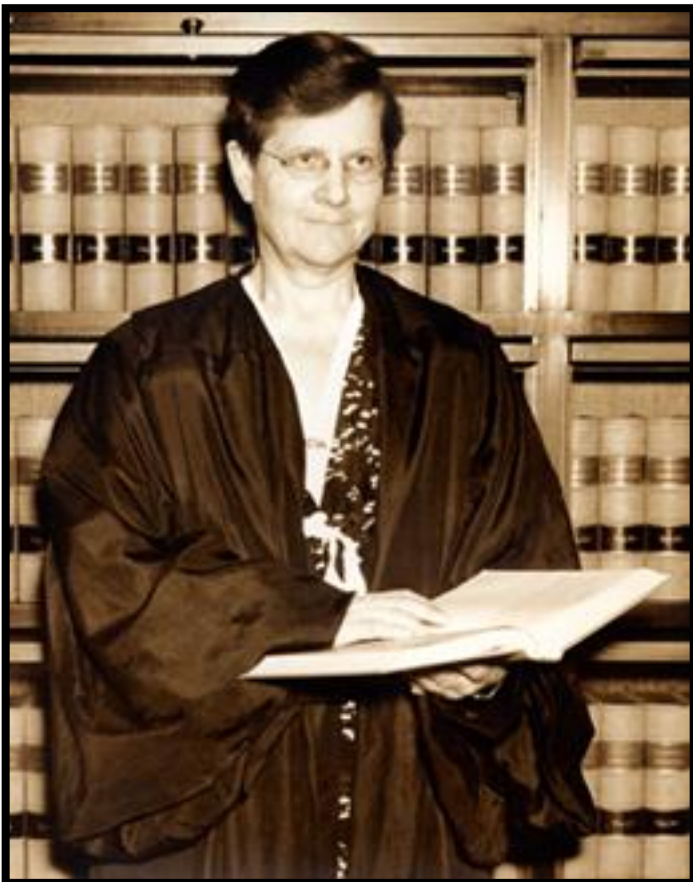
Judge Florence Allen (1864-1966) – Smashing the Glass Ceiling

Lending her remarkable intellect to the field of law, Florence Ellinwood Allen stands as a woman who forged a unique path for her generation. She was a U.S. Sixth Circuit Judge of the United States Court of Appeals. She was the first woman to serve on a state supreme court and one of the first two women to serve as a United States federal judge. She made the short list of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's potential U.S. Supreme Court nominees in 1939.

Born in Utah during the Civil War, Florence Allen came to Cleveland when her father joined the faculty of Western Reserve University, relocating with his wife and seven children. Allen's father taught her Greek and Latin as a child, and she had a keen love of music and poetry. She was a music major at Western Reserve University with plans to become a concert pianist. When an injury derailed a stage career, she became the music critic for *The Plain Dealer* for three years.

Dealer for three years.

By 1909, Florence Allen pursued a Master of Arts degree in Political Science with plans to study law. When Western Reserve would not admit a woman to the law school, she transferred to the University of Chicago and completed her studies at N.Y.U. Law School in 1913. She was admitted to the Ohio bar the following year.



She soon discovered that for a woman to practice law successfully was an uphill battle. She said, "I had no clients. And I had no money. But I had great hopes." She needed experience, so she did volunteer work with the Legal Aid Society. While getting the courtroom skill she needed, Allen also got involved with an important case about suffrage. As a child, Allen's mother had taken her to see Susan B. Anthony talking about women's rights. The belief that women should be treated as equals under the law never left her. Navigating the politics involved, she was committed to the cause of women getting the vote. She was active in the Women's Suffrage Party and began challenging local laws that limited women's participation in the political process. She argued one case that went all the way to the Ohio Supreme Court. As a result, she won the women of East Cleveland the right to vote in municipal elections in 1916.

During this time, she also became involved in another cause, one that would be important to her all of her life: disarmament and the quest for world peace. This was personal to Florence Allen whose two brothers died while serving during World War I.

As she established herself in the courtroom, she began to win the respect of her all-male colleagues. In 1919, she became an assistant prosecutor in Cleveland, a first in Ohio although not without opposition. By 1920, Florence Allen was elected as a

Common Pleas judge – another first. In 1922, she was elected to the Ohio Supreme Court. She immediately told reporters that she intended to keep partisan politics out of the judiciary. It was a promise she would steadfastly keep. In 1928, Allen was re-elected to a second term. She was the lone Democrat elected to the high court; and she continued to be a popular Ohio jurist, honored by civic groups for her fairmindedness. Lawyers who argued before her praised her readiness to listen. Conversely, she was not afraid to take a strong position as warranted, even on capital cases.

Cites 'Greatness'

Presidential Eulogy Hails Judge Allen

President Johnson called the life of the late Judge Florence E. Allen "an eloquent tribute to the highest traditions of American justice," yesterday.

His message was read at a memorial service for her at the Church of the Covenant, 11205 Euclid Avenue.

Nearly 100 relatives, friends and members of the legal profession attended.

Judge Allen died Monday at her home, 7690 Eagle Road, Waite Hill. She was 82.

JUDGE ALLEN was a retired judge of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, 6th Circuit. She argued the case for women's suffrage before Ohio's Supreme Court, and in 1920 became the first woman judge in a court of Common Pleas here.

In his message of sympathy, Johnson said "her legacy is to the living and lasting reminder of the greatness of her work."

The service was conducted by the pastor of Judge Allen's church, the Rev. C. Raymond Probst, of Old South Church, Kirtland.

HE ALSO READ a telegram from U.S. Sen. Stephen M. Young, who said Judge Allen had "championed the rights of all women."

The Daughters of the American Revolution (Lake City chapter), the Cleveland Bar Association and the National Association of Women Lawyers were among those represented.



Judge Allen's supporters urged President Harry Truman to nominate her for the Supreme Court, but Truman seemed to be opposed. Allen was later told that Truman's reluctance had to do with his bias that a woman would make the other judges uncomfortable. "They say they couldn't sit around with their robes off and their feet up and discuss the problems."

After an illustrious career, health problems prompted Florence Allen's retirement from the bench. She and distant cousin Mary Pierce enjoyed a quiet life on their Waite Hill estate. She passed away in 1966 after complications from a fall.

In 2005, Judge Florence Allen's remarkable achievements were recognized anew when she was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.

Belle Sherwin (1869-1955) - Forgotten Suffragist Leader

Mention 19th century suffragist leaders and the names Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Frances Jennings Casement come immediately to mind. A fourth member of that group Belle Sherwin (1869-1955) is often overlooked and undermentioned in the chapters of Northeast Ohio and Lake County history. Today's vignette examines her contributions and place in Women's History.

Belle Sherwin was Cleveland born in 1869, the daughter of Henry A. Sherwin, founder of the Sherwin Williams Company. Her academic pedigree far outpaced the standards of the era. A college graduate (Wellesley, 1890), she attended Oxford University (1894-95) and was granted additional degrees from Western Reserve University (1930), Denison University (1931), and Oberlin College (1937). Never married, her inherited wealth allowed her to pursue a career of giving and philanthropic projects. Her early years were spent as an educator at various institutions of learning.



Returning to Cleveland in 1900, her passions and causes concerning women's rights were unparalleled. She was a key member in the Visiting Nurses Association, Cleveland Consumers League, and Cleveland Welfare Federation. As a result of a visit by Maud Wood Park to Lake County in 1910, her efforts with the League of Women's Voters are most impressive. From 1921-24, she joined other famous local suffragists in the movement. Sherwin assumed the group's presidency in 1924 and held it for more than a decade. Belle Sherwin even found time to add the National Urban League to her resume.

As one recalls the period of history leading up to and immediately after the passage of the 19th Amendment, the names Anthony, Stanton, Casement, Kaukonen, Allen and Sherwin must be synonymous in the history of Lake County.



A 1912 photo: Belle Sherwin and Florence Ellinwood Allen at Woman suffrage headquarters, Upper Euclid Avenue, Cleveland.

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