

Mary Cachot Therkelsen (1875-1937)

By Kimberly Jensen

Physician, businesswoman, and suffragist Mary Agnes Cachot Therkelsen contributed to Oregon's Progressive Era activism and created a bridge between local and national advocates for women's rights. By attaining a medical degree and engaging in business, she pushed the boundaries of women's participation in the economic and social life of the state.

Mary Cachot was born in Boston, Massachusetts. Her father, San Francisco surgeon M.A. Cachot, had graduated from the Medical Department of the University of the Pacific, the predecessor to Cooper Medical College, in 1864, and served as resident physician of St. Mary's Hospital in the city. Mary Cachot graduated from the Cooper Medical College in San Francisco in November 1889 and received her license to practice medicine in California in April 1890. She wrote her thesis on skin diseases and after her graduation supervised the infant ward at St. Mary's Hospital.

Cachot met Portland businessman and widower Lauritz Therkelsen while he was living in San Francisco, and the two married in May 1892. The couple relocated to Portland in 1895, and Lauritz resumed his role as a prominent Portland business leader and manager of the North Pacific Lumber Company. The couple had three children. Lauritz Therkelsen died in 1910.

Although Mary Cachot Therkelsen apparently did not practice medicine in Portland, she was active in business and worked to support women who were engaged in various enterprises in the city. She was involved in women's club work and was a longtime member of the Portland Woman's Club.

Cachot Therkelsen also took an active role in both the Oregon and national movements for votes for women. She chaired the publicity department of the Oregon State Equal Suffrage Central Campaign Committee for the successful 1912 campaign, was a board member of the College Equal Suffrage League of Portland, and was a member of the Portland Equal Suffrage League. As a prominent woman of wealth and business connections, Cachot Therkelsen was a valuable fundraiser for the cause. She also developed a successful program for a suffrage lecture series at coastal resorts during the summer of 1912.

After Oregon women achieved the vote in 1912, Cachot Therkelsen turned her attention to the national suffrage campaign. In 1914, she joined the Congressional Union, an organization led by Alice Paul, to work for a federal suffrage amendment. She was a strong fundraiser for the Oregon branch of the Union and served on the organization's National Advisory Council. She also helped organize the Congressional Union's Oregon convention in September 1915, which hosted Paul's visit to the state.

In her later years, Mary Cachot Therkelsen maintained the family estate and traveled with family members. After a lengthy illness, she died in Portland in 1937.

Sources

"Laurits (sic) Therkelsen." In Harvey W. Scott, ed., *History of Portland, Oregon*. Syracuse, NY: D. Mason & Co., 1890, pp. 585-586.

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