

# Helen Gougar

*Lafayette, Tippecanoe County*

July 18, 1843 – June 6, 1907

Helen Gougar, a suffragist from Indiana, was recognized as a pioneer in the legal field for her effort and dedication to the struggle for women's voting rights. She was one of the first women in Indiana to argue before the Indiana Supreme Court, arguing on her own behalf in a case appealing the denial of her right to vote in the 1894 election. The case was filed in the Tippecanoe Superior Court in 1895, the same day Gougar was admitted to the bar.

Gougar worked tirelessly for the Suffrage Movement. In 1884, she traveled to Kansas to lead the drafting of a municipal suffrage bill, which became law in 1887 after being introduced in the Kansas Legislature in 1885. In 1894, she attempted to vote in the November election. She was accompanied by her husband and several supporters but was denied the right to vote. She then sued the Tippecanoe County election board for its refusal to allow her to vote. She argued that because she was a citizen, the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution ensured her right to vote regardless of language in the Indiana State Constitution limiting the franchise to males twenty-one and older. In the Indiana Supreme Court findings, Justice Leonard Hackney wrote,

*We are not prepared to say, under existing social conditions, considering the marked intellectual advancements of women since the adoption of the present constitution, that the elective franchise should not be given up... Whatever the personal views of the judges upon the advisability of extending the franchise to women, all are agreed that under the present constitution, it cannot be extended to them. (Gougar v. Timberlake, 1896)*

Helen Gougar died in 1907 in Lafayette, Indiana. Her legacy to advancing the Suffrage Movement in Indiana was honored in November 2014, when an Indiana Historical Marker was dedicated in Tippecanoe County to her efforts.

For information about Helen Gougar, go to:

<http://indianapublicmedia.org/momentofindianahistory/helen-gougar-foot-soldier-suffrage/>.

For information about *Writing Her Story*, go to: <http://www.in.gov/icw/2440.htm>.

Photo: Indiana Courts in the Classroom (N.D) *My Place in the Voting Booth: Hoosier Suffraget Helen M. Gougar*. Retrieved from: <http://www.in.gov/judiciary/citc/3298.htm>



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