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EARLY EVANSTON WOMEN

Evanston's Relative Impact in the Fight for Women's Rights in the Early 1900s

How our small city of 20,000 compared with the other cities and towns that led the movement.

Early Evanston, a small city with an outsized impact

Evanston boasted multiple significant accomplishments: a statewide legal win for voting rights, the largest national woman's organization of the time, and solid impact on broad international movements. It was the only small U.S. city with major influence at the local, state, national, and international levels simultaneously, and that influence lasted over decades rather than coming from a single event.

Big cities certainly had a greater total influence; Chicago, Boston, and Rochester did more overall, but their impact was significantly less relative to their size.

The small towns of Seneca Falls and Cheyenne were important, but each is known for a single milestone.

How the towns and cities compare

City	Population in 1900	State impact	National impact	International impact	Impact relative to size
Evanston, IL	19,259	5	5	4	5
Seneca Falls, NY	6,516	2	5	3	5
Rochester, NY	162,435	3	5	3	3
Boston, MA	560,892	3	5	3	2
Chicago, IL	1,698,575	5	5	5	2
Cheyenne, WY	14,087	5	4	2	4

What each place contributed to the cause

- ***Evanston, IL:*** *home to multiple individuals and organizations that were widely impactful. Elizabeth Harbert was a prominent leader regionally and nationally from the 1870s through the 1920s. Frances Willard championed women's suffrage and sweeping social reforms. The WCTU, with the influence of its 200,000 female members, moved its headquarters to Evanston in 1900. May Wood Simons, of the Socialist Woman's National Committee, was key in creating National Woman's Day in 1909. Catharine McCulloch's legal strategy and 20 years of lobbying led to Illinois' 1913 suffrage law, the first legislation east of the Mississippi to allow women the right to vote in presidential elections.*
- ***Seneca Falls, NY:*** *a tiny village that became the symbolic birthplace of the suffrage movement in 1848 by hosting the first U.S. women's rights convention. Elizabeth Cady Stanton was the primary author of its* Declaration of Sentiments.
- ***Rochester, NY:*** *Susan B. Anthony's home base had deep national influence. She was arrested in 1872 for voting.*
- ***Boston and Philadelphia:*** *centers of abolitionist-feminist networks. Lucy Stone's* Woman's Journal *was founded in Boston in 1870. Philadelphia Quakers Lucretia Mott and Alice Paul utilized moral suasion and militant protest tactics.*
- ***Chicago:*** *Hull House, Jane Addams' settlement house, local-to-international activism, and the club movement. Myra Bradwell sued for the right to practice law in the 1870s. Ida B. Wells fought tirelessly for the right of all women to vote.*
- ***Wyoming and Utah towns:*** *they won women's voting rights first, in practice.*

Content derived from Perplexity inquiries.

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Women's History Happened Here

Early Evanston buzzed with progressive, audaciously activist women who changed their nation and world.

In an era of mandated female domesticity, when women faced debilitating social and legal obstacles, Evanston offered a progressive oasis of support. It was an anomaly of the time – with an abundance of women and a truly exceptional level of women's activity and activism.

A small city filled with passionate, trailblazing women, Evanston became a hotbed of women's innovation, expertise, and professionalism. Here, women could live full, independent, impactful lives. And they thrived.

Did you know that an early Evanston woman:

- *was the first Montessori teacher in the U.S.?*
- *was key in founding National Women's Day and was a catalyst for International Women's Day?*
- *was the first woman honored in the U.S. Congressional Statuary Hall?*
- *was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Medicine?*
- *was convicted under the Comstock Act? Clarence Darrow was her defense attorney.*
- *published a ground-breaking feminist novel in 1871?*
- *helped establish African and African American studies as fields for scholarly research?*
- *wrote the bill that allowed Illinois women to vote in presidential elections – 7 years before the 19th Amendment?*
- *was arrested as a spy by the Germans in WWI?*
- *exposed white slavery in Wisconsin lumber camps leading to state legislation?*
- *wrote a gender-neutral version of the Bible based upon her own translations from the Hebrew?*
- *persuaded Theodore Roosevelt to investigate women's wages and working conditions?*
- *founded the first juvenile court in the U.S.?*
- *headed an organization of 250,000 women, inspiring and mobilizing social activism?*
- *opened a hospital in her own home to address the underserved needs of the Black community?*
- *was the first female presidential elector?*
- *was a pioneering botanist documenting dozens of unknown plant species in Central America?*
- *invented a technique to prevent infant infections from contaminated baby formula?*
- *was the fifth female doctor in the U.S.?*
- *pioneered development standards for early childhood education?*
- *was commissioned by the British government to investigate the opium trade between India and China?*
- *sold over 2,000,000 copies of her 26 children's books and inspired Beverly Cleary's writing?*
- *founded the precursor of the Illinois PTA?*
- *was the first female Justice of the Peace in Illinois?*
- *was the fifth female depicted on U.S. postage?*
- *was the first licensed female taxicab owner in Illinois?*
- *wrote the Illinois legislation that strengthened rape and age-of-consent laws?*
- *pioneered the Children's Theater movement?*
- *opened a school for girls in Berlin in 1886?*
- *prevented an outbreak of typhoid through food safety reforms?*
- *owned a large, elite domestic employment agency that enforced strict rules of conduct for its clients?*
- *was instrumental in establishing one of the first university-based music schools in the U.S.?*
- *established a pediatrics hospital in Shanghai?*
- *owned the largest U.S. costume rental business of the early 20th century?*
- *was one of the first American female composers to write an opera to be presented in the U.S.?*
- *was instrumental in the signing of the 1829 treaty giving the U.S. title to northern Illinois tribal lands?*
- *was instrumental in establishing one of the first daycare centers in Illinois?*
- *covertly investigated the systematic exploitation of women in Hong Kong by British military personnel?*
- *was friends with Tolstoy?*
- *shared podiums across the U.S. with Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton on behalf of voting rights?*

All these women lived in Evanston and were born before 1900. Each served society beyond Evanston's borders.