

EMILIE A. DOETSCH, 1882-1969

Suffragist and Lawyer

MARY KATHERINE SCHEELER

"The day will come when women will win out. I should like to urge them to keep trying until then." So said Emilie Doetsch, suffragette, upon the occasion of a march from New York to Washington in February 1913 to impress President Woodrow Wilson with the importance of woman suffrage. Emilie Doetsch was a "war correspondent" for the march.

Emilie Doetsch was born in Baltimore on June 30, 1882, and educated at Zion School and Western High School. In 1903 she graduated from Goucher College and applied for admission to the University of Maryland School of Law. The Law School refused to accept her because of her sex. She then turned to the Baltimore Law School, which was later to be absorbed by the University, for her legal education. She received her law degree in 1906 and became the second woman to pass the Maryland State Bar, the first being Etta Maddox in 1902.

She did not practice immediately after receiving her law degree because there was little opportunity and recognition for a woman in the profession. Her first job was on the *Baltimore News*, the forerunner of the *News-American*. She had been a correspondent for the *News* while an undergraduate at Goucher. At the same time she became active in the Maryland Women's Suffrage Movement, and she worked to win the right to vote for women until the Suffrage Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified by enough states to become the law of the land in 1920. Once women had received the vote many suffragists believed their ultimate goal had been achieved. Emilie Doetsch didn't agree. Winning the right to vote was only a milestone—to women like Emilie Doetsch.

Now that the vote was theirs, Emilie Doetsch and others wanted to see that this privilege was exercised and implemented. The 1848 Declaration of Rights from the convention of leaders of the Woman's Rights Movement, held in Seneca Falls, New York, still held true: "Man has compelled her (woman) to submit to laws, in the making of which she had no voice. He has taken nearly all the profitable employments. He has denied her the means for obtaining a thorough education, many colleges being closed to her. Now we insist that women have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States." Emilie Doetsch decided to see if she could help govern the City of Baltimore. In the Spring of 1923 she ran for the City Council from the Fifth District of Baltimore City, the first woman to enter the political arena for a City Council seat. She declared herself in favor of more schools and teachers and better salaries for teachers. She supported the reorganization of the street cleaning

department and the enlargement of the Child Welfare Bureau. During her campaign she is quoted as saying, "Women stepping into the legislative chambers of the municipal government will result in greater efficiency."

Women turned out to exercise their newly won franchise and to vote for her. She led her ticket, polling 8,000 votes, under the Citizens Independent League banner. She lost the election, finishing seventh in the race, but she proved her point that women could run for office and be serious contenders. She was setting new goals for which women could strive.

In 1928, during the Republican Administration of Mayor William E. Broening, the City Solicitor, A. Walter Kraus, appointed her Assistant City Solicitor, in his office. This made her the first woman to hold any major paying post in the municipal government. Her service in the legal department of the City was an important step for women. Miss Doetsch was quoted as saying the "city needs women in office to do what men forget." She owed much to the continued and active support of women's organizations and such vocal women as Helen Elizabeth Brown, a Baltimore lawyer, who openly chastised the mayor for his lack of feminine representation in Baltimore City government.

In 1931, the Democrats came into office, and Republican Emilie Doetsch, was under pressure to resign. Pressure, to Miss Doetsch, was nothing new, and she resisted all efforts to bring about her resignation until she was ready to leave for private practice some months later. In 1932, she resigned to enter private practice. Here she continued her court experience with trial work in civil cases, settlement of estates and other legal matters.

Through her life, Emilie Doetsch was loyal to family, friends, institutions and organizations which she felt had supported her and helped shape her career. She was a lifetime member of the First Unitarian Church of Baltimore. After graduation from Goucher College, where she had majored in Mathematics and English, she was selected as permanent Secretary of the class of 1903. She also served her class as Fund Representative for some years. She was a member of the Board of Directors of the Alumnae Association for one term. On May 14, 1929, she was elected President of the Women's Bar Association of Baltimore.

Emilie Doetsch advocated coeducation because she felt that boys and girls who got used to each other at an impressionable age would get along better with each other in adult life. In 1932, she advocated girls being allowed to attend the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, a boys' high school in Baltimore renowned for its technical training. She said, "Girls should have every advantage in every way in education that boys have. When authorities try to keep girls from getting a technical education on the grounds that it is such dirty work for girls to get under a car or work around machinery they forget how dirty it is for women to scrub floors, polish furniture and clean kitchen stoves."

She served as the Managing Editor of the magazine *Equal Rights* from 1932 to 1934. She became secretary of the Campaign Committee organized

about 1936 by Miss Mary Logue and Miss Margaretta Collins, public school principals, assisted by Mrs. Donald R. Hooker, feminist leader, to give teachers in the junior high schools of Baltimore the benefit of automatic salary raises enjoyed by all other teachers in the system. Although she never married, she maintained an interest in young people which was demonstrated by her participation in the Maryland Fresh Air Society as a Director and also as Secretary of the Board during the 1930's.

Miss Doetsch was a member of Phi Delta Delta, an international woman's legal fraternity, and an active member of the League of Women Voters. In 1935, she was a vice-president of the Maryland Branch of the National Woman's Party. At various times she was a lobbyist in Washington and Annapolis for *Equal Rights* and in behalf of the Old Age Pension Law. She advocated the use of women jurors. And she continually urged that the law be administered without regard to sex.

For more than fifty years, since the beginning of the century, the Baltimore attorney worked and wrote for the cause of equal rights. She died June 8, 1969, a few days before her eighty-seventh birthday on June 30. The tribute paid to her in the 1970 Winter Issue of *Quarterly*, the Goucher College Alumnae Magazine, describes how her classmates and associates felt about her:

"Emilie served the class of 1903 all these years and will be sadly missed. We never thought of her as a militant suffragist, for she was such a good listener—a model which some modern reformers might profitably follow. For she made converts; her reasonableness, so quiet and friendly, made friends who became converts. We like to remember her hospitable spirit, her serenity and intellectual honesty, and her loyalties. This was our Emilie."

Emilie Doetsch's contribution to the State of Maryland and to the progress of women was expressed in her dedication, her energy and her perseverance in the pursuit of equality and justice for all citizens.

Brief Bibliography

Material on Emilie Doetsch's career can be found in the Baltimore *News-American*, the Baltimore *Sunpapers*, Goucher College Alumnae Files, the Goucher Winter *Quarterly*, Winter, 1970 and Margie Luckett's *Maryland Women*, Vol. II (1937). For a much more detailed account of Miss Doetsch interviews of those who knew her should be undertaken.

Edited by WINIFRED G. HELMES, Ph.D.

Notable Maryland Women



Published in conjunction with the
Maryland Bicentennial Commission

TIDEWATER PUBLISHERS/Cambridge, Maryland
1977