

Wisconsin Supreme Court names State Law Library after Lavinia Goodell, Wisconsin's first woman lawyer

MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Supreme Court announced today that the State Law Library will be named in honor of Lavinia Goodell, the first woman lawyer in Wisconsin. The announcement comes on the heels of Monday's Wisconsin Women Lawyers Day. A celebration Monday at the Rock County Courthouse recognized the lasting impact that Lavinia Goodell and women across the state have had on the legal profession in the past 150 years.

Lavinia Goodell faced many obstacles in becoming Wisconsin's first woman lawyer. But she persevered, and on June 17, 1874, the Rock County Circuit Court admitted her to the practice of law in Wisconsin. Despite her admission, she continued to face obstruction by others in her profession. When seeking to appeal a case to the Wisconsin Supreme Court in 1875, former Chief Justice Edward Ryan authored a unanimous decision denying her the right to represent her client in front of the court.

This denial led to Goodell to draft legislation which would guarantee women the ability to practice law in Wisconsin. The bill was signed into law by Governor Harrison Ludington on March 8, 1877. With the new law in place, she again petitioned for admission to present a case in front of the court in 1879. This time, four justices agreed, granting her admission as the first woman to brief a case for consideration by the Wisconsin Supreme Court.

"Lavinia Goodell was a pioneer for Wisconsin women and the legal profession," said Justice Jill Karofsky. "She never backed down from this critical fight, which paved the way for so many women in our state who have proudly served as lawyers, judges, and justices." Karofsky added, "It is fitting to name a library after Goodell as Goodell was instrumental in establishing Janesville's first public library in 1874."

"Naming the State Law Library in Lavinia Goodell's honor is an opportunity to recognize her legacy and inspire the next generation of women in Wisconsin," said Justice Ann Walsh Bradley.

"Honoring Lavinia Goodell and all women in the law by naming the State Law Library after her is the right thing to do," said Justice Janet Protasiewicz. "When people enter this important space, they need to know they are somewhere named after a leader who inspired others to do good and do what is right."

Governor Tony Evers [proclaimed](#) June 17, 2024 as Wisconsin Women Lawyers Day. An official ceremony naming the State Law Library after Lavinia Goodell will be held at a future date. More information on the life and work of Lavinia Goodell is available at LaviniaGoodell.com.

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