

**FLORENCE
ETHERIDGE
COBB**
1878-1946



**POWERFUL
VOICE FOR
WOMEN'S
RIGHTS**

Florence Cobb dedicated her life to women's rights. The first major suffrage parade in Washington in March 1913 was her idea. It galvanized the women's movement that resulted in the 19th Amendment in 1920.

Florence Etheridge was born in September 1878 in Bridgeport, Connecticut, growing up in Boston and nearby Everett. After high school graduation in June 1897, she received her Bachelor of Laws in May 1911 and her Master's Degree in May 1912 from Washington College of Law. She became a member of the District of Columbia Bar soon after.

While serving as the President of the Equal Suffrage Association for the District of Columbia, she suggested a Washington parade at the National American Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA) convention in Philadelphia in 1912. Once the NAWSA board approved it, leader Alice Paul began organizing the event. By the time they had its first meeting in its new Washington headquarters on January 2, 1913, more than 130 women had shown up to start work. Local suffragist and attorney Florence Etheridge spearheaded local involvement.

The parade was scheduled for March 3rd, the day before incoming President Wilson's inaugural, to put him on notice that this would be a key issue during his term. It ensured that the procession would enjoy a large audience and publicity. The procession along Pennsylvania Avenue – the same route that the inaugural parade would take the next day – was carefully choreographed to bring new energy to the campaign for women's suffrage and to push for passage of the Susan B. Anthony amendment, proposed annually since 1878.

Known as the "most beautiful suffragist", Inez Milholland led the procession on a horse, wearing a white dress, cape, and golden tiara. About 10,000 women marched in state delegations, professional groups or in university regalia. Behind them were bands playing patriotic songs and elaborate floats. The crowd of 250,000 began to block the parade route, with police unable or unwilling to control the crowds. The marchers found themselves in a sea of hostile, jeering men yelling vile insults. Most women locked arms and faced the ambush.

The next day, newspaper coverage of the March was more prominent than news of Wilson's inauguration. Historians later credited the 1913 event for giving the Suffrage Movement a new wave of inspiration and purpose. The women had accomplished their goal of reinvigorating suffrage in America.

Florence began practicing law before the U. S. Supreme Court on January 29, 1915. She worked at the Census Bureau, Department of Commerce and Division of Education for twelve years and the Office of Indian Affairs for five years before moving to Oklahoma in 1918, where she became the U. S. Probate Attorney at Vinita and then at Wewoka. In 1921, she married former Seminole County judge Thomas Samuel Cobb.

In 1922, Florence became the Oklahoma Chairman for the National Woman's Party, headed nationally by Alice Paul. Her first order of business was to investigate the legal status of Oklahoma women. Florence's study of the Oklahoma Constitution revealed that women didn't share the same property rights as their husbands, didn't have custody rights of their children, and were prohibited from holding state office or serving on juries.

Florence wrote legislation that would eliminate sex discrimination in Oklahoma. But most important to her and the National Party was legislation on equal rights for women. It was the granddaddy of women's rights legislation and the most difficult to get anyone to sponsor because the ideas of the Woman's Party were too progressive for most Oklahoma women – and certainly most Oklahoma men.

After her husband died in May 1929, Florence continued to publish and write for the weekly magazine "The Gossip" that he had established. She wrote articles, poems, and opinions on topics of public interest for the magazine. From 1934 to 1937, Florence served as a municipal judge in Wewoka and became a Justice of the Peace in 1940. Florence died in March 1946 at age 67, eulogized as someone who had the courage of her convictions.