

MINNIE L. HARDING (1857 – 1937)



Minnie L. Harding was inducted into the Colorado Women's Hall of Fame in March, 2016 in recognition of her civic leadership in Cañon City and the State of Colorado, her support for education and her role in creation of a loan fund in 1900 to assist women attending college.

Born Almira M (Minnie) Lahm on June 13th 1857 in Canton, Ohio to Henrietta Faber Lahm and Samuel Lahm (1812-1876), a lawyer and County Prosecutor who served as an Ohio State Senator in 1842 and was elected to the Thirtieth US Congress in 1847. After attending a private school in Canton and the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Albany, New York, Minnie traveled to Cañon City in 1881 at age 24 to visit the family of Frederick A. Reynolds, a prominent Banker who had moved here from Canton. She decided to remain and began teaching kindergarten in a tent at Fifth & Main, then became a primary teacher at Washington School in 1882. Minnie was engaged to rising businessman Theodore Marsh Harding in 1882; and, in December of that year, they were married in Canton. The couple had two children, Theodore Marsh II and Gretchen.

T.M. Harding had numerous business interests, including the Harding Sandstone Quarry, and established Harding Hardware with his brother Lebbeus L. Harding, Jr. in 1879. Minnie became President of the Harding Hardware Company on her husband's death in 1913 and the store continued to be operated by their son until it sold in 1949. The Hardware Store was originally

located in the 400 block of Main Street and then moved to 605 Main, where the sign remains visible today above Palace Drug.

Both Minnie and T.M. were active in civic affairs and community improvement efforts. She was among the founders of the *Cañon City Ladies Library Association* in 1886 which soon had 200 donated books in circulation and helped to build the Carnegie Library in 1902. She was also a member of the *Dickens Club*, formed in 1892, which was devoted to the works of Charles Dickens and read his complete works by 1901. In 1888, she helped establish *Friends in Council*, which became influential in local affairs, and served as its first Recording Secretary while becoming active at the state level in the *Colorado Federation of Women's Clubs*. In September, 1900, Minnie Harding became President of the Federation and served until 1902. During the second year of her term as President, the Scholarship & Loan Committee was established. Initial funds were raised with the help of F. A. Reynolds and, in 1902, the first loan was made to a young woman from Pueblo. In 1904, Minnie became Chairman of the Loan Fund Committee and served until her death in 1937. By 1982, it is estimated that the loans totaled more than \$1 million. By 1987, the fund had assisted more than 1,600 women to attend college. In 2016, six recipients were enrolled and twenty-two women were repaying their debt to the Fund.

Due to her commitment to education, Colorado Governor Elias M. Ammons appointed Minnie to a vacancy on the *University of Colorado Board of Regents* to which she was elected in 1914 after former Governor Alva Adams suggested her name be placed on the ballot. She served until 1920 and Harding Hall at the University of Colorado is named in her honor. In 1928 a tree was planted on the grounds of Colorado's Capitol in her honor.

Minnie's community service during World War I was recognized by certificates signed by Herbert Hoover, then US Food Administrator, for leading Fremont County's women's division of food conservation and by President Woodrow Wilson, for leading an effort to raise funds for the American Red Cross. She led Liberty Bond drives and Chaired the women's section of the National Council for Defense.

Minnie was President of the Cañon City Improvement League which, in 1906, initiated the City's first "clean-up" campaign to improve the community's appearance. She was also a member of Christ Episcopal Church, active in its women's group and served as Treasurer of the Sunday School.

Minnie died of heart problems in the Harding family home at 507 Greenwood on May 20, 1937, one month before her 80th birthday. The Right Reverend Irving P. Johnson, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Colorado, officiated at her funeral. She was beloved by the community and recognized as a "pioneer woman of vision."