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Ahead of Her Time: Helen Z.M. Rodgers and Cecil B. Weiner

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*Ahead of Her Time:
Women in History*



Ms. Helen Z. M. Rodgers

Ms. Cecil Wiener

Helen Z. M. Rodgers and Cecil Wiener graduated with the Buffalo Law School class of 1899. They were the first women graduates of the school and did so in a time when it was uncommon for women to attend law school. In spite of the restraints placed on their sex they not only graduated, but also excelled in their careers.

Helen Rodgers was the first woman to argue an appeal before the New York Court of Appeals. She was also politically active. Her involvement in the women's suffrage movement is not surprising. Ms. Rodgers was a practicing attorney but was unable to vote for over twenty years after earning her law degree. Trailblazers like Ms. Rodgers and Ms. Wiener undoubtedly paved the way for women today by their strength of courage and their ability to break through the constraints that women felt at every turn.

Cecil Wiener did very well in private practice before going on to become the first judge (and, of course, the first woman judge) of the Erie County Children's Court (now the Family Court). She must have been a highly respected attorney to gain such a position. It is interesting to note that women of that time often excelled in areas of their professions that focused on more social, and thus "female," issues. By doing so, Ms. Wiener demonstrated that women could hold high positions; there can be no question that she opened doors for the women who came after her.

Remarkably, Buffalo Law School was one of the first law schools to permit women to attend and graduate. While other law schools are celebrating 50 or 75 years of women graduates, UB has the honor of celebrating 100 years of women graduates. The women graduates that UB has produced over the year have gone on to distinguished and varied careers. There can be no question that Helen Rodgers and Cecil Wiener played an important role in our successes.

In this, our one hundredth anniversary of women at UB Law, we honor Ms. Rodgers and Ms. Wiener for their intellect and fortitude. The law school will be holding a conference to celebrate women at UB Law in the Fall of 1999.