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Ahead of Her Time: Women in History: Belva A. Lockwood

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BELVA A. LOCKWOOD,
OF WASHINGTON, D. C.
Nominated for President of the Republic by the National Equal Rights Party, Aug. 23d, 1884, at
San Francisco, Cal.

MRS. LOCKWOOD'S CAMPAIGN DOCUMENT

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Belva Ann Lockwood fought to secure the rights of women both as an attorney and as an ambassador for peace. Ms. Lockwood was dedicated to the struggle for equal rights and universal suffrage and was instrumental in gaining women admittance to practice in the United States Supreme Court.

Ms. Lockwood was born on October 24, 1830 in Middleport, N.Y. She was educated at the district school, and at the age of 15, was asked to teach, which she did for four years. At the age of 18, she married Uriah H. McNall. Soon after Uriah was seriously injured in an accident at a saw mill. After a long illness, Uriah died, leaving her a widow at the age of 22 with a baby daughter. Throughout Uriah's illness, Belva managed his business, but following his death, she became determined to finish her education. She began attending the academy in Gasport, N.Y. After the completion of her studies there, she accepted an invitation to teach.

After only two years of teaching, Belva felt the need to further educate herself. During a time when higher education for women was virtually nonexistent, she entered Genessee Wesleyan College in Lima, N.Y., which has since merged into Syracuse University. She graduated with honors in 1857. She thereafter worked as preceptress of Lockport Union School, and of Gainsville Seminary. She built a school in Hornellsville, N.Y., and then established a school for girls in Owego, N.Y., which flourished until 1866, when she sold it and moved to Washington, D.C. Upon arriving in the Capitol, she established a select school while continuing her own education. Belva married Rev. Ezekiel H. Lockwood, a Baptist clergyman, in March of 1868.

Belva began her study of law in 1868 at the National University Law School in Washington, D.C., where she received a B.L. degree. She was admitted to that district's supreme court bar in 1873. Two years later, Ms. Lockwood became the associate editor of The Peacemaker, in Philadelphia,
P.A. In 1878, she drafted a bill admitting women to practice in the U.S. Supreme Court. Two years later she finally succeeded in getting the bill passed. Belva Lockwood then became the first woman admitted to practice in the Supreme Court in 1879. She also authored and successfully ushered a bill through Congress which gave female government employees the same pay as men. She also won several notable legal battles, including one in which she represented the Cherokee Indian Nation against the United States and secured a settlement in the amount of $5,000,000 for the Cherokees.

Ms. Lockwood was nominated for the U.S. presidency by the Equal Rights Party both in 1884 and in 1888. She was the first woman ever to be nominated for that high office. She became a delegate of the Universal Peace Union to the International Peace Convention in Paris in 1880 and again in 1890. Throughout her life, she lectured around the country on issues ranging from suffrage to disarmament, and until her final illness, maintained a law office in Washington, D.C. Belva A. Lockwood died at the age of 85.

"I have never stopped fighting," Lockwood said. "My cause was the cause of thousands of women." On her 85th birthday, she was finally able to say, "Suffrage is no longer an issue. It is an accomplished fact. Those States which have denied it to women will come around."

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*by Amy K. Kendall Scoins*