

Katharine Wright (Haskell)

mlaschweickart

April 14, 2015



(<https://womensuffragemovementindayton.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/katharine-wright-c-1914.jpg>)

A Community Activist and Suffragette

She was involved in social-political movements in Dayton and according to her letters she participated in the Women's Suffrage Movement as well. In a letter to Oberlin College classmate and future husband Henry Haskell on November 11, 1924, she relates her views on women's suffrage (MFM-117, 2). It reads as follows:

*. . . Yes, you did make yourself clear enough, about the widows. I didn't misunderstand and think you were railing at women in general. I wondered if on to more general ground myself, because – well, because I think it is all some thing of the same piece. I get "het up" over living forever in a "man's world," with so much discussion about what kind of men women like, that it's a good deal like the particular subject of woman suffrage used to be with me. Orv always teased me about that. **When we were working for it, he used to say that woman suffrage was like Rome in one respect: all roads led to it, with me.** No matter however where the conversation started. I always managed to switch it off on to the woman suffrage track. It wasn't quite as bad as that but I was very much "in earnest" about it, to put it mildly, I know that's settled and I look around for other worlds to conquer. But no man can ever know how some women, at least, felt about that. . . . Public opinion has a lot to do with it. I don't know what can be done but I know that already having the vote has done a lot toward making men take us seriously. It is laughable to see what a change has come about already. . .*

This central line makes it clear that the Women's Suffrage Movement was important to Wright and that she discussed it openly with her family, and they saw her passion for the movement within her actions and words. In her own words, ". . . I was very much "in earnest" about it, to put it mildly . . ." Her suffragist activities were mentioned in the Dayton Daily News. In an article from October 23, 1914, the day before the first Dayton Woman's Suffrage Parade organized in part by Katharine Wright, she is quoted as saying, "If it is the last thing I ever do. I will march in the suffrage parade." The article also mentions that her father Milton and brother Orville planned to march in the parade with her (DDN – October 24, 1914). [To read the full article, click the link below].

[Oct. 23, 1914 Dayton Daily News "Plans Complete for Big Suffrage Parade"](https://womenssuffragemovementindayton.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/oct-23-1914-ddn-plans-complete-for-big-suffrage-parade.pdf)
<https://womenssuffragemovementindayton.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/oct-23-1914-ddn-plans-complete-for-big-suffrage-parade.pdf>

Katharine's father Bishop Milton Wright also wrote about her involvement with the suffrage movement in his diaries. Here are few excerpts from his diary from 1914:

Tuesday, February 3 Katharine went to the Suffragette's supper.

Sunday, February 28 Mrs. O. H. Davison called at 4:00, to talk with Katharine on Suffrage. We have been here ten months to-day. It is a cold but fair day. ***NOTE: This is probably Mrs. O.F. Davisson, aka Jesse Leech Davisson and was just misspelled by Milton. I checked in the Dayton Directory's for 1913-1915 and there is no O.H. Davison listed.

Thursday, September 24 Katharine went to the Woman's Suffragette supper and staid till after 10:00.

Wednesday, October 21 The folks went to hear Mrs. Catt, Susan B. Anthony's successor speak. They pronounced it the best speach [sic] they had heard this fall. The folks lunched at Rike's with Agnes Beck.

Friday, October 23 Katharine dines down town where she is busy aiding in planning for the Women's Suffrage March.

Saturday, October 24 At 3:30, we were in the 1300 march in town. There was Mrs. Bolton and other aged women, perhaps no older men than, I in the march. There were 44 College women, in the procession. Orville marched by my side. The sidewalks were lined by thousands of respectful spectators. (M. Wright, 3 February 1914 – 24 October 1914).

According to the entries above, Wright attended suffrage dinners and luncheons, went to listen to speakers such as Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt and was one of the organizers for the first Dayton Suffrage Parade held on October 24, 1914. According to a letter from her to Jesse Leech Davisson on March 3, 1914, she allowed the reservation of a meeting room in the Membership House for \$5.00 per month for the Women's Suffrage Party of Montgomery County to hold regular meetings (MS-004 Finding Aid, 25).

Sister and Scholar



Early Life

Katharine “Katie” Wright (Haskell) was a community activist and a member of the famous Wright family. She was born in 1874 in Dayton, Ohio to Bishop Milton Wright and Susan Koerner Wright of the United Brethren Church, and was sister to the famous Wright brothers Wilbur and Orville Wright. She had two other older brothers Reuchlin and Lorin Wright (KC263 Finding Aid, 1). At fifteen years old, Wright would lose her mother to tuberculosis. In order to cope with her grief, at her father’s urging she “gathered as many different flowers as possible and pressed them into an album which she kept with her always,” (“Katharine Wright”). Her mother’s passing also forced her to step into a new role as both hostess and woman of the household for the Wright family, responsible for day to day operations and overseeing her staff while supervising her family’s care. She ran the household while her father was away on church business, and often entertained his associates and church elders (“Katharine Wright”). In 1914, they moved to the home the Wright brothers designed for the family in Oakwood, Ohio. They named it Hawthorne Hill (“Katharine Wright”).

Education and Career

Wright would graduate from Oberlin College of Ohio in 1898 with a degree in teaching, the only Wright child to earn a college degree. In 1896, while attending Oberlin College, Wright became engaged to classmate Arthur Cunningham. They called it off not long after he left for medical school. Her father never knew she was engaged (“Katharine Wright”). After college she became a teacher at Steele High School in Dayton, teaching classes in the study of the Latin language (MFM-117, 1). After her brother Orville suffered severe injuries in a plane crash in 1908, she took a

leave of absence. During this time she also helped her brothers with their “airplane experiment.” She acted as their social secretary, helping them navigate the social world and its obligations (Dewey, “Katharine Wright’s Legacy”). While in Europe helping her brothers try to sell their airplane in 1909, she became the third woman in the world to fly after Teresa Peltier and Edith Berg. The French were extremely impressed with her, and they “awarded all three of them – Katharine included – the Ordre national de la Légion d’honneur (Legion of Honor). She remains one of the few American women to have received this award,” (“Katherine Wright”). She would retire from teaching in 1909, becoming more involved with her brothers’ work as they had been contacted by a German company regarding the license and production of their aircraft following their last European tour (“Katherine Wright”). Stories about Katharine’s level of involvement in her brother’s work were numerous. In 1922 she wrote, “I did not pioneer work in connection with the invention of the airplane. That pretty story was the outcome of someone’s imagination. I had the greatest interest in my brother’s work always, but that was all,” (Dewey, “Katharine Wright’s Legacy”).



https://womensuffragemovementindayton.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/katharine_in_cockpit_illustration.jpg

The Middle Years

Wright “was invited to join the Board of Trustees of Oberlin College” (“Katherine Wright”), and found that the invitation increased contact with Henry “Harry” Haskell, whom she met at Oberlin College as a student. She became friends with

Henry and his first wife Isabel Cummings. They made many visits to the Wright home over the years. A romance developed between her and Henry after the death of Isabel in 1923 (“Katharine Wright”).

The death of her brother Wilbur in 1912 devastated her and her family. Her father would write of the family’s loss, “Monday, June 3, 1912 – Wilbur is dead and buried! We are all stricken. It does not seem possible that he is gone. Probably Orville and Katherine felt his loss most. They say little. Many letters. Ezra Kuhns comes, reads Wilbur’s will, and leaves copies....” (M. Wright, 3 June 1912). Her father Bishop Milton Wright died a few years later in 1917 after a long illness. “Orville had become dependent upon his sister’s running of their home, especially after Wilbur’s death in 1912. Katharine was well aware that her brother depended upon her in many ways and that her romantic relationship with Henry Haskell would greatly distress Orville. She kept the true nature of the involvement a secret from Orville and from most of their friends for some time,” (1) Although Orville would not attend their wedding or acknowledge it, she and Henry wed on November 20, 1926. She moved to Kansas City, Missouri where Henry was the editor for the Kansas City Star (MFM-117, 1). Orville refused to speak to Katharine for the next three years.

The Death of an American Girl

When she fell ill “her brother Lorin sent word to Orville and told him ‘to dig himself out of his funk and get on a train to Kansas City.’ Orville arrived on March 2nd, the day before she died. Her husband Henry took Orville to see her and said, ‘Here is Orv Katharine. Do you recognize him?’ She replied, ‘Yes, of course,’” (“Katharine Wright”). Katharine Wright Haskell died in March of 1929 from complications of pneumonia. She is buried in Dayton, Ohio in Woodland Cemetery with the rest of her family. Her husband Henry would build a fountain at Oberlin College in her honor to commemorate her memory. It is a replica of the Fountain of Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, Italy that they had planned to see on an upcoming trip to Italy. (“Katharine Wright”). The fountain is located on Oberlin’s campus in front of the Allen Memorial Art Museum. It bears the inscription, “To Katharine Wright Haskell 1874-1929.” The college had it restored to it’s original condition in 2007 (“Katharine Wright”).

Photo 1 Citation: Katharine Wright (Haskell), c.1914 (WSU Special Collections and Archives).

Photo 2 Citation: Katharine Wright (Haskell) upon her Oberlin College of Ohio Graduation, 1898, (WSU Special Collections and Archives).

Photo 3 Citation: *The World Magazine* illustration of Katharine as a “Gibson Girl” piloting the Wright B Flyer. The image appeared in an article entitled, “The American Girl Whom All Europe is Watching,” c. April 11, 1909. Attrib. to Dan

Smith.

[Click here to view the Collections on Katharine Wright \(Haskell\)](https://womensuffragemovementindayton.wordpress.com/collections/)
(https://womensuffragemovementindayton.wordpress.com/collections/)

Bookmark the **permalink**.

[Blog at WordPress.com.](#) [The Bushwick Theme.](#)

 Customize  Edit 