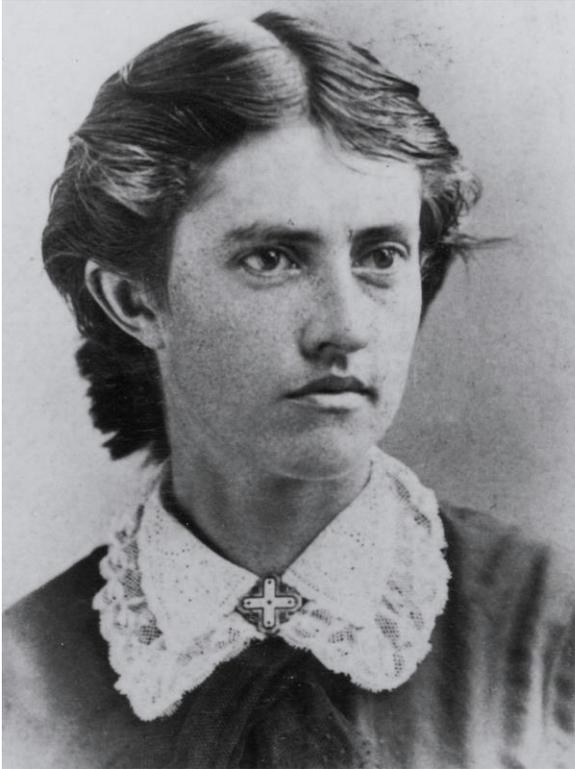


# Ellen Martin: Illinois' First Woman to Vote

Courtesy of the [Lombard Historical Society](#)



This is Ellen Martin. She has been recognized as the first woman to vote in the State of Illinois by a number of authorities. But her story is little known except for an article published by the Chicago Tribune a number of years ago and by the “keepers of the history of Lombard, IL,” the Lombard Historical Society.

Ellen was born in 1847 in New York and was the first woman law student in Chautauqua County. She graduated from the University of Michigan in 1875 and was admitted to the Illinois Bar in January of 1876.

She and a colleague, Mary F. Perry founded the legal firm of Perry and Martin with offices at 143 LaSalle Street in Chicago. Both Ellen and Mary lived in Lombard on West Maple Street and commuted to Chicago on a daily basis to their small office lit by kerosene lamps.

Women lawyers were restricted to bringing lawsuits or working in a law office at this time. They could not argue a case in court as they were not officially recognized as a “lawyer” because of their non-status as an “ELECTOR”. In other words, they could not vote.

On April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1891, Ellen Martin, carrying a large heavy “book of law” under one arm and a gripsack in the other, marched into the polling place in Lombard and demanded that *as a citizen* she be allowed to vote. She was not alone but followed by 14 of Lombard’s prominent women. They entered the sacred precincts of the polling place, set apart in the corner of the general store, where

the ballot box stood guarded by the election judges, Mr. T.H. Vance, Mr. Ed Reber and Mr. Fred Marquardt.

The judges were flabbergasted. It was reported that Marquardt was taken with a spasm, Reber leaned stiff against the wall and Vance fell backward into the flour barrel!!

Miss Martin raised the point that the Special Charter of the Incorporated Town, did NOT include the word “male” but in Section 4, stated that “All citizens above the age of 21 years shall be entitled to vote at any corporation election”. These women insisted upon exercising the franchise which they claimed were theirs under the Act.

A lengthy argument ensued and 2 of the 3 judges, Vance and Reber, allowed the votes to stand. Marquardt called the County Judge George W. Brown from Wheaton and notice was given for a contest. The consensus was that, as a result of this furor, the women “still held the fort”.

The law allowing Illinois women to vote in school elections only, became effective 3 months later in July of 1891. On July 1, 1913, an act providing that Illinois women of legal age could vote for all statutory offices became law.

Ellen Martin died in 1916, just 4 years before the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the US Constitution gave nation-wide suffrage to women.