

# WISCONSIN WOMEN MAKING HISTORY

THEIR STORIES  
OUR LEGACY

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## HELEN FARNSWORTH MEARS

1872-1916

City: Oshkosh

County: Winnebago

Helen Farnsworth Mears's statue of temperance reformer Frances Willard was the first sculpture of a woman to be placed in National Statuary Hall in the U.S. Capitol Building.

Mears was a self-taught sculptor. Born in Oshkosh, she learned anatomy from her father and used the family woodshed as a studio. She won her first award at the age of nine, at the Winnebago County Fair, for a bust of the god Apollo. Mears studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and, at age 21, received her first commission from the State of Wisconsin to create a heroic figure for the Chicago World's Fair. She sculpted a woman on a winged eagle and titled it THE GENIUS OF WISCONSIN. Mears went on to assist famed sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens, working with him in New York, Paris, and Italy.

Her most famous commission is the statue of suffragette and temperance reformer Frances Willard; this piece was the first sculpture of a woman to be placed in the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. Her other famous works include a bust of Saint-Gaudens and a bas relief of composer and pianist Edward Alexander MacDowell. But even though she was one of the most well-known sculptors of her era and was acclaimed for her skill in bas relief and monumental sculptures, Mears died destitute at the age of 43.

### LEARN MORE

"Helen Farnsworth Mears." FAMOUS WISCONSIN WOMEN. Women's Auxiliary, State Historical Society of Wisconsin. <http://womenscouncil.wi.gov/docview.asp?docid=66>.

"Helen Farnsworth Mears." Wisconsin Visual Lifetime Achievement Awards. <http://www.wvalaa.com/inductee/helen-farnsworth-mears-20>.

"Helen Farnsworth Mears." Encyclopedia Britannica. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/371660/Helen-Farnsworth-Mears>.

"Helen Farnsworth Mears (1872 - 1916)." Museum of Wisconsin Art. <http://www.wisconsinart.org/archives/artist/helen-farnsworth-mears/profile-103.aspx>.

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