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ELIZABETH HAWKES

1906-1978

City: Washburn

County: Bayfield

For decades, Elizabeth Hawkes was the only practicing female attorney in northern Wisconsin, and she was the first woman president of the Wisconsin State Colleges Board.

Elizabeth Hawkes was born in Washburn, Wisconsin, on November 22, 1906. She became interested in law at an early age and sometimes skipped class at Washburn High School to watch the lawyers working at the Bayfield County Courthouse. She graduated from high school at just 15 years old. She would go on to be the first Washburn High School graduate to become a lawyer. She attended Superior State Teachers College, now University of Wisconsin–Superior, and finished her bachelor's degree at Boston University. From 1922 to 1928, she served as a congressional aide to Representative Hubert Peavy, and later, in 1935, worked for Representative Thomas Amlie. She earned her law degree at the National University, now George Washington University School of Law, where she was one of only seven women in her class of 200 students.

In 1937, she passed the Wisconsin State Bar, which allowed her to work as a lawyer in the state. She returned to Washburn and opened her own law practice while caring for her mother and nephew. For decades, she was the only practicing female attorney in northern Wisconsin. She represented many of her clients free of charge. She also served as a court commissioner, a role similar to a judge. In 1941, she was elected district attorney of Bayfield County. She was the first woman district attorney in Bayfield County and the second in the state. That same year, she also became the first woman to serve on the State Bar of Wisconsin Board of Governors. Hawkes was also a leader in the Democratic Party from the 1950s to the 1970s. She served as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention five times.

In 1961, she was appointed to the Wisconsin State Colleges Board, and in 1963, she became the first woman president of the board. In honor of her accomplishments, she was named a regent emeritus, meaning she could keep the title even after retiring. She remained dedicated to helping people her whole life, even giving legal advice while she was in the hospital. Hawkes died at age 71 on February 8, 1978.

To learn more, visit <https://womeninwisconsin.org/profile/elizabeth-hawkes/>