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LUCY SMITH MORRIS

1850--1935

City: Berlin

County: Green Lake

Lucy Smith Morris was a suffragist, the first president of the Wisconsin Federation of Women's Clubs, and an early advocate for free libraries in Wisconsin.

Lucy Smith was born on August 28, 1850, on a farm near Markesan in Green Lake County, Wisconsin. She was a student at a rural school near her home before attending the Notre Dame Convent in Milwaukee and the Musical Academy in Beaver Dam. Later, she worked as a school teacher until she married Charles Secor Morris in 1876. The couple bought a house in Berlin, Wisconsin, in 1887, and they became very involved in Berlin society.

Morris was an expert on the English writer William Shakespeare, and in 1890, she founded the Athena Club, a women's literary group, and served as its president for 25 years. Not only did clubs provide a way for women to socialize, but they also helped women to improve their education and wield political power before they had the right to vote. In 1896, Morris helped to unite women's clubs around the state into the Wisconsin Federation of Women's Clubs and was elected its first president.

The federation made creating public libraries one of its top priorities. In the first year of Morris's presidency, they created over 100 free traveling libraries in Wisconsin. In 1896, she was appointed to the Wisconsin Free Library Commission by Governor Robert M. La Follette. The Commission later became known as the Wisconsin Library Association, and Morris served as its president for 20 years. Additionally, she was a member of the Berlin Library Board and president of the Fox River Valley Library Association.

Morris was active in the fight for women's suffrage (the right to vote). She brought prominent women to Berlin to speak about the suffrage movement and hosted them in her home. After the passage of the 19th Amendment, which allowed women's suffrage, she helped reorganize the Wisconsin Woman Suffrage Association into the Wisconsin League of Women Voters. This grassroots, nonpartisan organization works to protect people's right to vote and educate the public on various democratic issues. Morris was instrumental in starting several branches of the League in Wisconsin.

Lucy Smith Morris died at age 84 on May 27, 1935. In 2018, she was inducted into the Wisconsin Library Hall of Fame for her work with Wisconsin libraries.

To learn more, visit womeninwisconsin.org/profile/lucy-smith-morris