

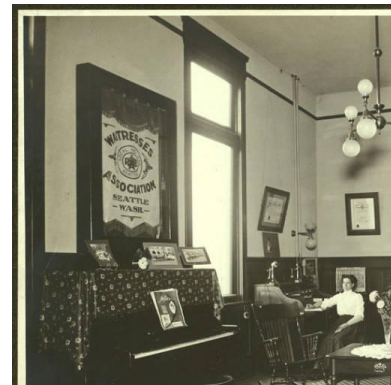
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Civic Courage: The Stories That Should Be Told (Alice Lord)

Washington State represents one of the last frontiers. For hundreds of years one could “go west” if he or she was unsatisfied with the current surroundings. In 1889, enough people had gone west that Washington had a high enough population to become the 42nd state (Washington). In the seemingly short 125 years that have elapsed since then, Washington State has been built, with a flavor and history as unique as it’s setting.

Across the continent from the original thirteen colonies, Washington was absent for many of The United States’ most historic events and disputes. Indeed, even today the eastern coast of the United States has a much more prominent role in the news than it’s western counterpart, in large part because of the federal government’s placement in Washington DC. While U.S. history textbooks are filled with Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and New York, it is important for us to remember, especially those of us who live here, that Washington State has a history filled with culture and courage as well. While historical events are practically limitless, with the millions that have lived here over hundreds of years, it is important to pay tribute to certain individuals who have shown the courage necessary to farther our state along towards equality and prosperity. One such individual is Alice Lord. Lord was a pioneer for women workers in the twentieth century. She fought for workers’ rights and in her forty active years achieved unbelievable success. Through her morality and leadership, Alice Lord played an important role for women’s rights in Washington State.

Just before the turn of the 20th century Alice Lord moved to Seattle Washington, she was 23 at the time.



Alice Lord at her desk

Lord became a waitress and soon found her self working twelve to fifteen hour shifts, every day of the week. Unable to stand the working conditions, Lord rallied other waitresses in the area, and together they formed 'The Waitress Union' (Andrews, Alice) in 1900. The new Union had only sixty-five members and a long road ahead of it. It won immediate support from the other labor groups in the area, such as Seattle Union Record, (Andrews, Lord) and in the period of only a year the Waitress Union was already reporting results such as cuts in hours and a raise in salary (Andrews, Lord). Lord's waitress union became one of the first women's unions to be chartered by the American Federation of Labor and the success didn't stop there. In 1901 Lord walked from Seattle to Olympia to raise her voice regarding conditions for the working class, and legislators listened (Andrews, Lord). A 10-hour workday was passed by legislation for women and waitresses gained the six-day work week years earlier than the rest of the state thanks to Alice Lord and the Waitress Union. Lord and her union could not be ignored. In 1911 the 'Waitress Bill' was passed by legislation and Washington State became the first to give an eight-hour workday to women (Andrews, Alice). Alice Lord headed the Waitress Union until she resigned to get married. Less than two year passed, however, before she was back and re-elected as president. She stayed in that position until 1940, her energy and persistence going great measures in securing the rights she was fighting for.

Unlike many women of the 19th and 20th centuries, Alice Lord was not confined to the domestic sphere, there was no way she would allow herself to be. She fought many of the same battles workingmen were trying to win, and often achieved better results than the male labor unions in the area. In creating the Waitress Union, Lord exhibited her ability to be courageous directly for the public good, and sacrificed much personal

tranquility in order to do so. Even though Lord herself had been a waitress, her civic work was far from limited to that sole domain. Ten years after creating the Waitress Union, Lord helped organize hotel workers and maids and eventually the 'Union Women's Federation' (Andrews, Alice). She fought for minimum wage increases (for men and women); better working conditions, and women's suffrage in addition to her regular duties as head of the Waitress Union. Alice Lord's actions, through her countless endeavors, touched and helped the entire community. No one knows the secret to life, why humans were put on this planet. For most, the main goal is happiness. Sometimes, however, someone comes along that recognizes what must be done to improve the quality of life for everyone, and who has the courage to make it happen. Alice Lord, was one of those people.

Lord's actions have left a deep and unmistakable impact on our state. As a direct effect of her work, women's hours were cut in half and wages tripled (Andrews, Alice). Innumerable other achievements regarding working conditions can be traced back to Lord as well, such as minimum wage increases and the 8-hour workday (Women). These accomplishments only add to her remarkable life and courage, and make it all the more clear how influential she really was. While Washington State still only pays seventy-eight cents on the dollar to women workers compared to men (Gender Pay Gap), one hundred years ago that comparison wouldn't have been made, the gap would have been so large. Lord compared the \$3-\$6 women were making per week and the conditions that work was taking place in, to sweatshops and would not stand for the thought, famously saying, "You give even your horses one day's rest in seven" (Andrews, Alice). The amount of progress Alice Lord saw from 1900-1940 was immense. While we still have a good deal

of distance to travel, both as a state and as a country towards equality in the workplace, without Alice Lord's help it can be said with absolute confidence Washington would be in a much worse position. Her never dying spirit helped many of the Washington's accomplishments, such as the highest minimum wage, immensely.

It was not common in the beginning of the twentieth century for women to organize unions; in fact, it was practically unheard of. The Waitress Union was one of the first chartered women's unions in the entire country, even with the much more densely populated areas of the east. The whole country seemed to hold the same opinion as the national labor policy on the issue: women were incapable of organizing and successfully running a labor union (Andrews, Lord). While Alice Lord was incredibly successful in her attempts to not only create a union but also create better working conditions, the risks and trials involved cannot be overlooked. Not only did many people expect Lord and the Waitress Union to fail, many hoped it would. This was the result of a growing unease with the idea of the power of the women's working class. Making her an even more controversial figure than she already was, Alice Lord was also involved in the fight for women's suffrage, which Washington passed in 1910 (Washington), ten years before the country as a whole. Risk and reward will always be a common theme for those who fight for what they believe is right. Lord's path was in no way easy or safe; she fought with bravery and morality in order to obtain the success she did and luckily surrounded herself with people that were receptive to her opinions and ready to make a change.

History textbooks are filled with names and pictures. Thousands of pages, devoted to a mere fraction of humankind. Countless influential figures have molded human history and many continue to do so. Labels are placed on these people in order for

us to better understand and catalogue them: father, hero, tyrant, innovator, or leader. Teachers must make the difficult choice of deciding which names the children should know, which names the foundation of knowledge should be built on, and which should melt away. It is through literature, learning, libraries, and stories that we try to preserve every piece of history we feel is important. The winners may write the history books but history is not confined to a set of dusty pages. History is alive in the stories we tell, the people we knew, the decisions we make. History and influence are relative and the recipient decides their significance. There are seven billion people alive today, billions more who once lived, and every one made an impact. All humans walked the same earth, the same ground, but we do not all live in the same world. Everyone is constantly tweaking and interpreting it in order to satisfy something larger than themselves. It is impossible to document the history of every human, so we pick and choose. Not all impacts are courageous, not all are large on a global scale, but all can teach us something. It is what you want to learn that is important. Not everyone's story can aid in the pursuit of recognizing civic courage because not everyone is civically courageous. But when those stories are found, the authors, whether it is Alice Lord, or Stimson Bullitt, must be recognized. It is not unusually difficult to make a happy life for yourself, to establish a quiet existence. The difficulty comes in trying to better the quality of life of those around you; and that challenge is one that should always be told.

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