

ELMHURST HISTORY HIGHLIGHT: Lovela Hagans

Long before the 19th amendment changed the constitution to give women the right to vote in 1920, Lovela Hagans (1829-1917) was a prominent Elmhurst citizen who played an active role in both the women's temperance and suffrage movements in the late 19th century. Both she and her husband, Lucian Hagans, had been involved in political causes before moving to Elmhurst in 1874. Lucian was a stakeholder in a prominent Republican Party newspaper in West Virginia and was involved in the formation of the state of following the secession of Virginia at the onset of the Civil War. Lovela was an ardent philanthropist, donating much of her time and wealth to the causes of childcare, temperance, and women's suffrage. Prior to moving to Elmhurst, Lovela helped found the Children's Home in Wheeling, West Virginia, in 1872.

The Hagans built their home, known as Hawthorne, at the present northwest corner of Prospect and St. Charles Road in 1875. Lucian held a large stake in the Rand McNally map publishing company and retired on these earnings, allowing the Hagans family to enter the upper crust of Chicago Victorian society. Aristocratic parties at Hawthorne were renowned for Lovela's excellent hosting abilities, and for decades it was rumored that the Prince of Wales was entertained at Hawthorne during his tour of the United States. However, since it is documented that the future King Edward VII visited Chicago in 1860—a full fifteen years before the construction of the home—this is certainly false.

Before their home was built, Lovela immediately became involved in the local temperance movement. She was a charter member of the Chicago branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in 1874 and joined the board of directors Women's Temperance Publication Association. She was a loyal friend and ardent supporter of suffragist and temperance activist Frances Willard, president of the WCTU, and Lovela supported these causes throughout her life. While her son, Wilbur, was in France in the 1880s, he sent several crates of fine wines to his home at Villa Virginia, located across the street from Hawthorne. When he returned to the states, Wilbur found that his mother had emptied every last bottle.



Lovela Hagans pictured on the front cover of "The Temple Appeal," a temperance movement newsletter. EHM Collection, M73.2.4

The Elmhurst History Museum collection contains a letter written by Lovela Hagans to a friend dated October 13, 1906, in which she explained her intent and determination to vote for a female university trustee. She wrote:

"I will be at the Village Hall some time Tuesday the 16th—as that is the day to register—so as to vote—for the woman trustee on the Board of Trustees—for the State University...You must be sure to register & vote."



The Lucian and Lovela Hagans Home at St. Charles Road and Prospect, known as "Hawthorne," circa 1906. EHM Collection, M2017.1.284

By Daniel Lund, Elmhurst History Museum Staff, Updated October 2021