



Midway Village Museum  
*Rockford's*  
HISTORY MUSEUM



Kate F. O'Connor  
Suffragist «» Businesswoman «» Activist

## **Highlight Timeline:**

**May 31, 1860**—Kate F. O'Connor born in Rockford, IL to Irish immigrants Cornelius and Mary O'Malley O'Connor. She was the youngest of 8 children.

**1878**—Graduated from Rockford High School

**1882**—Appointed deputy to the County Clerk.

**1886**—Made notary public.

**1887**—Starts a new horseback riding society.

**1888**—Comments on women's suffrage, saying "Great reforms will always work out in time, and woman suffrage is inevitable." (Daily Gazette, 1/26/1888)

As the flag on the newly built Courthouse was raised, Kate tied a yellow ribbon, representing the equal suffrage, to the flag rope.

**1893**—Joins the board of the Hospital Association.

**1898**—Resigns her office of deputy clerk and opens her own office; this includes general business services, probate law, government claims and real estate.

**1914**—Moves her business to Chicago.

**1921**—Backing Rockford teachers in dispute over equal pay.

Appointed to the board of education for 1 year.

**1926**—Returns her business to Rockford.

**1929**—Honored by national suffrage organization for her work, along with Jane Addams & Catherine Waugh McCulloch.

**1930**—Member of the first jury in Winnebago County to have women and men serving.

**1932**—Vice chairman of the 12th Congressional District for the Illinois Democratic Women's Congressional Committee

**1933**—Appointed by Gov. Horner as supervisor of the new minimum wage law for women and children in Illinois.

**1935**—Puts in new wage scales for women & minors working in laundries, as well as pushing for wage regulations in beauty shops.

**1937**—Makes her second trip to Washington to see Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt inaugurated.

**1938**—Named a member of the advisory committee of the Illinois Democratic women's division.

**1942**—Made assistant to Thomas F. O'Malley, regional director of the federal wage and hour division of the U.S. Department of Labor.

**May 25, 1945**—Kate F. O'Connor dies in Chicago of a heart attack.



Kate, pictured here at age 30 in 1894.

## Who was Kate?

Kate was an active Rockfordian who worked as Deputy Clerk, started her own business and was an active proponent of women's voting rights. Here are some of the highlights of this fascinating woman's life.

By 1894 Kate had studied drawing, was a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Chicago, and had been working as Deputy Clerk for 12 years.

She was active in the different groups at St. James Church, made notary public by Governor Oglesby, and started an equestrienne society.

In an 1887 article she is described as "small and slight", wearing her hair in a braid down her back and dresses that are to her ankles. (Daily Register, 12/29/1887)

An outspoken supporter of equal rights for women, in an article from the Daily Gazette she comments that "There is certainly no good reason why woman should not vote if she wants to, and every argument advanced against it so far, is without foundation, and cannot be substantiated by rational proof." (1/26/1888)

1894 also brought some controversy. Reports in the paper said that the new County Clerk wanted Kate to resign her post, citing that she was spending too much time with other commitments. (Morning Star, 11/15/1894)

5 days later, following much discontent, it was reported that Kate will stay on as deputy clerk. (Morning Star, 11/20/1894)

In 1898, Kate does resign her office, and stated her desire to open her own office.

The 1900 Federal Census lists Kate living with her sisters Anne & Elizabeth. Kate is listed working as a Real Estate Agent and Elizabeth as a Corsetmaker.

Her brother Charlie came to work with her in 1901, and Kate remained active in her many club affiliations.

In 1911, she added Jeanette Bates, a Chicago lawyer, to her offices.

**Desirable Homes at  
a Bargain.**

**Office  
415-416 Brown Bld'g.**

**KATE F. O'CONNOR,**

**PENSIONS, LOANS, REAL ESTATE AND INSURANCE.**  
Probate Matters a Specialty.

**Sixteen Years Deputy Clerk County Court, Winnebago County.**

Advertisement from The Morning Star, 9/3/1898

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## Kate F. O'Connor.

This lady is one of our most energetic real estate agents and does an extensive business. She also does an insurance business, negotiates loans, and makes a specialty of pensions and probate matters. She was for sixteen years deputy clerk for Winnebago county, during which time she won the confidence of the entire county. Her office is located in rooms 415 and 416 Brown building.

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Advertisement from The Morning Star,  
2/11/1900

### How Kate Spent Her Time:

- State Equal Suffrage society
- St. James' Catholic Church
- Young Ladies' Sodality (from St. James)
- Rockford Woman's Catholic League
- Young Women's Christian Association
- Woman's Monday Event Club (connected to Y.W.C.A)
- Charter member of the Illinois League of Women Voters; active in the national group as well
- Active in Illinois Federation of Women's Clubs, including the Rockford branch
- Member of the Business & Professional Woman's Club
- Girl Scout counsellor & hostess of many picnics
- Rockford Riding Club
- Blackhawk Club
- Hospital Association board
- Rockford High School Alumni Association
- Board of Education
- Winnebago County Home for the Aged
- Library Board
- Vice Chairman of the Illinois Democratic Woman's Congressional Committee
- Cordon Club of Chicago
- In charge of campaign to re-elect Gov. Henry Horner
- Illinois Women's Press Association
- Member of the 1st Chamber of Commerce

### Kate's Hobbies

Kate was involved in just about everything in Rockford. She kept herself busy with her many commitments and advocated fiercely for any group she was involved in. On the left is a list of some of the groups Kate was a part of. On many occasions she was elected as a delegate to various national meetings for these groups, representing the Rockford area group and their interests. She was the only woman among the 1st subscribers to the Morning Star in 1888.

She was also an advocate for many people, raising petitions and directing inquiries if she felt that anyone was receiving unfair treatment.

Campaigned for Ruth Hanna McCormick & many Democrats, including Judge Henry Horner (later elected Governor), and President Roosevelt.



MISS KATE F. O'CONNOR,  
Member of School Board.

Morning Star,  
4/29/1921



**MISS KATE F. O'CONNOR,**  
School Board member.

Rockford Republic, 4/29/1921

**Kate F. O'Connor.**

Miss Kate F. O'Connor is a graduate of the old East Side high school. She was president of the Rockford High school alumni association for two or three terms. She is Rockford's most prominent woman real estate dealer and is a member of the Illinois Woman's Press association and The Cordon of Chicago; was a member of the first Chamber of Commerce organized here and a member of the reater Chamber of Commerce. She also belongs to the Business and Professional Womens

Morning Star, 4/29/1921



Morning Star, 5/1/1921  
Kate leads the riding club in the Loyalty Parade.

## **Kate the Advocate**

Ever the advocate, in 1921 Kate, along with the Business & Professional Woman's Club, backed local teachers in a dispute over equal pay for female teachers, acting in conjunction with the Rockford Teacher's Club. It was this year that Kate was also appointed to serve on the Board of Education. She continued in her time serving to push for equal pay and general teacher welfare. She spoke out against the superintendent of schools, saying that the teachers had to be heard no matter what, and "...spoke of the deplorable conditions in the schools caused by crowded buildings and the need of new buildings. She compared the high school to "pens and jails I have visited to see my friends" on account of the poor light and ventilation." (Morning Star, 5/4/1921)

She ended up declining to be re-appointed to the board the next year, citing too many other commitments.

After making Chicago her home in 1914, Kate returned to Rockford in 1926. She continues to support democratic candidates, and reminding women of the difficult struggle that was the winning of suffrage, and that they have an important duty to vote. Kate urges women to vote, reminding them that the law which formerly required women to prove their exact age before voting had been revised, and reminded women to be "...independent in thought and action..." (Daily Register-Gazette, 12/13/1927).

In 1929 she was honored by the national suffrage organization for her work in the movement, along with Jane Addams and Catherine Waugh McCulloch.

As a good summary of her time in real estate, in a 1930 article Kate gave some advice to other women wishing to work in the same field:

"Drop your excess baggage.  
Put on your shock absorbers.  
Forget the lipstick.  
Get a broker's license.  
Take a through street.  
Take a man's chance.  
And step on the gas."  
(Morning Star, 10/26/1930)



Kate, far left, shown at Girl Scout Play Day.  
Rockford Sunday Star Register-Gazette, 6/8/1930

Rockford Republic,  
3/9/1929



KATE F. O'CONNOR

REAL ESTATE - LOANS

512 ROCKFORD NATIONAL BANK BUILDING  
ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS

Corner of an envelope, c. 1920s-1930s  
(Midway Village Museum's Collection).

*Kate F. O'Connor, who was named a "pioneer" by the National Woman suffrage association, is one of Rockford's outstanding and pioneer workers for the cause of woman suffrage. She is a well known woman realtor and is an active member of the Business and Professional Woman's club, as well as an ardent feminist and woman's rights advocate.*

Rockford Sunday Republic, 8/17/1930



Starting in around 1907, Kate remarked on her preference to wear suits, and is shown many times wearing suit jackets and pants.

(From Midway Village Museum's collection.)

### **Kate Gets Promoted**

In 1932 she began working as the representative for the 12th Congressional District for the Illinois Democratic Women's Congressional Committee, and at the end of the next year she was appointed by Governor Henry Horner as the supervisor to the new minimum wage law for women and children in Illinois.

Her work in the new position reflected her lifelong advocacy, pushing for new wage scales for women and minors working in laundries, and also pushing for wage regulations in beauty shops in 1935. She ran the re-election campaign for Governor Henry Horner and for the second time attended Roosevelt's inauguration.

In 1942, she was made assistant to Thomas F. O'Malley, the regional director of the federal wage and hour division of the U.S. Department of Labor.

May 25, 1945 Kate died in St. Luke's Hospital in Chicago of a heart attack.

Kate's signature, from a letter she wrote to Chief A. E. Bargren congratulating him on his 47th anniversary as a Rockford policeman in 1937. (Midway Village Museum's Collection)



**"Katie" O'Connor, the "Trim Little Deputy."**

The Register, 12/29/1887

The fame of our fair and bright young friend, Katie O'Connor, seems to be spreading. A leading editorial in a recent issue of the Woman's Tribune gives the following interesting notice of her and her work:

Miss Kate K. O'Connor, of Rockford, Ill., has been deputy county clerk for seven or eight years. Men may come and men may go in office, as the political wheel of fortune revolves, but she stays there, the standby. Though she does the work of an able-bodied man, she is small and slight in appearance, wears her hair down her back in one braid, and never wears her dresses longer than to her ankles. So she looks quite like a little girl, and the burly men who transact business in her office have not only genuine respect, but fatherly affection for the trim little deputy. It is strange how great a favorite she is everywhere, for she is most outspoken on questions of morality and temperance. At the last election for county clerk it only had to be known which man would hire "Katie" for a deputy and he was elected. Everybody counted it her victory, and so it was, for she had certainly managed the election. Last spring the Knights of Labor nominated her for city clerk of Rockford and her friends were confident that she would be elected. But Miss O'Connor herself pointed out a clause in the statutes which says that only qualified electors are eligible to municipal offices in Illinois. So she declined the nomination, and works on as deputy county clerk.

## VICTORY FOR WOMEN.

Kate F. O'Connor Is Reappointed  
Deputy County Clerk.

### MR. NORTON TRUE TO HIMSELF

He Refuses to Let Prejudice Prevail in  
His Appointments—Every Working  
Woman Will Now Be a Friend of  
the Worthy County Clerk.

When the present deputy county clerk writes her name the patronymic, Kate F. O'Connor, is silhouetted in ink on the parchment. That well written signature has been attached to official documents so many years that they would hardly seem legal or natural without it. So it is entirely in order and highly appropriate that the next deputy county clerk should spell her name in the familiar way it has been spelled the past fifteen years. To break away from mystery and deal in realism, THE STAR is gratified to state that there will be no change in the deputyship at the county clerk's office. Mr. Norton and Miss O'Connor got along in a mutually satisfactory way in the past and they have decided that nothing shall sever these pleasant and mutually satisfactory business relations.

In informing the public that Miss O'Connor's removal was contemplated, in fact practically decided upon, THE STAR stated that Mr. Norton, if left to himself, was the last man in the world to sacrifice a woman. He is a generous, amiable, independent man, and his friends could not believe that he would submit to outside dictation. That THE STAR knew him is evidenced in the fact that he intends to free himself from all entangling alliances and that he has decided to reappoint his present worthy and efficient assistant. This means, therefore, that the county clerk's office will continue to be managed efficiently and in the interest of the whole people.

So there are a good many congratulations to be offered. Miss O'Connor is to be congratulated in that she is not to be sacrificed by prejudice, Mr. Norton is to be congratulated in being true to himself and his well won and worthily worn reputation, and the working women of Rockford are to be congratulated in that their cause triumphed. Hereafter if Marcus A. Norton sees what he wants he has only to ask for it, and the women of Rockford, and particularly those who toll for a living, will see that he gets it. And where does THE STAR come in? Well, THE STAR will be content to shine for all as usual. Meanwhile all those interviews with and communications from the ladies will be laid away as souvenirs of the day the noble women of our city rallied around a plucky little member of their sex who had been marked for decapitation on the altar of prejudice.

Marcus Norton, THE STAR takes off its hat to you, and will do you a good turn should time o' need come along.

The Morning Star,  
11/20/1894

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# DO IT OURSELVES

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The Morning Star,

1/22/1905

## **Kate F. O'Connor Says We Make Our Own Environment.**

During the past week Kate F. O'Connor was a guest of the celebrated Social Economy club in Chicago, of which Dr. Frances Dickinson, dean of Harvey Medical college, is president.

Many prominent club women from all parts of the state were present and they discussed the problem, "Is Human Nature What Environment Makes it?" The discussion brought out many original and diverse opinions. Miss O'Connor, according to the Chicago papers, said in part: "Environment is largely what human nature makes it. In early youth and during the period of adolescence we are nailed to the cross of environment, but when we step out into Walt Whitman's 'open road' of unbounded freedom of thought and action we can make environment subservient to the strength of individual character—we can make it what we will."

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# NO WOMEN POLITICAL BOSSES, KATE O'CONNOR TELLS WOMEN

Chicago, Ill., Nov. 16.—“There are no women political bosses,” said Kate F. O'Connor, of Rockford, a delegate to the second annual convention of the Illinois league of women voters in session here today.

“And there never will be,” she continued.

“There will be the woman leader—the woman who has had practical worldly experience, and who has not theorized about politics. The leaders will act in an advisory capacity to women voters. Of course, women are taking politics very seriously right now. It has become fashionable to participate in political movements,” Miss O'Connor concluded.

The following officers were unanimously elected by the league today:

President, Miss Julia C. Lathrop of Rockford; vice-president, Mrs. Kenneth

F. Rich; second vice-president, Mrs. Florence Bennett Peterson; corresponding secretary, Mrs. Willa B. Laird; auditor, Mrs. Edward L. Murfey; directors for two years, Miss Bertha Bidwell, Freeport, Ill., Mrs. Henry W. Cheney, Dr. Grace Dewey, Jacksonville, Ill., Mrs. James A. Field, Mrs. William S. Hefferan, Mrs. R. E. Hieronymus, Urbana, Ill., Mrs. Noble B. Judah, Mrs. Hugh I. Morrison, Springfield, Ill., Mrs. Ignace G. Reiss, and Miss Sarah A. Tunnicliff.

The directors to serve one year are: Mrs. William A. Sauer, Miss Helen Hood, Mrs. Boza Oumiroff and Mrs. Marvin B. Pool.

Dr. Rachelle Yarros' social hygiene program, which includes sex education in the schools, was endorsed by the league this morning.

# KATE O'CONNOR CONDEMNS NEW CONSTITUTION

Rockford Daily Register-Gazette,  
11/20/1922

## *Proposed Basic Law Discussed Here.*

Illinois' proposed new state constitution was vigorously condemned by Kate F. O'Connor in an address at a mass meeting in Lyran hall Sunday afternoon.

"The adoption or rejection of the new state constitution on Dec. 12 is more important than a presidential election," said Miss O'Connor. "You might correct a mistake in four years but fifty or a hundred years is a long time. Last week I heard a speaker declare that the constitution should be adopted because it cost so much money, in the neighborhood of \$2,000,000. If you were sold poison by mistake would you take it to save money?"

"The revenue section is no relief. Let them assess the equity in the home instead of assessing for full value and taxing the mortgage. In Section 5, Article 1, they say: 'The General Assembly may provide that women may be eligible to serve as jurors.' We knew that before, and they could have said: 'Women shall be eligible as jurors.'

"This is just sop to the women, as Section 3, same article, on reading the bible in the public schools is sop to the bigots. I have gone over every article and found no need for a new constitution for the so-called 'improvements.' It jeopardizes mothers' pensions and teachers' pensions and makes a political brokerage house out of the supreme court."

LeRoy Green, state legislative representative-elect, also spoke. John Peters presided. Following the talks it was voted to appoint a committee with representatives in each ward to work against adoption of the constitution.

Oscar Ogren urged defeat of the local street car franchise at the referendum on Dec. 12.

# **KATE O'CONNOR RETURNS HERE TO OPEN OFFICE**

Kate F. O'Connor, who has been handling large real estate deals in Chicago for some time, has returned to Rockford and opened an office in the Rockford National bank building.

Believing in the future of her home city, Miss O'Connor has formed an eastern connection for obtaining capital to invest in Rockford real estate.

Miss O'Connor is re-entering Rockford business circles with enthusiasm and confidence gained by the added experience of carrying on business enterprises in larger fields.

Rockford Register-Gazette,

3/21/1926

**BACK TO THE BEST TOWN**

**In the  
U. S. A.**

**Kate F. O'Connor**

**Suite 714 Rockford National Bank Bldg.**

**Telephones—Office Main 7202—Residence  
Forest 1574**

**Attractive Business and Residence  
Properties**

**Country Estates a Speciality**

# **KATE F. O'CONNOR**

714 Rockford National Bank Building

**REAL ESTATE AND LOANS**

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**In Business Since 1882**

**Knows Rockford and Winnebago County.**

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The woman who operated in Detroit and Chicago and believes that her home town of Rockford offers equal opportunities.

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The woman who is in a position to advise and assist her clientele.

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The woman who makes her business a profession.

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**MANAGEMENT OF ESTATES  
A SPECIALTY**

Office phone  
Main 7202

Residence Phone  
Forest 1574



## KATE O'CONNOR IS BACK FROM COAST WITH SMITH HOPES

Kate O'Connor, prominent Rockford woman, is back from California and other points on the Pacific coast where she says the democrats are as enthusiastic about Al Smith as they are back in the governor's home state of New York.

"Governor Smith is one of the great men of America," Miss O'Connor stated "and is able and honorable. I hope I have the opportunity to vote for him."

### Kate Is Indignant

Miss O'Connor was indignant at the public attack on Governor Smith made by Col. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., Friday, when he said the

New York leader is still an ally of "old Tammany hall."

"Tammany is no worse than Teapot Dome," she asserted. "Where was Roosevelt during the oil scandal."

When asked where she had been on her recent trip, Miss O'Connor said, "everywhere from Vancouver to Mexico, where everyone is either retired, rubber tired, or damn tired."

### Women Running State

Miss O'Connor says California women are running the state. She cited an incident where there were 11 women and one man on a jury; so the man became drunk and failed to appear. She also said she had a splendid glimpse of Colonel Lindbergh and remarked that he is cool and courageous and an upright example of American manhood.

## KATE O'CONNOR SAYS WOMEN OF ILLINOIS ARE LAUGHING STOCK

Miss Kate F. O'Connor, who has been styled "A Real Realestaty," Mrs. Ora Hanson Snyder, well known business woman of Chicago who spoke here recently, gave women of Winnebago county something to think about yesterday afternoon in a talk before the South Side Civic Study club at Montague branch library.

### A Back Number.

Miss O'Connor, who spent some time in California this fall, declared, "The women of California are far ahead of the women of Illinois in political status. They fill many positions of honor and trust with great credit to themselves.

"Illinois is a back number when it comes to organizing women and Winnebago county is a joke among the women of the state," Miss O'Connor pointed out. "Why, we couldn't elect a woman dog-catcher in this county.

### Too Indifferent.

"Just look over the list of superior and courageous women who dared to aspire to office here," urged Miss O'Connor. "Everyone of them defeated and told to 'go way back and sit down' or hold a subordinate position at half pay and do all the work. This is not altogether the men's fault, but it is partly due to the apathy and indifference of you women.

"For many years I worked for suffrage, spending time and money, before it became a popular issue," Miss O'Connor explained. "After it came I naturally expected women to have their share of offices but they never got to first base. I am not speaking for myself for I could never live on the pay, but I am referring to some of my friends.

### Mer Mrs. McCormick.

"It seems impossible to elect a woman in this county—especially a poor woman," exclaimed Miss O'Connor. "so I am going to see what can be done about Mrs. Medill McCormick. She has wealth and has no price. She has social position, she has brains and she 'knows her onions'. She is an Illinois woman and our neighbor so I am going to rally around her all the political strength I can summon and see if we can't break the backbone of political prejudice against women in this state.

"I notice that a new club has been formed in Chicago by women for teaching patriotism," Miss O'Connor observed. "Just another camouflage to keep women quiet while that bunch of fine patriots in Washington, under indictments for stealing the people blind, get away with the goods.

### True Patriots.

"The best kind of patriot, and the kind we need most," declared Miss O'Connor, "is the kind that pay their bills, keep their word and keep their hands off other peoples' business!"

### Stars—Movie and Otherwise.

Speaking of the movie persons she met in Hollywood Miss O'Connor said, "The natural prejudice I had against them dissolved when I met them at closer range. Prejudice of every kind is generally founded on lack of knowledge and it is safer to get the facts before bringing in your verdict.

"The brightest star I met on the Pacific coast was not a movie star—but he communed with the stars," Miss O'Connor stated. "When Capt. Charles A. Lindbergh landed at Vail field in Los Angeles in the 'Spirit of St. Louis' and pulled off his helmet showing his touselled, sun-burned hair he was the finest 'Spirit of Young America' I ever looked upon."

### Musical Program.

Preceding Miss O'Connor's talk Miss Edna Crotty, accompanied at the piano by Mrs. Edward Guagliata, sang a group of lovely songs.

A telegram was received from Mrs. W. C. Free, former president of Winnebago County League of Women Voters and head of the South Side Civic club, in which Mrs. Free sent a word of good cheer to the club

Morning Star,  
11/5/1927

# WOMEN VOTERS NEED ONLY SAY "I AM OVER 21"

## Kate O'Connor Leads Vote Discussion

Miss Kate F. O'Connor led the discussion of electoral duties and responsibilities which comprised the program of the Study guild of the Catholic Woman's league, Monday night at the Rockford Business and Professional Woman's club. Miss Margaret Connolly, chairman, presided.

Miss O'Connor reminded the women of the revision in the law which heretofore has required a statement of the exact age of the voter. "When you go to the polls," she said, "either to register or to vote and meet some officious clerk who demands your age, just say, 'I am over 21,' as that is now all that the law requires.

Miss O'Connor called attention to the fact that out of a population of more than 80,000, Rockford only has a registered vote of approximately 35,000, and of this number only about 15,000 go to the polls and vote; whereas in England there is an average of 80 per cent and in Germany 90 per cent who cast their votes, against the 48-50 average in the United States.

"It was a difficult matter to secure suffrage and women today do not seem to realize their duties as citizens," Miss O'Connor continued. "The greatest obstacles to women's progress seem to be clothes, or the lack of them,—long wickered traditions that need a shake—card parties, chain stores and pettiness. I do business with men all the time and while they fight and swear and even tear each other's hair, they agree to disagree amicably and vote for the same candidate.

"I am beginning to feel with Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt that 90 per cent of the work of women's clubs are wasted effort. What for instance have the women's clubs done in regard to dress? Everywhere we see the girls on the street with their heads crouched down in fur coats while their pitiful little spindly legs clad only in silk hose are exposed to the wintry blasts, neither becoming, artistic nor comfortable. What have we done for sanitation in places where women are employed?"

In conclusion Miss O'Connor admonished women to be independent in thought and action, as "there is nothing on God's green earth that a self-respecting woman need be afraid of providing she cast fear out of her heart."

Rockford Register-Gazette

12/3/1927

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## **KATE DID HER BIT.**

There's at least one person in Rockford—of course there are a great many more—who rejoiced at the news in the Register-Gazette last evening that Dr. Frederick A. Cook, former Arctic explorer, has been granted a parole from Leavenworth prison after having served nearly five years of a fourteen-year term on a charge of having used the mails to defraud in a Texas oil deal. The particular person referred to is Miss Kate F. O'Connor who contributed not a little time and effort toward securing the release of the aged prisoner. Miss O'Connor had no personal interest in Dr. Cook, other than her usual warm-hearted Irish sympathy for the oppressed. She solicited and procured many letters from persons of prominence and influence, urging that Dr. Cook be given another chance in the world. These letters all helped in winning favorable action by Attorney General Mitchell on the application. As a matter of fact Dr. Cook served long enough for the offense with which he was charged and no good could have come to either the public or the prisoner by longer confinement. The lesson taught to him was as great as if he had been kept in prison the remainder of his life.

Rockford people will recall that Dr. Cook filled a vaudeville engagement of a week at the old Orpheum theater in this city soon after his return from the frozen North and before exposure came of his having found the North pole. Dr. Cook is now a gray-haired man and promises that he will make good when he starts life over again.

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Drop your excess baggage.  
Put on your shock absorbers.  
Forget the lipstick.  
Get a broker's license.  
Take a through street.  
Take a man's chance.  
And step on the gas.

These seven brief rules are offered to women who want to "break into real estate" by a woman who broke in back in the days when the real estate business was considered almost scandalously advanced for a woman. She is Kate F. O'Connor of Rockford, one of Rockford's first women to enter the business world.

In a trenchant article, *Breaking into Real Estate*, which appears in the October issue of *Independent Women*, a magazine for business and professional women, Miss O'Connor offers some sage advice, and wonders why more of this generation's modern women are not engaged in the business of buying and selling real estate.

Part of her article is reprinted below:

To me one of the anomalies of business life is the comparatively small number of women who are actively interested in real estate. It seems an occupation to which they are particularly well adapted. They have intuitive judgment — as men would express it, they "operate successfully on hunches" — they have patience and perseverance to a degree which few men can boast, and they have a marked tendency to tell the truth.

#### Does Truth Pay?

I presume many realtors would not agree with me that that is a valuable qualification. They think the ideal realtor is a combination of Ananias and Baron Munchausen. But business is a long-time game, and a satisfied customer who has been equably treated today is a good prospect for tomorrow.

Yet in spite of the obvious qualifications which women possess, when I survey the real estate field I find comparatively few of them engaged in that type of work.

I presume I am a pioneer in the business. I entered it when it was considered almost outside the pale for a woman. All these years I have been eager to welcome newcomers into it, and they have come not in droves, but straggling in, one by one, while men have pre-empted all the richer opportunities.

In studying the reason for it I can reach only one conclusion. It is the fear complex which is inhibiting women. They have an exaggerated idea of the hardships and responsibilities surrounding business—particularly an occupation so highly individualized as real estate. In clerical positions or as saleswomen on a salary they are making good, but they seem to shy at opening their own offices and doing business under their own names.

## Forget The Lipstick, Kate O'Connor Advises Aspiring Women Realtors

### Don't Be Scared!

And the real rewards in the real estate field are for those who have the courage to take the plunge. I cannot urge women too strongly to take fear out of their consciousness—whether they are operating in the real estate field or follow some occupation far removed from it.

In urging women to take up real estate, however, I am duly aware that their training has not been as broad as that of men, who have the advantage of learning their own mistakes. So as one of the cardinal qualifications for success I should advocate learning to get on with



Miss O'Connor.

men, absorbing some of their wisdom second hand.

The real estate woman will find that she has to do a great deal of business with men. In fact the major portion of my clients are men. They irritate me once in a while. They smoke in my office, occasionally they swear, and often they have a rather brisk verbal passage at arms with each other or with me, but they emerge from the fray good-natured and smiling. Unfortunately one cannot always say that about a woman. Her piques are most lasting.

There is, I am sure, a deep and abiding respect in the heart of every good man for a good woman, so the real estate woman need sacrifice none of her dignity merely to make herself agreeable to men.

But she must learn to distinguish between the men who are honorable and the unscrupulous smooth talkers who have no compunctions about getting the confidence of women and appropriating their life savings for some unsound investment.

### Be a Good Listener.

The professional humorists who have so much to say about women's loquacity would probably indulge in a good laugh at this next suggestion. But still I say that the good real estate dealer—man or woman—must be a good listener. If you would succeed at real estate, know when to keep silent and give your prospect a chance to talk himself out. Generally he will sell himself, and save you a lot of effort.

Keep your own counsel. Treat your client's confidence with the same sacredness with which a lawyer respects his case. Keep your appointments and keep your word. And remember that high pressure salesmanship brings low pressure results.

Any young woman with imagination is sure to find real estate an interesting business. One can find romance, and even tragedy, in running down an abstract of title from the government to the present owner of the property. And there is always a thrill in human contacts.

There is a good deal of talk about bad times just now, and business all over the country seems temporarily retarded. But the trouble, I believe, is mainly psychological and is sure to pass. This is a buyer's market, and you cannot go far wrong on real estate, so if you have any leanings in that direction now is the moment to start.

Morning Star,  
12/24/1930

# ELGIN YOUTH IS FOUND GUILTY BY MIXED JURY

Eight Women, 4 Male  
Jurors Agree Upon  
Guilt In 2 Hours

## FIRST IN COUNTY

With Miss Kate O'Connor, prominent local real estate dealer, as foreman, Winnebago county's first "mixed" jury since the passage of the law providing for services of women on juries, reached a decision after two hours' deliberation—the usual length of time spent by men jurors in arriving at a verdict—and returned a sealed verdict which was read in court yesterday morning.

The case under consideration by the "mixed" jury was that of Leonard Piazza, 20, Elgin, who was charged with carrying concealed weapons. The jurors ordered the conviction of Piazza, but Judge George T. Liddell deferred sentencing him pending arguments on a motion for a new trial filed by his attorney.

Besides Miss O'Connor other members of the jury were Mrs. Edna Sill, Mrs. Lola Piper, Miss Caroline Hyatt, Miss Bessie White, Mrs. Mary Helt, Mrs. Sigrid Houghton, Mrs. Thomas Swords, Burt M. Allen, W. Clyde Oliver, C. W. Bohlin, and Martin Gripp.

Four ballots were required to reach the verdict of Piazza's guilt. The jurors stood eight to four for conviction on the first ballot, nine to three on the second, and one woman held out for acquittal on the third ballot, the vote standing 11 to one. On the fourth ballot, as the dinner hour approached, the jurors were unanimous for conviction.

That Kate O'Connor, who was a courageous pioneer in the cause of woman's suffrage, is still pretty much annoyed at Tom Gill for his bland assertion before a group of clubwomen that the nineteenth amendment to the constitution should never have been adopted.

Morning Star,  
2/28/1932

## *Speaks Here For Judge Horner*



When Mrs. M. L. Purvin came out from Chicago Wednesday to speak in behalf of Judge Henry Horner, Democratic candidate for governor, she was met at the train by Miss Kate F. O'Connor, left, and Mrs. Harry Shanhouse, who assisted in arranging the meeting. (Register-Republic photo).

Rockford Register-Republic,  
4/9/1932



# Kate O'Connor On Democratic Woman's Staff

Morning Star,  
7/31/1932

Chicago, July 20.—(AP)—Formation of an Illinois Democratic Women's Congressional committee to organize woman voters in the state's congressional districts for the fall elections was announced here today at headquarters of the Democratic state central committee.

Mrs. Dorothy L. Kaye of Watseka was named chairman of the committee. She will be assisted by the following vice chairmen:

Mrs. Rose Fletcher, Danville; Mrs. Bernice Robinson, Benton; Mrs. Ethel S. Wright, Newton; and Miss Kate F. O'Connor, Rockford.

Other members of the committee are: Mrs. Lee Goodwin, Aurora; Mrs. Mary Reardon, LaSalle; Mrs. Aileen McGrath, Polo; Mrs. Sarah Bond Hanly, Monmouth; Mrs. Iva C. Martin, Canton; Mrs. Mary Conner, Peoria; Mrs. Mary Bell Sloan, Bloomington; Mrs. Sarah C. Wallace, Windsor; Mrs. Anna E. Eabs, Belleville; Mrs. Florence Mabry, Mt. Vernon; Miss Bess Parrish, Harrisburg; and Mrs. Beatrice Walker O'Kane, Cairo.

Delegated with the mission of securing support for both national and state Democratic candidates, the committee's work "will show results in the fall that will surprise our Republican friends," said Mrs. Kaye.

Offices of the Democratic state organization for the coming campaign announced today the appointment of Assistant State Treasurer John H. Stelle of McLeansboro as director of the organization with headquarters at Springfield. George T. Scully of Chicago was named his assistant. He will maintain offices in Chicago.

## State Appointee



Miss Kate O'Connor, named field agent for the division of rehabilitation, a joint state-federal post, covering eight counties in northern Illinois. Miss O'Connor succeeds Mrs. W. R. Fringer of Rockford.

## MISS O'CONNOR IN STATE POST Succeeds Mrs. Fringer As Field Agent In Eight Counties

Appointment by Gov. Henry Horner of Miss Kate O'Connor of this city to be field agent for the division of rehabilitation, a joint state-federal post, for eight northern Illinois counties was made yesterday, effective Oct. 10. Miss O'Connor, who succeeds Mrs. W. R. Fringer of Rockford in the post, will have supervision of Winnebago, Boone, Ogle, Stephenson, De Kalb, Jo Davless, Carroll and McHenry counties.

Her selection was made by a board representing the state departments of labor, commerce, agriculture and public instruction, after Gov. Horner, a friend of long standing, had urged Miss O'Connor to consent to take the post. She will keep her office in the Rockford National Bank building, making that her headquarters.

A pioneer in woman suffrage and in public service for many years. Miss O'Connor was active in last year's Democratic primary and election campaigns, being one of the original Horner workers here. During the election campaign she was a vice chairman of the Twelfth district Democratic drive. She is a charter member of the Illinois League of Women Voters and of the Rockford Business and Professional Woman's club, and a member of the Illinois Woman's Press association and Chicago's Cordon club.

In accepting the appointment, Miss O'Connor paid high praise to the retiring field agent, Mrs. Fringer, and expressed the hope that her work would be as valuable. Mrs. Fringer's training and her excellent work have made her known throughout the entire district, Miss O'Connor declared. Mrs. Fringer served as Rockford hospital superintendent when Miss O'Connor was on the hospital board of trustees, and the friendship of the two women is of long standing.

Morning Star,  
10/1/1933

# Kate O'Connor Is Named to State Position

## Will Be Supervisor Of Minimum Wage Law for Women

Appointment of Miss Kate W. O'Connor of Rockford, nationally known as a leader of the woman suffrage movement, as supervisor of the minimum wage law for women and children was announced yesterday by Gov. Henry Horner.

Enactment of the law at the last session of the general assembly caused the post to be created, and Gov. Horner selected Miss O'Connor for its first occupant because she has devoted her life to the improvement of conditions for women and children in business and industry.

Miss O'Connor is a personal friend of Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Miss Frances Perkins, secretary of labor, and international leaders in the efforts that have been and are being waged to obtain proper recognition of the rights of women in business, industry and government.

Miss O'Connor's jurisdiction as supervisor of the minimum wage law extends over the entire state. One of the first tasks she has set for herself is to acquaint the public with the provisions of the law and to bring about a closer community of interests between employers and their women and minor employees.

# Asks Funds to Enforce Woman Wage Minimum

## Appropriation Sought To Hire Helpers for Miss Kate O'Connor

By WILLIAM E. WALTON

(Associated Press Staff Writer)

Springfield, Ill., Feb. 9.—Illinois is to put financial teeth in its 1934 law regulating minimum wages for working women and children.

Appropriation bills will be introduced in the third special legislative session next week to make effective the law passed last June at the request of the Horner and Roosevelt administrations.

Because the regular session of the legislature failed to pass a special appropriation for the department of labor, the minimum wage law has been virtually inoperative for nearly eight months.

### Police Powers Defined

"While the state law provides lower wages and longer hours than the NRA codes, our police powers are more definitely defined," said Martin P. Durkin, director of labor. "Enforcement of the state laws can be more rigid when we have a sufficient staff."

Durkin will sponsor an appropriation to give his department a chief supervisor, three supervisors, six assistants and two deputy inspectors during the rest of the biennium.

Miss Kate F. O'Connor of Rockford, was appointed supervisor of the minimum wage law on Jan. 1. She is the only state employ now working under the law.

Durkin said that Miss O'Connor's work has been largely concerned with inspection and reporting of violations.

### Report Violations to U. S.

Violations of the NRA code that have been discovered by state authorities have been reported to federal officials for prosecution. Full cooperation with the NRA on violations that do not come under the state law is planned. Durkin stated.

## *Bucks Minimum Wage*

Rockford Register-Republic,  
8/13/1935



KATE F. O'CONNOR

### **Kate O'Connor Supports Beauty Shop Wage Edict**

Kate F. O'Connor of Rockford, chief supervisor of the minimum wage law division of the Illinois state department of labor, today was lending her support to the new minimum wage proposal for beauty operators in Illinois.

Women and minor operators in the beauty industry in the state will get a weekly wage of \$16.50 and a maximum work week of 45 hours if edict of a special state board are carried out. The decision was reached last night at a public hearing in Chicago which will be followed by one in Peoria and another in East St. Louis later in the week.

The announcement brought protests from many shop owners in Chicago, who said that because of present conditions they could not charge prices that would permit payment of such a minimum.

The state beauty industry code is one of several being formulated under a law passed by the legislature in 1932.

(Political Advertisement)

**AN OPEN LETTER TO  
W. P. A.  
WORKERS and OTHERS**

No one can take away your right to choose your own candidate on election day. When in the voting booth you are there only with your ballot and your conscience. Vote your choice and remember that no one knows how you vote.

**KATE F. O'CONNOR -**



**KATE O'CONNOR**, a leader in the Horner-for-governor movement in Winnebago county, preparing to cast her vote in the first precinct of the Third ward. She is getting her ballot from **Harry Dickerman**, election clerk.



**MISS KATE F. O'CONNOR**, veteran and ardent Democrat, was probably the happiest woman in Rockford last night as news of Democratic victories were received. She is shown with (left to right): **L. J. Smith**, commissioner of conciliation of U. S. department of labor; **W. B. Hunter**, U. S. treasury employe; **Harry G. Curtis**, Rockford. Miss O'Connor is chief supervisor of state department of labor's minimum wage division. (Register-Republic photo.)



# KATE O'CONNOR PREDICTS NEW MINIMUM PAY LAWS

**Y**ESTERDAY'S decision of the United States Supreme court upholding the validity of the Washington state minimum wage law will result in speedy enactment of similar laws in other states, Miss Kate F. O'Connor, chief supervisor of the minimum wage division for women and minors of the Illinois department of labor, told the Morning Star over long distance telephone from Chicago last night.

The decision, however, will have but little effect on the Illinois law, she said.

"We have been enforcing our law ever since it was passed in 1933, and we are going to keep right on doing it. We have already benefited more than 39,000 women in Chicago and downstate," she declared.

## Test Suit Pending

Miss O'Connor, veteran Rockford business woman and political leader, predicted that a test case pending against the Illinois law, modeled after the New York state law which was held unconstitutional by the Supreme court last June, would be dismissed as a result of yesterday's court decision. This suit, instituted in the Sangamon county Circuit court at Springfield, has never been decided, she said.

At the present, seventeen states have minimum wage laws in operation. Inquiries received from state departments of labor throughout the nation have convinced Miss O'Connor that "it won't be long before every state has a law similar to ours."

Yesterday's decision did not come

as a surprise to the veteran Rockford Democratic leader who with Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, listened to final arguments in the New York case last spring.

"The arguments in the New York case were not presented right, and I don't blame the judges for deciding the way they did. But this time, they got the right arguments in at the right time, and I figured that Justice Roberts would vote with Chief Justice Hughes and the liberals this time.

## Comment On Court

"It's about time those boys on the Supreme bench down there are waking up. It looks like they are going to be good for a while now, and give the poor man and the poor woman a little consideration for a change," she declared.

Broadening of the enforcement division of her department to cover the more than 500,000 women employed in Illinois industry is already underway, she revealed. A "wage" board will soon be appointed for the cotton-garment industry to assist in setting minimum wages for that industry throughout the state, she said.



MISS KATE O'CONNOR of Rockford today was appointed superintendent of women's and children's employment in the state labor department by Governor Horner. Miss O'Connor has been chief supervisor of women's minimum wage division of the department. (Register-Republic photo.)

## Labor Dept. Promotion For Kate F. O'Connor

(Continued from Preceding Page)

tion out of the Chicago offices of the state department of labor.

### Add 10 to Staff

Ten workers have been added to Miss O'Connor's force to keep up with the increased work. Most important of her duties will be to carry out enforcement of the new eight hour law for women passed by the legislature.

She will also have charge of carrying out the industrial homework law, which applies where disabled persons do industrial work in their homes; the child labor laws, the six day week law, and the minimum wage laws for women and minors.

Friends from all sections of the state were swamping Miss O'Connor with congratulations, she reported today from her Chicago office. She anticipates the busiest days of a busy career in assuming and broadening of her responsibilities under the new legislation.

Pleased with the new legislation which broadens her responsibilities, Miss O'Connor said today that the "public has become increasingly labor conscious."

### Fix Salary at \$3,600

"I am encountering a wonderful spirit of cooperation," she reported. "People are beginning to realize that, after all, the employer is a man you can talk to. I find that the employers are ready and willing to cooperate, and believe that the new laws are bringing the workers and employers closer together."

Miss O'Connor, in her political and business career, has gained national prominence. She was one of Rockford's most enthusiastic advocates of woman suffrage, worked as a real estate broker and was a prominent member of the Business and Professional Woman's club.

The Rockford woman will receive a \$3,600 salary, according to the International News Service.

# Wash Dress Industry Wage Hearing Ordered

Springfield, Ill., Oct. 15—(UP)—  
State Labor Director Martin P. Dur-

kin issued an order today calling public hearings in Peoria and Chicago before a minimum wage is established for the wash dress industry.

Durkin will meet with representa-

tives of the industry in Chicago Nov. 1 and in Peoria the following day to confer on the report of a wage board named to recommend fair minimum wage standards.

Following the conferences Durkin will issue an order which may be made mandatory if employers do not comply with the standards.

Miss Kate F. O'Connor, head of the department's minimum wage division, sent the board's recommendations to the director. The report suggested:

1. Minimum wage of \$14.80 a week or 37 cents per hour for women and minors working on a basic 40-hour week.

2. For apprentices, \$7.40 a week for the first eight weeks and \$11.10 a week for the second eight weeks.

3. Overtime rates of one and one-tenth the hourly wage for hours over 40 per week.

# KATE F. O'CONNOR IN FEDERAL POST

## Gets Regional Wage And Hour Job

Miss Kate F. O'Connor, of Rockford, has been appointed assistant to Thomas F. O'Malley, regional director of the federal wage and hour division of the United States department of labor, Chicago, it was announced yesterday.

Miss O'Connor served since 1937 as superintendent of women's and children's employment on the staff of the state department of labor. Her new duties will consist of coordinating state and federal labor department efforts, O'Malley said.

She will serve as a special representative of the U. S. labor department in charge of women's and children's labor law administration in the regional office's territory, Illinois, Indiana and Michigan.

Gov. Dwight Green has accepted Miss O'Connor's resignation from the state labor department.

Miss O'Connor's offices are on the 12th floor of the Merchandise mart in Chicago.

In the four years previous to 1937, Miss O'Connor was chief supervisor of the minimum wage division for the state. Before the state appointment, she conducted a real estate office in Rockford. In earlier years, she was an outstanding advocate of woman's suffrage.

Miss O'Connor has been an ardent Democrat for many years. Her state labor department job has not been filled.



Miss Kate F. O'Connor, above, native of Rockford, pioneer advocate of woman suffrage and for many years employed in the state and federal labor departments, died in St. Luke's hospital, Chicago, early yesterday after a heart attack. She had been a patient in the hospital since May 2. Miss O'Connor, 77, had been assistant to the regional director of the U. S. department of labor's wage and hour division in Chicago since 1942. Previously, by appointment of the late Gov. Henry Horner, she had supervised the state's minimum wage and hour laws pertaining to women and children. Her body will be returned to Rockford for funeral services and burial. (Story on page 1)

Morning Star,  
5/25/1945