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Pettem: Campbell and McHarg were early civic leaders

Decades ago, a Camera reporter described Boulder City Council member Ida Campbell as "faithful, sensible, and businesslike." Campbell was elected in 1917, the same year that her attorney friend Flora McHarg used her legal training to help draft the city's charter, which set up the city manager form of government still in use today.

The two women were civic leaders in Boulder at a time when men still made most of the decisions.

Campbell had moved from Iowa to Boulder with her husband and children in 1904. During World War I, while two of her sons were in the military service, she was involved in war relief activities. At the time, she discovered that she worked well with other people.

When Campbell was elected to the City Council, she made a list of Boulder's needs, then worked toward accomplishing them. Of her "no-nonsense" approach, a reporter wrote, "She doesn't run wild with fads — nor did she talk bonnets when the subject was bridges."

Campbell was an outspoken advocate of parks, baseball grounds, tennis courts, an art building and swimming pools. No doubt she was behind the construction of the large indoor Hygienic Pool, completed in 1923 (and since replaced with Spruce Pool) on the southeast corner of 21st and Spruce streets.

McHarg had moved from Illinois to Boulder with her parents in the 1890s. She attended the University of Colorado, where she was the second woman to receive a law degree. Her civic involvements were endless, from helping out on hospital boards to working without pay as a member of the Boulder Parks Commission. She was elected to the City Council in 1920.

Two years later, while still on the council, McHarg was elected president of the Boulder Woman's Club. During her tenure, she planted trees and shrubbery at Chautauqua and placed 20 iron benches downtown. Today, a few of these benches are at Chautauqua Park, and two remain downtown in front of the Courthouse Annex on 13th Street.

McHarg never had any children of her own, but she founded the Boulder Day Nursery, still in existence on Spruce Street. She also provided playgrounds for children at Chautauqua and was part of the commission which drew up the original laws governing the Colorado Juvenile Court.

Campbell also was involved in the community. At various times in her career, in addition to the Woman's Club, she was active in the Friday Musical Club, the Boulder chapter of the women's sorority P. E. O., and the Colorado Federation of Woman's Clubs. She also served on the advisory board of the League of Nations Association Inc., organized to work for the entrance of the United States into the league of the World Court.

After several years of failing health, Campbell died in 1956 and was buried next to her husband in Green Mountain Cemetery. McHarg suffered from crippling arthritis and spent the final 30 years of her life confined to a wheelchair. When she died in Arizona, in 1961, the Camera stated, "Mrs. McHarg has probably contributed more to the progress of Boulder than any other woman."

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