

FOUNDER

CATHERINE FILENE SHOUSE (1896-1994)

Born into a family whose fortune was built on a famous Boston department store, Catherine Filene (later married to Jouett Shouse) led a rich life dedicated to public service. Her résumé reveals one of the most accomplished and celebrated women of her time.

Mrs. Shouse was born in Boston, Massachusetts on June 9, 1896. She would become known as a leading activist for women's rights. But a large part of her impact in this area was made simply leading by example.

Consider just a few of her accomplishments in the earliest decades of the 20th century.

- ◆ 1918: graduated from Wheaton College as WWI raged on
- ◆ 1918: became Assistant to the Chief of Women's Division, U.S. Employment Service, U.S. Dept. of Labor
- ◆ 1919: became the first woman appointed to the Democratic National Committee, representing MA
- ◆ 1920: wrote a book, *Careers for Women*, published by Houghton Mifflin Company
- ◆ 1923: became the first woman to receive a master's degree in education from Harvard University
- ◆ 1925: co-founded the Women's National Democratic Club
- ◆ 1926: was the first woman appointed by President Calvin Coolidge as Chairman of the first Federal Prison for Women and instituted a job training and rehabilitation program
- ◆ 1929: founded the Institute of Women's Professional Relations and became its Chairman. Organized national conferences on opportunities for women with more than a high school education.

In her thirties, she had already accomplished more than most would in a lifetime. But she went on to work alongside every President from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Bill Clinton, as well as senators, diplomats, and international royalty to advance women's rights, education, and access to the arts.

By the time she was 80, she was still receiving national and international recognition for her public service. President Gerald R. Ford bestowed upon her the highest United States civilian award, The Presidential Medal of Freedom for her work promoting the arts. Queen Elizabeth II made her a Dame Commander of the British Empire. She was the first woman to receive the German Federal Republic's Commander's Cross of Merit. The Government of France named her "Officier Dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres."

Mrs. Shouse lived most of her life in and around Washington, D.C. Although she was a prominent member of Washington society, she cared as much about making the performing arts accessible to people of all ages and incomes as she did about national and international political affairs.

In 1966, Mrs. Shouse gave the United States government its first national park dedicated to the performing arts, Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts in Vienna, Virginia.

Mrs. Shouse was active and involved with Wolf Trap to the end of her life, dying just before turning 100 in 1994.

In 2017, Mrs. Shouse was honored with a Virginia Historical Marker on Trap Road.