



# Etta H. Maddox

1860-1933

## **The First Woman Admitted to Practice Law in Maryland**

*By Margaret Lynch*

Henrietta Haynie Maddox (Etta) was born on January 6, in or around 1860. Her father, John T. Maddox was a magistrate, known as Squire Maddox. Her mother was Susannah Maddox. Etta attended public schools in Baltimore Maryland and graduated from the Eastern Female High School. She was awarded one of the Peabody Gold Medals for high marks and a Maryland Institute Membership Ticket which allowed her to attend recitals and lectures at the institute free of charge for a year.

Following high school, Maddox attended the Peabody Institute for three years. She was a mezzo-soprano and studied for the Grand Opera in New York and Washington. She used her talent to sing in choirs and suffrage meetings throughout the city. While Maddox could have pursued a career in music, she was intrigued by law and wanted to follow that path.

Etta Maddox was the first woman to graduate from the old Baltimore Law School. Her graduating class consisted of 12 men and herself, the sole woman. Maddox was in the top of her class but received no graduation awards. After her fight to attain access to the Maryland bar as detailed above, she was the first woman licensed to practice law in the state of Maryland. She formally was admitted on September 11, 1902 and took her oath to practice in front of the Supreme Bench of Baltimore City on September 24, 1902.

Following her admittance to the bar, Maddox opened a law office in 1903 on the corner of St. Paul and Lexington Streets. After the Baltimore fire of 1904, Maddox opened an office at 424-425 Law Building. She spent a good deal of her time handling the legal and real estate work of her parent's estates.

Maddox's first case was filed in November 1904 in Circuit Court No. 2. The case was an action for limited divorce; Maddox was representing the wife. Her first court appearance was December 14, 1904, and was met with media coverage. Typical of the times, the reports regarding her case dealt with what she was wearing and her mannerisms in court rather than the positive outcome of the case for her client.

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Maddox was a promoter of the first suffrage body in the state organized in 1894, the Maryland Suffrage Association. The first suffrage bill introduced in the Maryland General Assembly was authored by Maddox and introduced in 1910. While the bill was tabled, and subsequent bills failed in 1912 and 1916, Maddox contributed greatly to the fight for women's suffrage.

Maddox devoted her career to the pursuit for women's rights. As Maddox said in January 1916, "We who believe that women are entitled to the right of suffrage, and who are trying to convince the members of the Legislature that they ought to give it to us, are in Annapolis on serious business. We are serious and earnest women working for a cause we believe to be right and just. We do not like being made objects of ridicule. Many men do not agree with us and we find no fault with them for that, if their objection to women suffrage is based on thoughtful and earnest consideration of the subject. But we do object to any legislator refusing to consider the subject which is being seriously considered by most of the civilized nations of the world."

Maddox died in the home of her sister, Mrs. J. William Funck on February 19, 1933. Maddox is buried on the hill near the chapel in Greenmount Cemetery, in Baltimore. On her tombstone is the design of the scales of justice with the inscription:

MARYLAND'S FIRST WOMAN LAWYER  
ETTA HAYNIE MADDUX  
DIED FEBRUARY 19, 1933  
GRADUATED IN LAW IN 1900  
ADMITTED TO PRACTICE IN THE STATE OF MARYLAND  
IN 1902  
AND THE DISTRICT COURTS OF THE UNITED STATES IN  
1911

Maddox's family and friends were proud of her accomplishments. Not only did Maddox ask people to seriously consider suffrage, she fought and won a battle for women regarding the right to practice law in Maryland. All women who practice law in Maryland are indebted to the courage, conviction and determination of Etta Maddox. Etta Maddox challenged the prevailing law, customs and standards to successfully bring basic equality to the practice of law.

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**Sources:** *Bradwell v. Illinois*, 83 U.S. 130 (1873); *In Re Maddox*, 93 Md. 727 (1901); Joan B. Gordon, *Women of the Baltimore Bar, Histories of the Bench and Bar of Baltimore City*, 97-106 (1997); Hollis Atkinson, *Etta Haynie Maddox Maryland's First Woman Lawyer; A Biography* (Feb. 19, 1950); *Women as Lawyers: Miss Etta Maddox and Other Women Before Committees*; *Heard with Attention*, *Baltimore Sun* (February 20, 1902)