



Women in the Law

Theme Introduction

By Donna M. MacKenzie

This year, the Women Lawyers Association of Michigan (WLAM) proudly celebrates its 100th anniversary. This historic milestone was kick started in April with our Centennial Gala. The theme was “Looking Back, Moving Forward.” At the gala, we honored the past presidents of our state organization and of each of our regional chapters and foundation. We recognized more than 350 women who have been leaders within the organization.

WLAM was founded one year before women had the right to vote in this country. Five self-proclaimed “ardent Portias of Detroit” organized the association for the purpose of cooperation, exchange of information, social benefit, and preservation of a high standard of ethics.

Today, the organization has grown extensively in size and purpose. Members include attorneys, judges, and law students. Our mission is to advance the interest of female members of the legal profession, promote improvements in the administration of justice, and promote equality and social justice for all people.

Currently, WLAM has seven regional chapters throughout the state: Great Lakes Bay, Macomb, Mid-Michigan, Oakland/Women's Bar Association, Washtenaw, Wayne, and Western. Each region has its own president, officers, and board of directors.

In 1983, WLAM established a foundation to support the education of women who show leadership in advancing the position of women in society. This mission is carried out annually through scholarship awards to outstanding female students attending Michigan law schools. Since its inception, the foundation has awarded more than \$500,000 to 246 female law students.

In 1992, the Black Women Lawyers Association of Michigan was founded by a group of African-American women from the metro Detroit area who wanted to focus on women's issues, increase black female representation in the judiciary and in public offices, and take a proactive stance on political issues. The organization focuses on the professional advancement of female lawyers and the promotion of women's rights.

1871

Sarah Killgore Wertman is the first woman to graduate from the University of Michigan Law School and become licensed as an attorney in Michigan

1878

Bessie Eaglesfield is the first woman to practice law in Grand Rapids

1888

Martha Strickland Clark is the first woman to argue before the Michigan Supreme Court

1899

The Michigan Supreme Court removes Ogemaw County Prosecuting Attorney Merrie H. Abbott from office because of her sex



In this theme issue of the *Michigan Bar Journal*, we look back on the history of WLAM and its members, review significant legal cases that have affected women's rights in the employment sector, and look forward to what the future holds for gender equality in the legal profession.

For more information about WLAM, visit <https://www.womenlawyers.org>. ■



Donna M. MacKenzie currently serves as the 100th president of the Women Lawyers Association of Michigan. She is also a shareholder at Olsman MacKenzie & Wallace with three locations in Michigan. She devotes a majority of her practice to representing individuals injured as a result of neglect and abuse in nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and adult foster care homes, as well as medical malpractice.

1919

The first all-woman Michigan jury deliberates on a civil case in Detroit

Congress passes the Nineteenth Amendment granting women the right to vote

Women Lawyers Association of Michigan (WLAM) is formed

Ella C. Eggleston is appointed Michigan's first female probate judge

WLAM Past Presidents

Julie A. Gaffay 2017–2018	Hon. Theresa Doss 1973–1974
Suzanne Sukkar 2016–2017	Sharon C. Ranucci* 1972–1973
Kristen Pursley 2015–2016	Hon. Gladys Y. Barsamian* 1971–1972
Michele Rivas 2014–2015	Virginia C. Dare* 1969–1971
Marla Linderman 2013–2014	Mary Ellen Fulton 1968–1969
Julie Wagner 2012–2013	Pearl D. Newcomb 1965–1966
Hon. Angela Sherigan 2011–2012	Mary Jane Liddy 1964–1965
Lysa Postula-Stein 2010–2011	Claire E. Morrison 1963–1964
Kim Winokur 2009–2010	Virginia E. Hetmanski 1962–1963
Ann Erickson Gault 2008–2009	Anne Alpern 1961–1962
Kristin Arnett 2007–2008	Ardis A. Smith 1960–1961
Kathleen M. Allen 2006–2007	Marjorie Jaros 1959–1960
Ann L. Routt 2005–2006	Loretta J. Tata 1958–1959
Lee A. Somerville 2004–2005	Hon. Dorothy R. Comstock 1957–1958
Hon. Lisa Sullivan 2003–2004	Ruth Schugin 1956–1957
Hon. Cylenthia LaToye Miller 2002–2003	Esther A. Morden 1955–1956
Laura M. Canfield 2001–2002	Caryl Hathaway 1954–1955
Lauren M. Tomayko 2000–2001	Esther Pollick 1953–1954
Margaret A. Costello 1999–2000	Mary N. Kolis 1952–1953
Barbara S. Weintraub Kimmel 1998–1999	Charlotte M. Sutton 1951–1952
Laura M. Slenzak Vogel 1997–1998	Madeline C. Dinu 1950–1951
Kimberly M. Cahill* 1996–1997	Gertrude E. Moder 1949–1950
Leslie Myles-Sanders 1995–1996	Elizabeth L. Stack 1948–1949
Elizabeth K. Brandsdorfer 1994–1995	Annette Thayer Means 1946–1947
Suellyn Scarnecchia 1993–1994	E. Katherine Kilpatrick 1945–1946
Paula M. Talarico 1992–1993	Zaio A. Woodford 1944–1945
Janet E. Lanyon 1991–1992	Regene Freund Cohane 1943–1944
Lisa A. Godfrey 1990–1991	Dorothy Benz Stark 1942–1943
Dawn Van Hoek 1989–1990	Lula Bachman 1941–1942
Kathleen Leavey-Kageff 1988–1989	Dorothy Hughitt 1940–1941
Hon. Marilyn Kelly 1987–1988	Lulu Seifert DeMay 1939–1940
Charlene M. Snow 1986–1987	Phoebe Munnecke 1938–1939
Deborah L. Miela 1985–1986	Mary H. Zimmerman 1937–1938
Linda L. Bruin 1984–1985	Evelyn A. Green 1935–1937
Mary M. Fowlie 1983–1984	Hazel Moran* 1933–1935
Chrysanthe A. Kotsis 1982–1983	Hon. Lila M. Neuenfelt* 1931–1933
Karen Colby Weiner 1981–1982	Rachel Newcomb 1929–1931
Rosemary K. Wolock 1980–1981	Catherine Donovan 1927–1929
Elaine Grand Stulberg 1979–1980	Anne Davidow* 1924–1927
Beverly J. Clark* 1978–1979	Henrietta Rosenthal 1921–1923
Julia Donovan Darlow 1977–1978	Theresa Doland Cornelius 1919–1921
Hon. Marianne O. Battani 1976–1977	
Judith D. Doran* 1975–1976	
Hon. Clarice Jobes Williams 1974–1975	

*Deceased

1920

Regene Freund Cohane, a leading Michigan Jewish attorney, is licensed to practice law

Ada Eldredge becomes the Upper Peninsula's first female attorney

1921

WLAM submits a petition to the Michigan legislature to protest capital punishment