

# Mary Tiera Farrow

Attorney

1880-1971

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by Susan Jezak Ford

Tiera Farrow was a pioneer in her field, proud to be the first female lawyer in Missouri and the third in the United States.

Born Mary Tiera Farrow in Columbus, Indiana, her family moved to Delphos, Kansas, when she was five years old. A childhood spent listening to tales of Abraham Lincoln's adventures as a lawyer fostered an ambition in her that could not be met by traditional female occupations of her day.

Farrow came to Kansas City to study business and found work as a "typewriter" in an office, writing letters on the newly designed typing machine. With her earnings, she enrolled in the Kansas City School of Law, the only woman in a class of 75. She graduated from law school in 1903, but had trouble finding a firm that would hire a woman lawyer.

Farrow eventually began a partnership with Anna L. Donahue, another graduate of the Kansas City School of Law. Most of Farrow's earliest clients were women, and she often had to accept home-canned fruits or needlework in payment for her fees. Farrow's ambition was not to be underestimated, however, and her reputation for hard work grew.

In 1916, Farrow served as the first female attorney to defend a woman charged with murder. Clara Schweiger had retained Farrow as her divorce attorney. Following the final hearing, the distraught Schweiger pulled a revolver and killed her husband. Farrow presented such a skilled defense that Schweiger was found guilty only of second-degree murder, receiving parole for poor health after serving two years in prison.

Farrow's accomplishments included appointment as the first female divorce proctor to the Jackson County Court, the first female to serve as substitute judge in Municipal Court, and author of a book based on her experiences, *Lawyer in Petticoats*. After practicing law for 54 years, she retired in 1957 from her last position as a legal aid counselor for the Kansas City Department of Welfare. She died at a nursing home in Lenexa at the age of 91.

**Sources**

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