

Dr. Kathryn McHale

Logansport, Cass County

July 22, 1889 – October 8, 1956

Kathryn McHale was born in Logansport, Indiana, Cass County on July 22, 1889, to Martin and Margaret McHale. Although she was a resident of Washington, DC, she maintained the family home in Logansport. She received her B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. at Columbia University in 1919, 1920 and 1926 and became a professor of education at the New York University. Later she taught for 15 years in Baltimore.

She was general director of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) from 1929 to 1950. During her twenty year tenure, she shaped AAUW policy and more than tripled its membership. She also was a member of the Purdue University Board of Trustees and a member of the National Committee for United Nations Education, Social, Cultural Organization.

In 1950, Dr. McHale was appointed by President Harry S. Truman to the Federal Subversive Activities Control Board (SACB), which investigated Communist infiltration into American organizations. However, her appointment was delayed by questions of her loyalty during the era of McCarthyism when she defended Dorothy Kenyon, a New York lawyer and political activist, and Esther Brunauer, an AAUW employee. After her appointment was finalized, she remained on the board until her retirement, serving longer than any other member. As a member of the board, she helped determine which organizations would be classified as Communist-action groups. After retirement and until her death she performed special research assignments for the subversive activities body.

Her desire to ensure women's representation on public boards and commissions fueled her choice to join the SACB, which many of her colleagues believed was hostile to academic organizations. She brought common sense thinking to her role and defended what she believed was right about these organizations. At one point, she stated, "This is the time for us to be courageous and active... We are seeing in this country the beginnings of 'witch hunts,' book burnings, etc. AAUW cannot hesitate to act when convinced that the search for truth, freedom of thought and expression are in jeopardy."

She died in Washington, DC after suffering a stroke. Frank M. McHale, her brother and only survivor, flew to Washington to bring her home to be buried in Logansport.



Photo Courtesy: Cass County Historical Society



Biographic information for this profile was provided by the Cass County Historical Society.

References will be published at the end of Women's History Month.