

Inez Milholland

“Gave her life to the fight for suffrage”

August 6, 1886 – November 25, 1916



Inez Milholland was born on August 6, 1886 in Brooklyn, New York to wealthy parents. Milholland grew up in New York City and London. She met militant suffragist Emmeline Pankhurst in England, who converted Milholland into a political radical, a transformation that would define her life.

Milholland attended Vassar College, where she continued to be politically active. The school had a rule that banned discussion of suffrage on campus, so Milholland organized meetings in a local cemetery. Milholland was also very active in extracurriculars at school, performing as Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as numerous roles in other productions. She was also a member of the Current Topics Club, the German Club, the debate team, and the unrecognized but very

present Socialist Club. Additionally, Milholland played basketball, tennis, golf, and field hockey. She broke Vassar's shot-put record in her sophomore year and won the college cup for best all-around athlete as a junior.

After her graduation from Vassar in 1909, Milholland began to work as a suffrage orator in New York City, also advocating for women's labor rights and was arrested for picketing alongside female workers during strikes in 1909 and 1910. During these strikes, Milholland used her status and resources as a member of the upper-class to pay bail for strikers and organize fundraisers. As a woman, she was rejected from several law schools but earned a law degree from New York University in 1912.

Milholland achieved wide-spread fame on March 3, 1913 when she served as the herald of the Woman Suffrage Procession in Washington, D.C. Riding a horse name Grey Dawn and dressed in dramatic, billowing white clothes, acting as the physical representation of the “New Woman” of the twentieth century. Milholland led thousands of women down Pennsylvania Avenue in DC in the first ever organized march on Washington. After the parade, Milholland continued to work for women's rights, giving numerous suffrage speeches both in the United States and England, and even campaigning for pacifism as World War I developed in Europe.

In 1913, while on an Atlantic Ocean crossing to England, Milholland met a Dutch coffee importer named Eugen Jan Boissevain. Milholland proposed to him while they were still aboard and they married shortly after the end of the voyage, with Boissevain supporting and encouraging his wife's work. In the following few years, Milholland's health became plagued by pernicious anemia, but she refused to stop her activist work. In 1916, Milholland began a suffrage tour of the Western United States. On October 22 of that same year, she collapsed while addressing a crowd in Los Angeles. Reports from audience members say that the last words she uttered before were addressed to Woodrow Wilson: “Mr. President, how long must women wait for liberty?” Milholland died a few weeks later at the age of thirty.

While Milholland did not live to see the passage of the 19th Amendment, she left behind a legacy of fighting for the rights of all disenfranchised people, regardless of their class or gender. After Milholland's death, her husband remarried poet Edna St. Vincent Millay, who in 1923 attended a memorial for Milholland at the Portrait Monument to Suffrage Pioneers at the U.S. Capitol and read a sonnet titled “To Inez Milholland” that implored listeners to carry on Milholland's fight for justice and equality.

Sources

<https://www.nps.gov/people/inez-milholland.htm>

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/women-of-protest/articles-and-essays/selected-leaders-of-the-national-womans-party/icon/>

<http://vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/alumni/inez-milholland.html>