

ELSIE H. WILCOX FOUNDATION

Bank of Hawaii, Trustee

Historical Note

Born in 1879 at Grove Farm in Lihue, Kauai, Elsie Hart Wilcox was the daughter of Samuel Whitney and Emma Washburn (Lyman) Wilcox. Elsie lived with her parents and five brothers and sisters at Grove Farm, the plantation established by her prosperous uncle, George Norton Wilcox, in a lifestyle that kept with their missionary heritage of simplicity and few luxuries.



Elsie, along with her siblings, was assigned chores at Grove Farm which along being a sugar plantation was also a nearly self-sufficient farm. She helped pick fruits and vegetables, tended to the farm animals, and also helped to provide food on the table by hunting and fishing.

As a child, Elsie was tutored at home and later attended Punahou School on Oahu. Elsie went on to continue her education, graduating in 1902 from Wellesley College in Massachusetts. Upon her return to Kauai, Elsie taught Sunday school at the Lihue Union Church, and in 1905 founded the Mokihana Club with other women for social and cultural enrichment, and involvement in community project activities.

During World War I, Elsie made bandages for the troops and engaged in home front activities. Elsie never married; however she contributed greatly to charitable causes and discreetly paid for the education of young people who had the ability to learn and lacked the funds for schooling.

If Elsie's missionary heritage formed the values that shaped her character, then her education at Wellesley College transformed her into a progressive woman of the early twentieth century. Elsie became the legal guardian of several orphaned children and supported or assisted widowed or deserted women. Elsie was appointed the Commissioner of Education from 1920 to 1932 and was a leading figure in most territorial institutions that dealt with women, children, religion and social welfare. In 1932, Elsie Wilcox became the first woman to be elected to the Territorial Senate and was re-elected to a second term from 1936 to 1939. She advocated for social security legislation and improved health and education in the Territory of Hawaii. Elsie also served as an early director of Bishop Trust Company and as Vice President of Grove Farm and G. N. Wilcox Memorial Hospital on Kauai.

Elsie devoted much time to civic and religious activities and was a member of the National Education Association, American Red Cross, the Institute of Pacific Relations, the Board of Hawaiian Evangelical Association (now the Hawaii Conference of the United Church of Christ), Kauai Historical Society, Kauai Salvation Army and the Kauai YWCA.

Elsie H. Wilcox died in 1954 at the age of 75. An excerpt from her gravestone reads, "I am among you as one who serves".

The Elsie H. Wilcox Foundation was established by Deed of Trust on February 15, 1938 for religious, charitable, scientific, literary or educational purposes. The Trust provides a flexibility to permit use of income to meet changing requirements or needs.