

Ida Henrietta Hyde

Pioneer Woman 2002

This inductee was one of the most extraordinary physiologists of her day. She was the first woman from the United States to be awarded a Ph.D. from Heidelberg University, in 1896. In 1902, she was the first woman elected as a member of the American Physiological Society. She was known as an extraordinary researcher and teacher, and also lectured widely on public health. And the University of Kansas was indeed fortunate to have her as a Professor of Zoology and Chair of the Physiology Department from 1898 – 1920.

Ida Henrietta Hyde was born in Davenport, Iowa, in 1857, the daughter of German immigrants. After attending the University of Illinois for a year, and several years of teaching in Chicago public schools, she graduated with a B.S. degree from Cornell University in 1891. She pursued scientific research and study in Germany with the assistance of what would become the American Association of University Women. Despite strong prejudice against women in science, she was awarded a Ph.D. in physiology, with honors, in 1896. In her article, “Before Women Were Human Beings” she described her struggles as the only woman student at Heidelberg University, where she was viewed as a “curiosity” by students, faculty, and faculty wives. She courageously dealt with the attitude of one of her primary faculty members, the most prominent physiologist of his day, against “skirts in the laboratory.”

After receiving her Ph.D., she was invited to do research at the Naples, Italy, Zoological Station, and the Harvard Medical School, the first woman to do so. University of Kansas Chancellor Francis Snow hired her as an Assistant Professor in 1898, and within a few years she established a separate department of physiology and was named full professor and chair. From 1900-1913 she was also a faculty member in the School of Medicine and completed most of the requirements for a M.D. degree during the summers at Rush Medical College in Chicago. Her primary scientific interests included phases of physiology in both invertebrates and vertebrates, including respiration, circulation, nervous function, and embryological development. She developed exacting micro methods for studying single cells. She was the first and only woman member of the American Physiological Society from 1902-1914.

She also had a strong interest in public health that led her to establish health programs on communicable diseases for children in public schools. She also demanded adequate restrooms for women students at KU, especially in science buildings that lacked facilities, since they assumed only men would study science. She demanded that the University hire women janitors, and promoted the hiring of women corrections officers in Lawrence. She also repeatedly asked for a salary equal to her male colleagues and promoted educational opportunities for women through research efforts at Woods Hole, MA, and in Naples, Italy. She influenced many women students to pursue science study and

endowed scholarships for women students at KU. One of her students was Cora M. Downs, noted microbiologist and the first woman to earn a Ph.D. from KU in 1924. Also, she supported the woman's suffrage movement. Ida Hyde also kept a diary so we know of the courage it took to be a women scientist in the Progressive Era. She spoke of betrayal and vulnerability as the chair of the physiology department... "I have lost all hope and courage." In a 1917 letter, former KU faculty member Kate Stephens remarked that she had recently talked with Ida Hyde and remarked, " She and I have been pricked by the same thorns, for both of us have been women-professors in the University of Kansas." She moved to California after leaving KU in 1920 and died at the age of 88. Concerning her the importance of her scientific endeavors she wrote, " All research requires patience and inspiration, and the results in themselves are difficult to estimate. They lead to other problems and may inspire others with new ideas"

The University of Kansas is inspired and honored to have as one of its distinguished faculty members this outstanding scientists, educator, and role model. The Commission on the Status of Women is proud to recognize Ida Henrietta Hyde as the Outstanding Pioneer Woman for 2002.