

**Bessie Mabel Seely, Esq**  
(1881-1981)



Graduation Day, 1903, and Miss Bessie Mabel Seely was the first — and only woman — to graduate in that class from Syracuse University School of Law.

Bessie Mabel Seely was the first woman to graduate from Syracuse University Law School and the first woman to be accepted to the New York State Bar. She went on to lead a distinguished career and an exemplary life as well.

Her career began as a law clerk in a Syracuse law firm, moving up to become a partner. From there she moved into the banking field, accepting a position in the Syracuse Trust Company. “Dynamic Detroit lured [her] from static Syracuse,” and while there at the Union Guardian Trust Company her writing talent and banking acumen combined to reach a wide reading audience. She wrote direct, informative, and highly readable advice in syndicated columns that appeared in “The Detroit Banker” and the magazine of the American Institute of Banking. Miss Seely had an outstanding record on the lecture and public speaking circuit.

As a result of the “panic days” of the 1930's the bank where she was employed was shut down. She moved back east and was hired to help the trust officers at the First National Bank of Rochester. This allowed her to be near her aging parents. At her father's death, she settled his estate, giving his tinsmith shop to the town of Walworth to be used as a library.



Miss Seely **chose** Cincinnati to be the place she would live the last half of her life, the place where she would be buried. She took up residence in a historical Cincinnati home she inherited from her brother-in-law. Retirement there did not find her idle. She became a member of the Cortland County Historical Society and joined the Board of the Kellogg Free Library--the first woman to serve on that board. Miss Seely kept up correspondence with a number of servicemen around the world. She pursued

her interest in textile arts and continued to be an avid reader.

Bessie M. Seely passed away June 26, 1981, one month after her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. She willed her historic home to the Kellogg Free Library as a permanent and living museum and her estate in trust to two educational institutions. At the end of her long life she could look back on a legacy of educational and philanthropic work: a life well lived.



History and pictures provided by the Cincinnati Area Heritage Society; courtesy of Sharon Pesesky.