

A Wider Horizon

How Katharine Dexter McCormick Changed the World and MIT

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Katharine Dexter in a biology lab, circa 1900

Throughout her life, Katharine Dexter McCormick (August 27, 1875 – December 28, 1967) widened the horizons of what was possible for women. A suffragist, philanthropist, and scientist, she broke boundaries from an early age, becoming one of the first women to graduate from MIT. She later went on to fund McCormick Hall, the first on-campus dormitory for women at MIT.

Enrolling at MIT in 1896, first as a non-degree seeking “special student” and then as a matriculated student, she majored in biology (course VII), making her the 14th woman to graduate from MIT with a bachelor’s degree in the subject. She was one of only six women in her graduating class, and the only one to major in biology.



Katharine Dexter McCormick at a suffragist rally, 1917

Katharine was also a vocal supporter of women's rights. She played key leadership roles in the women's suffrage movement, worked to advance women's presence in higher education and the professional world, and funded the development of the world's first birth control pill. McCormick's philanthropy left an enduring mark on medical and scientific institutions – from universities to research laboratories, hospitals, and beyond. She donated millions of dollars to the Planned Parenthood Foundation, to Stanford Medical School for women's education, and to the Worcester Foundation.

Explore McCormick's impact in person in the Hayden Library Loft and through [our online](#)