

Women's History Month: Meet CSU's first female graduate

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Throwback gallery: Women at CSU

The Colorado Aggie girl is "pretty and witty and nice to talk with, too. She's charming and clever and brilliant in her style" — or so says a 1917 poem published in the Rocky Mountain Collegian.

But in 1884 the Colorado Aggie Girl was singular. That year, when Colorado Agricultural College — now CSU — celebrated its first graduating class, only three people received diplomas and one was a woman — Elizabeth "Libby" Coy.



Libby Coy Lawrence atop Horsetooth Rock.
THE ARCHIVE AT FORT COLLINS MUSEUM OF DISCOVERY

As the first female graduate of the state's land grant university, Coy represented a new time for women in agricultural communities like Fort Collins. As stated in the Morrill Act of 1862, land grant universities, unlike the state's liberal arts colleges, offered agricultural and mechanical classes for the laboring and industrial classes. That's how it was written — the universities were for the "classes," not "men" necessarily.

Because of that, many of the 19 land grant universities established in the late 1800s were coeducational and their female students became known as "coeds," according to a 1985 report by Dr. Alison Thorne of Utah State University.

“Strong women and sympathetic men pushed for equal educational opportunities and the state legislatures could see economies in not having to establish separate facilities for women,” Thorne wrote. “The few women who attended the land-grant colleges in those earliest years took the same courses that men did.”

Coy was born in 1865, the eldest daughter of John and Emily Coy. The Coys were early settlers of the Cache la Poudre Valley and homesteaded the 100-acre Coy-Hoffman farm, which is now marked at the southwest corner of Lincoln Street and Lemay Avenue. Today it's home to Woodward.

Coy enrolled in Colorado Agricultural College, which at that time only offered a handful of classes, like arithmetic, English, U.S. history, natural philosophy, horticulture and farm economy. Coy graduated with a bachelor of science degree in 1884. Soon after, as more women enrolled, the university started offering liberal arts courses, which were more "appropriate" for women at the time, according to the Archive at the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery.

In 1934, Coy and her fellow 1884 graduates Leonidas Loomis and Dr. George Clover were photographed at their 50-year class reunion. In the 50 years after graduating from C.A.C., Coy had married one of the college's mechanical engineering professors, J.W. Lawrence and had a son, George.

After graduating, and before marrying in 1890, she also taught preparatory courses at the college. After marrying, she became active in the Fort Collins Woman's Club and was elected its president in 1901. She also remained active at the university and was pictured moving books to the campus' new library in 1928.

Coy Lawrence and her husband remained in Fort Collins, where they lived at 206 W. Myrtle St. J.W. Lawrence died in 1933 and Libby Coy Lawrence died in 1944. They're buried next to each other in Grandview Cemetery.



Libby Coy Lawrence with Leonidas Loomis, left, and Dr. George Glover, right. The three made up the first graduating class at Colorado Agricultural College in ... [Show more](#)

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

