

CRYSTAL CATHERINE EASTMAN

Born: June 25, 1881, Marlborough, MA

Died: July 28, 1928, Erie, PA

Cemetery Location: Section 5 Lot 207 NP

Crystal Eastman was an American lawyer, antimilitarist, feminist, socialist, and journalist. She is best remembered as a leader in the fight for women's suffrage, as a co-founder and co-editor with her brother Max Eastman of the radical arts and politics magazine *The Liberator*, co-founder of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and co-founder in 1920 of the American Civil Liberties Union. In 2000 she was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York.

Crystal was born in Marlborough, Massachusetts, on June 25, 1881, the third of four children. Her oldest brother, Morgan, was born in 1878 and died in 1884. The second brother, Anstice Ford Eastman, who became a general surgeon, was born in 1878 and died in 1937. Max was the youngest, born in 1882.

In 1883 their parents, Samuel Elijah Eastman and Annis Bertha Ford, moved the family to Canandaigua, NY. In 1889, their mother became one of the first women ordained as a Protestant minister in America. Her father was also a Congregational minister, and the two served as pastors at the church of Thomas K. Beecher near Elmira.

Crystal and her brother Max were influenced by humanitarian traditions. Max became a socialist activist in his early life, and Crystal had several common causes with him. They were close throughout her life, even after he had become more conservative. The siblings lived together for several years on 11th Street in Greenwich Village among other radical activists. Crystal graduated from Vassar College in 1903 and received an MA in sociology from Columbia University in 1904. Gaining her law degree from New York University Law School, in which she graduated second in the class of 1907.

Crystal's first job was investigating labor conditions for The Pittsburgh Survey. Her report, *Work Accidents and the Law* (1910), became a classic and resulted in the first workers' compensation law, which she drafted while serving on a New York state commission. She continued to campaign for occupational safety and health while working as an investigating attorney for the U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations during Woodrow Wilson's presidency. She was at one time called the "most dangerous woman in America," due to her free-love idealism and outspoken nature.

During a brief marriage to Wallace J. Benedict, which ended in divorce, Crystal moved to Milwaukee with him. There she managed the unsuccessful 1912 Wisconsin suffrage campaign. When she returned east in 1913, she joined Alice Paul, Lucy Burns, and others in founding the militant Congressional Union, which became the National Woman's Party. After the passage of the 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote in 1920, Eastman and Paul wrote the Equal Rights Amendment, first introduced in 1923. She also delivered the speech, "Now We Can Begin", following the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, outlining the work that needed to be done in the political and economic spheres to achieve gender equality.

During World War I, Eastman was one of the founders of the Woman's Peace Party. Renamed the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in 1921, it remains the oldest extant women's peace organization. When the United States entered World War I, Eastman organized (with Roger Baldwin and Norman Thomas) the National Civil Liberties Bureau. The NCLB grew into the American Civil Liberties Union, with Baldwin at the head and Eastman functioning as attorney-in-charge. Eastman is credited as a founding member of the ACLU.

In 1916, Eastman married the British editor and antiwar activist Walter Fuller, who had come to the United States to direct his sisters' singing of folksong. They had two children, Jeffrey and Annis. They worked together as activists until the end of the war; then he worked as the managing editor of *The Freeman* until 1922 when he returned to England. He died in 1927, nine months before Crystal, ending his career editing *Radio Times* for the BBC. After the war, Eastman organized the First Feminist Congress in 1919. Her activities led to her being blacklisted during the Red Scare of 1919 - 1920. She struggled to find paying work. Her only paid work during the 1920's was as a columnist for feminist journals, notably *Equal Rights* and *Time and Tide*.

Crystal Eastman died on July 28, 1928, of nephritis. Her friends were entrusted with her two children, then orphans, to raise them until adulthood.

Eastman has been called one of the United States' most neglected leaders, because, although she wrote pioneering legislation and created long-lasting political organizations, she disappeared from history for fifty years. Freda Kirchwey, then editor of *The Nation*, wrote at the time of her death: "When she spoke to people, whether it was to a small committee or a swarming crowd, hearts beat faster. She was for thousands a symbol of what the free woman might be."

Her speech "Now We Can Begin", given in 1920, is listed as #83 in American Rhetoric's Top 100 Speeches of the 20th Century. In 2000, Crystal Eastman was inducted into the (American) National Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York.

