



## *Awards Celebration*

*March 21, 2010*

*Legacy Awardee*



***Catherine Montgomery***

**1867 - 1957**



Educator, suffragist, homesteader, early environmentalist, philanthropist, leader in the women's club movement of the 1890s, her most enduring legacy is as *Mother of the Pacific Crest Trail* that runs 2,650 miles from Canada to Mexico.

*Photo courtesy of WWU Wilson Library  
Special Collections*



## *The YWCA Northwest Women's Hall of Fame Salutes Catherine Montgomery (1867-1957)*

*Born two years after the Civil War ended, Catherine Montgomery died in 1957 at the dawn of the Space Age. During her 90 years among us, she was a leader in the advancement of women and in the preservation of the natural world for future generations.*

*She was one of a handful of faculty members when New Whatcom Normal School, which would become Western Washington University, opened its doors in 1899. Over the 27 years that she supervised the primary education program, she trained thousands of young women for the schools of a new and growing state. Interviewed at the age of 100, a student who received her teaching certificate in 1926 recalled her mentor vividly as a "wonderful, wonderful teacher... We all tried to pattern her."*



*Throughout her life's journey, she traveled in the company of those who blazed trails for women of today. The year after she joined the Normal School faculty, she became a founding member of Bellingham's PLF Club, which stood for Progressive, Literary and Fraternal. Part of a national movement spurring greater involvement of women in cultural and civic affairs, the club's first president was Frances Axtell, later to be one of the first two women elected to the state legislature in 1912.*

*Catherine Montgomery fought to make that possible. With her best friend, Ida Agnes Baker, our 2008 Legacy Awardee, she campaigned vigorously for women's right to vote. That long-awaited goal became reality for Washington women in 1910, a decade before it was adopted throughout the nation.*

*Nothing daunted her. Starting in 1902, as a single woman, she homesteaded 160 acres in what is now the Mt. Baker National Forest. In 1906, she was among 47 women to attempt the first climb of Mt. Baker's northeast face -- the women wearing bloomers. A 1955 Sports Illustrated article notes that, while some called their feat "unwomanly," it was a "joyous victory over convention and the wilderness."*

*She shared her love of the natural world with her students and friends, among them Washington's Poet Laureate Ella Rhodes Higginson, another member of the PLF Club and our 2004 Legacy Award honoree. In honor of her friend, who died in 1940, Catherine Montgomery donated a parcel of land to Federation State Park near Enumclaw. Her entire estate was devoted to expansion of the park, now over 600 acres of preserved natural beauty. The Catherine Montgomery Nature Interpretive Center celebrates that gift.*

*Of her many legacies, perhaps the most enduring is her vision of a hiking trail along the ridges of the Pacific Coast that she began to champion starting in 1926. Others took up the cause and, today, that 2,650 mile-long trail that runs from Canada to Mexico attracts thousands of hikers. She is justly called "The Mother of the Pacific Crest Trail."*



*Born in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Catherine Montgomery embodies the qualities of perseverance, courage and dedication that we of the 21<sup>st</sup> seek to emulate.*

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