



PENNSYLVANIA CONSERVATION  
**HERITAGE**  
PROJECT

## **Fact Sheet to accompany “Mira Lloyd Dock’s Beautiful Crusade”**

*“Mira Lloyd Dock did more for forests than any woman in the United States”*

— U.S. Chief Forester Enos Mills in 1909

### **Childhood Influences**

Born Christmas Day, 1853, she started her childhood in rural central Pennsylvania where her parents encouraged outdoor play and exploration. As a young child, she was home-schooled by her mother, then attended schools in Harrisburg, Lancaster and Media, PA.

Following the end of the Civil War, her parents moved the family to Harrisburg to enable the rest of the children to attend school. Here, Mira had daily exposure to the rapid and uncontrolled industrialization taking place in urban areas throughout the east, and the associated pollution and urban ugliness occurring at that time.

### **Family Responsibilities**

Mira received the basic education of a privileged young woman of the time, but was 23 years old when her mother died, requiring her to put further training on hold. She became the primary caretaker for her younger siblings, but that eventually took a heavy toll on Mira. In 1878, her father sent her on a trip to the Rocky Mountains with the hope of renewing her health and spirit. She was delighted by the many new plants she encountered in Colorado, which helped inspire her to continue her personal study of botany.

As her siblings grew up and left home for schooling, her time was still not her own due to her father taking ill in the 1890s, providing nursing care until his death in 1895.

### **Becoming a Scientist and Lecturer**

Mira was 42 when her father died in 1895. Knowing of her two decades of personal sacrifice, her siblings encouraged and helped her to enroll in the University of Michigan where she studied botany for a year.

Though women in the late 1800s had limited scientific job opportunities, Mira realized that with her personal and university training she could offer public lectures and influence people through slideshows and her passion for nature.

She became a very popular lecturer throughout Pennsylvania and surrounding states, focusing on native flowers and other plants. As time went on, her topics broadened to include talks on forestry and village improvement.

### **European Influences**

In 1899 Mira travelled to London to attend the International Congress of Women as the official representative of the Federation of Pennsylvania Women and the Parks Association of Philadelphia. There she learned more about the Woman's Suffrage Movement and advances in plant sciences of the day. She also travelled to learn about municipal improvements in England and Germany for roads, sanitation, parks, and recreation for the working class; and studied forestry practices in Germany.

She returned to Pennsylvania with many new ideas on how to clean up the water and land being polluted in American urban centers, setting her sights first on Harrisburg.

### **The City Beautiful Movement**

The year before, in 1898, Mira had helped to found the Civic Club of Harrisburg. Upon her return, she immediately began giving talks to her club members about what she learned in Europe. At the same time, she teamed up with Horace McFarland to widen her audience and give talks to influential men of the city. She also wrote newspaper and journal articles about the need for city beautification and sanitation, and helped to formulate a plan for improvements.

A bond issue passed soon thereafter with widespread support Harrisburg to raise money for a comprehensive improvement plan, which included building infrastructure for drinking water, sewage, and storm water. The plan also valued reconnected the city with the riverfront. In addition to the creation of Riverfront Park, the plan laid out numerous playgrounds and a series of parks, parkways, and natural areas around Harrisburg – referred to by Mira as the city's "Emerald Necklace."

The City Beautiful Movement in Harrisburg, influenced greatly by Mira's work and vision, not only helped to clean up and modernize Pennsylvania's capital city, it served as a model for medium and small cities throughout the state and the country.

### **Early Forest Protection**

In 1901, Mira used her expertise and her connections to become the first woman to be appointed to the state's Forest Commission, and the first woman in the world to hold such a position.

Since the state did not have any foresters or rangers in the early 1900s, Mira volunteered to travel throughout north-central Pennsylvania to inspect the large, cutover and remote forest lands that were coming up for sale.

During her first year on the Commission, more than 175,000 acres were added to the state forest reserves. By the time Mira retired from the Commission in 1913, the state's total forest reserves increased to nearly one million acres.

### **Creating the State Forest Academy**

Mira's influence within the Forestry Commission also extended to Dr. Joseph T Rothrock, who was looking to improve the management of Pennsylvania's newly-acquired state forests. She helped to create the State Forest Academy, which later became the Penn State Mont Alto campus.

She lectured and taught botany there, and was an important influence in the lives of the young men who became Pennsylvania's first cadre of professional foresters. In 1909, The U.S. Chief Forester Enos Mills wrote: "Mira Lloyd Dock did more for forests than any woman in the United States."

### **Mira Lloyd Dock's Legacy**

Mira pushed hard for livable, healthy cities with access to parks and playgrounds by all of its residents. Her work resulted in dramatic changes in the way many smaller urban areas in America dealt with sewage, flooding, drinking water, parks, recreation, and general beautification.

At the same time, she raised the awareness of our need to protect and nurture expansive tracts of forests for watershed protection and wild habitat, and helped Pennsylvania develop its national leadership in forestry and forestry education programs.

"She's not wealthy. She's not prominent. She's not well-known and she's a woman. And, yet she accomplishes quite a bit in one lifetime. And I think she's a great example of the power of one voice." *Susan Rimby*

"... her legacy will be that every person will see that despite their cultural confines, which for her were formidable, they can have a voice, they can make a difference, they can follow their passion." *Elle Morgan*

### **Additional Resources**

Susan Rimby. *Mira Lloyd Dock and the Progressive Era Conservation Movement*. University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012.

Norman L. Lacasse. *An Essay on the professional life of Mira Lloyd Dock*. [insert publisher], 2008.

"Mira Lloyd Dock," from *Digital Harrisburg: Exploring the History, Society, and Culture of Harrisburg, PA*. Several pages of interesting commentary and historical notes by Caitlyn Coleman, upon reading papers and other historic documents from the State Archives about Mira Lloyd Dock and the City Beautiful Movement. <http://digitalharrisburg.com/category/mira-lloyd-dock/>

*Mira Lloyd Dock Papers, 1879-1947.* Penn State University Archives. This collection includes personal and official correspondence documenting Mira Lloyd Dock's term as Commissioner of Forestry (1901-1913) and her continuing involvement with forestry throughout her life. There are also observations on a visit she made to Germany (1899), photographs of plants, and other letters she received. [www.libraries.psu.edu/findingaids/1526.htm](http://www.libraries.psu.edu/findingaids/1526.htm)

## **Local Speaker Ideas for Film Screening Event**

Botany professor

Member of the Harrisburg Civic Club

PA Bureau of Forestry

PSU Mont Alto campus professor or researcher

Master Gardener

Pennsylvania Federation of Garden Clubs

Local sewage authority

Professor or writer on women's history

Pennsylvania League of Women Voters

County Conservation District

Watershed protection group

County or city planner

Local Environmental Advisory Council member

Local Girl Scout Leader

Student majoring in non-traditional career