

Virginia Claypool Meredith

(1848 - 1936)

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Sources:

- Image: "Mrs. Virginia C. Meredith," photograph, n.d., in "Virginia Claypool Meredith (1848-1936)," Richmond and Wayne County Biographies, Morrison Reeves Library, Richmond, Indiana, accessed <http://www.mrlinfo.org/history/biography/meredithvc.htm>



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When Virginia Claypool Meredith of Cambridge City inherited Oakland Farm in 1882, she chose to take over management of the large farming and stockbreeding business at a time when this was not common for women. She improved and grew the business, becoming one of the most renowned stockbreeders in the country. At an Interstate Farmers' Institute in 1895, she was given the lasting title of "Queen of American Agriculture."

Meredith's agricultural expertise made her a sought after voice for the advancement of women in agricultural fields, starting in the 1880s and lasting throughout her career. In this period of unequal opportunity and pay, she encouraged more women to go into farming because their "work is not discredited on account of sex." Through speeches before farmers' institutes and women's clubs and a regular editorial page in the *Breeder's Gazette*, her advocacy for women's educational, professional, and suffrage rights reached an international audience. In her 1891 speech to the National Council of Women, Meredith asked, "Is

it visionary to predict that the real reform of the times is indicated by the present forceful impulse among women to put effort, energy, and ability into industrial channels, where earning capacity is the measure of success?"

First at the University of Minnesota and then at Purdue University, Meredith organized home economics departments, which she defined broadly enough that classes included horticulture, agriculture, and stockbreeding. Thus, many of the female students were enrolled in classes with male students, a step toward equal educational opportunity. She told the *Indianapolis News* in 1901, "This I consider the finest work I have done, though far from being as pleasant as farming." In 1921, Meredith became the first female trustee of Purdue University, a position she held until her death in 1936.