

IOWA HISTORY



(Courtesy Library of Congress)
Sailboat similar to Caroline Jarvis's craft

Gallant Girl Rescues Friend

It was a lovely summer day in June 1901 when Caroline Jarvis's heroic actions near the Coralville Dam caused her to make history at the University of Iowa in Iowa City where she was a student—a member of the class of '02.

Caroline was a popular athlete and member of the basketball team at the university. She was considered an expert when it came to sailing and swimming. She owned her own sailboat and was sailing with a fellow male student, RM Fagan, when a sudden gust of wind caused the "frail craft" to capsize and toss the occupants into the current. The water was estimated to be 30 feet deep at the location where the two struggled to survive. They were just above the Coralville Dam.

While Mr. Fagan was well known at the university, he was not very athletic and was having a difficult time in the water. Caroline assisted her "helpless companion" to the capsized boat and "with the skill of a longshoreman" she "unshipped the mast." "Sturdily" swimming at the rear of the boat, she was able to propel the craft into shallow water. Caroline and Mr. Fagan reached the shore "totally exhausted." Rescuers had to carry Mr. Fagan from the water when they reached shore.

The rescue was a "sensation" in Iowa City. The university faculty saw it as an opportunity to take an unprecedented step. For the first time in its history the faculty voted to present an official "medal for bravery" to a student. The awards ceremony took place in the

chapel after a faculty meeting. In addition, the class of 1902 awarded Caroline a “golden token” for her rescue of RM Fagan.

Caroline’s bravery and the award presentation received national attention when newspapers across the country carried stories about her. The *San Francisco Call* described Caroline as a “gallant girl.”

Source

Gallant Girl Wins a Medal,” *San Francisco Call*, June 4, 1901.

©Cheryl Mullenbach