Celebrating Women's History Month: Notable Women in IP

In honor of Women's History Month, Banner Witcoff highlights a small handful of women who have made incredible impacts on intellectual property throughout history.

Mary Kies

On May 5, 1809, Mary Kies received the first U.S. patent issued to a woman for her new method of weaving straw with silk to create women's hats. First Lady Dolley Madison publicly thanked Keis for helping boost the nation's hat industry, as it was one of the few industries that continued to thrive during the War of 1812.

Florence King

Florence King is recognized as the first woman registered to practice before the USPTO in 1897. She went on to be the first woman to argue a patent case before the Supreme Court. After hearing the arguments in an obscure patent dispute in 1922, the Court initially ruled against King. However, a year later she tried again and became the first woman to win a case before the Supreme Court.

Elizabeth Magie

In the 1970s, a decade-long trademark infringement lawsuit revealed that the 'Monopoly' board game was not invented by Charles Darrow in 1933, but rather was heavily based on a patented game created by Elizabeth Magie.

Magie was granted a U.S. patent in 1904 for her board game 'The Landlords Game,' which she self-published in 1906. Despite her game not performing well, many homemade versions began to pop up, leading to Charles Darrow's version we know today as 'Monopoly'. Charles became the first millionaire game designer in history, while Magie is said to have earned only $500 from her game.

Michelle K. Lee

In 2012, Michelle Lee became the Director of the USPTO's office in Silicon Valley. Two years later, President Barack Obama appointed Lee to Deputy Under Secretary of Commerce for Intellectual Property and Deputy Director of the USPTO and then nominated her for the agency's top leadership position. On January 13, 2015, Lee was sworn in as the first woman to serve as Director of the USPTO.

Read more about Michelle K. Lee and her career by clicking here.

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