



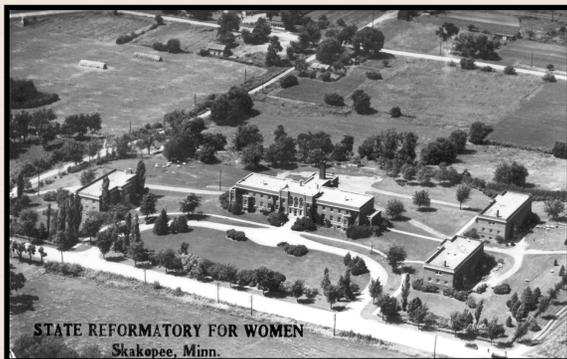
Women working on the farm at the State Reformatory for Women. From Minnesota Historical Society, 1920.

As a result of her work, the bill to create a women's prison in Shakopee finally happened. They purchased 167 acres of land what was then at the edge of Shakopee.

The Women's Reformatory began in Shakopee, Minnesota in 1920.

Isabel Davis Higbee had died on March 4, 1915 at age 65 at the capitol. She is buried at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Maplewood, Minnesota.

And even though she never lived in Shakopee, her memory is here, in the hall and plaque that notes the grateful appreciation for Isabel for the good of the women in Shakopee and the state of Minnesota!



STATE REFORMATORY FOR WOMEN  
Shakopee, Minn.



This plaque stated: Isabel Higbee Hall. This building so named in grateful appreciation of the life and labors of Mrs. Isabel Higbee who died March 4, 1915, in the state capitol in St. Paul after pleading for the establishment of this institution. When the State Reformatory for Women moved across the street in 1986, a new cottage was named after Isabel Higbee Hall. The new place is called the Minnesota Correctional Facility-Shakopee, and it is the women-only state prison in Minnesota. In 1986, the census was 92 inmates. Today there are close to 600.



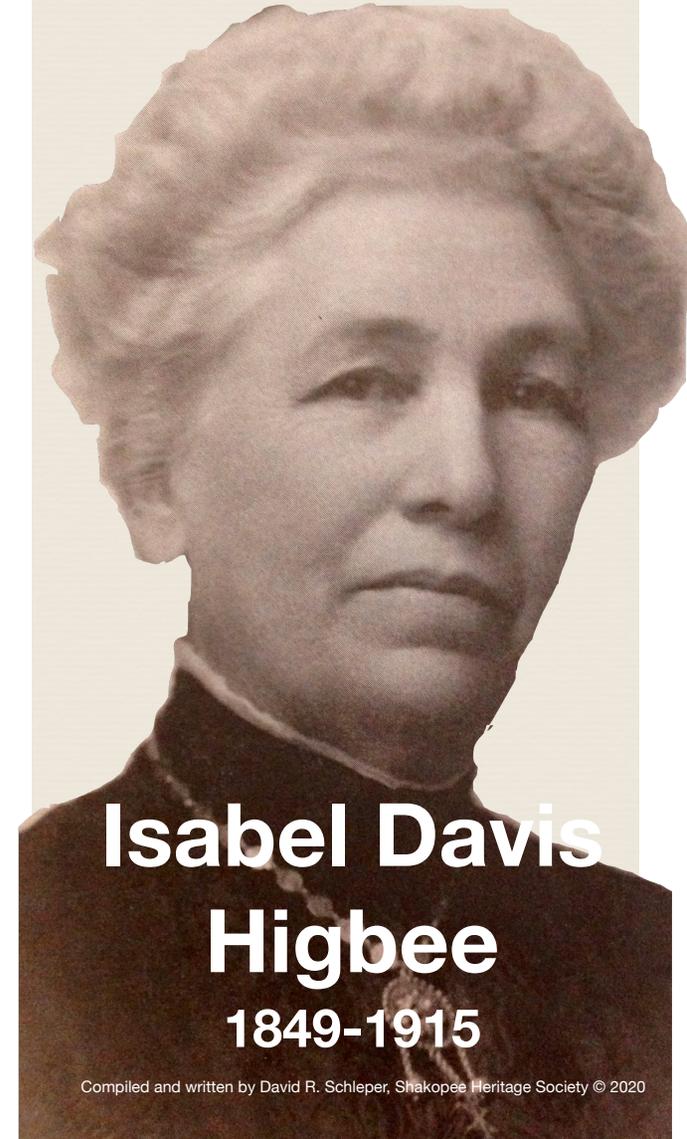
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## SHAKOPEE HERITAGE SOCIETY



**Isabel Davis  
Higbee  
1849-1915**



Isabel David was born in Warren, Vermont on April 24, 1849. She became a teacher at age 14. Isabel moved to Minneapolis in 1870 and taught there. She married Chester Gross Higbee in January 1876.

Isabel spoke out for the needs of women and children, the poor, and the downtrodden. "There was a time when individual effort was sufficient to meet social needs, but life was grown so complex that organization is absolutely necessary."

In 1908, with the help of Isabel, the state of Minnesota constructed a separate school for delinquent girls (the Minnesota Home School for Girls) in Sauk Centre.

But for 20 years, Isabel Davis Higbee and others tried to provide humane treatment for women convicted of crimes, but the lawmakers did not support it.

On March 4, 1915, Isabel Davis Higbee and 50 other women went to the capitol, and Isabel decided to testify at the meeting.



On left are a few women who were put into the Stillwater Prison for men until the women's reformatory was added in Shakopee in 1920. In middle is a picture of Isabel Davis Higbee, who was a strong supporter of women's suffrage. On right is the State Reformatory for Women in Shakopee. The reformatory was torn down and a new facility was build across the street in 1986.

On that same day, a bill to allow women to vote was turned down. Again. It would be another five years before women got the right to vote. (And only if you were white.)

Isabel was not happy. But Isabel had a plan.

She stood and faced the men (who were the only ones who were allowed to vote) and told them they should have a women's reformatory. There was no place in Minnesota for women in trouble. She faced the men in the committee room, across the gulf that custom, law, and privilege had created.

And she spoke.

She said women should not be housed in Stillwater Prison. Women needed to have a place, a place to provide a humane and healthy environment that would help them return to society as contributing members.

Isabel Davis Higbee made a plea for establishment of a reformatory for women. She argued in favor of a new institution where women offenders would neither be incarcerated with male inmates

nor with teenage girls. At the time, the majority of women law-breakers were found guilty of prostitution and were usually fined and sent home or committed to the workhouse for a short term. Others were sent to the State Prison, the State Reformatory or the girls' school. The superintendent at the reformatory took women inmates into his home or placed them in the local jail.

"We must give the women fresh air, God's glorious sunshine, and as much freedom as is consistent with discipline....I shall trust your judgement to accord us a women's reformatory," said Isabel Davis Higbee.

When she sat down at the capitol, Isabel coughed.

Then Isabel Davis Higbee fell over...dead!

People were shocked, and they started to think about what she had to say. One woman said, "...no man can refuse us the reformatory when it is realized that women are willing to give up their lives for it."

The legislature finally responded.