

Women in Oklahoma History

In Ponca City stands a statue that is a tribute to the pioneer woman. The sculptor captured the strength, courage and determination of the women who came to a wild land and tamed it with their culture and their homemaking skills. They played a major role in bringing civilization, learning, and morality to the hills and prairies of Oklahoma. Many women left their own families behind and followed their husbands to a promising land. Some came as wives. Others came as missionaries, teachers, homesteaders, or business-women. When they arrived, they changed things.

These early women emigrants came by foot, by wagon, or by train. They carried few possessions. When they staked their claims, they used their imaginations, creativity, and talents along with their physical strength to “dress up” their sod houses, dug-outs, or tents to make them as home-like as possible. They fought the extremes of heat and cold. They fought the pests, reptiles, and insects that tried to inhabit their humble dwellings. They fought the loneliness and the dangers. And they won! They survived.

There was no one except themselves to create a religious or educational atmosphere for their families, and they made it happen. Frequently, they had to teach the basic educational skills of reading, writing, and figuring simple arithmetic to their children. Since their daily chores were massive, they usually taught their children by lamplight around a kitchen table. But there was little time for instruction. They had to weave cloth and then make it into clothing. They had to make quilts and bedding, raise food and preserve it, take care of the house, prepare the meals, and help their husbands with field chores and animal husbandry. They raised chickens and hogs, and they milked cows.

Pioneer women possessed endurance and initiative (taking action when needed). At times, they were forced by circumstances to accept an independent role.

Education and religion were important to pioneer women. Because of them, schools and churches were built almost as quickly as were homes.

The statue of one pioneer woman in Ponca City is a symbol. There is





**Pioneer Woman
statue in Ponca
City.**

no single pioneer woman, no single description. They came from all walks of life and created their existence in many different ways. What binds them into one is the perseverance, the endurance, the tremendous spirit that enables them to turn a prairie into civilization.

The pioneer spirit did not cease with statehood. It was a legacy, a heritage. When statehood came, there were women who used that legacy to influence the direction that the state would take. There were many such women, and they left a legacy for those who would follow them.

SOCIAL REFORM. At age thirty-eight, Kate Barnard, Commissioner of Charities and Corrections, was one of the first women in the nation elected to a statewide office. The year was 1908. At that time, as a woman, she didn't even have the right to vote.

When Kate Barnard took office, Oklahoma was boarding its prisoners in Kansas prisons. Rumors of inhumane treatment in the Kansas prison at Lansing, where most of the Oklahoma prisoners were held, led Kate to travel to Kansas to tour the facility herself. It was her duty as commissioner to inspect jails and prisons where Oklahoma prisoners were held, even if those prisons were in another state.

The Lansing warden questioned her right to tour the prison as a state official. However, he offered to show her through the prison as a private citizen. A member of the governing board for the prison also tried to prevent Kate from making the inspection, but the Kansas officials were dealing with a ninety-pound dynamo. Her only purpose in life was to help the poor and downtrodden and to rehabilitate, if possible, those who had gone wrong and had wound up in prison.

"I am commissioned by a million and a half Oklahoma citizens to investigate this penitentiary. Either show me through as a state officer of Oklahoma, or order me out. I shall do my duty here, unless I am forced from this institution," declared Kate Barnard.

Blustering with threats to order her from the prison, the warden argued and argued. However, he had met his match. Finally, he conceded.

A new threat arose when Kate demanded to interview each Oklaho-

ma prisoner in private. The conflict was resolved when the warden once again gave in to Kate's request.

When Kate returned to Oklahoma, she gave a full report on the inhumane treatment and the poor conditions in the Kansas prison. As a result, Kansas, Missouri, and Texas made some efforts toward prison reform. Oklahoma brought its prisoners home and built what was then a model prison at McAlester.

Prisoners were not Kate Barnard's only interest. Her great concern was for impoverished children. She found them in public institutions in shocking numbers, in pest houses of filth, disease, semi-starvation and brutal treatment.

Kate was far ahead of her time. She recognized the physical and mental impact of poverty upon children, and she observed that crime is often directly related to that circumstance. She recognized that alcoholism is an illness and that alcoholics need treatment, not imprisonment. She also knew that most prisoners had few, if any, work skills.

Because of her intelligence, keen observations, character, and foresight, the first legislature passed twenty-two bills which she had sponsored. It followed her leadership in establishing all the major state institutions, including schools for delinquents, the blind, deaf, insane, mentally ill, and orphaned.

Her crusading spirit took her one step too far. When she discovered that some white Oklahomans were getting themselves appointed as guardians to Indian orphans, and then cheating them of their *inheritances*, she asked the legislature for the power to intervene on behalf of the children. They gave her the power and then took it away when some prominent Oklahomans brought pressure on the legislature to cut her funds. Without the funds, she could do nothing.

Kate Barnard left office in 1914, defeated and ill. But she had helped to write the Constitution of the State of Oklahoma, and she had helped to get important legislation passed to protect those who could not protect themselves.

CIVIL RIGHTS. On a hot day in August, 1958, led by Clara M. Luper and supported by *numerous* other African-American leaders, 13 African-American youths entered the downtown Oklahoma City Katz Drug Store. They sat down at the lunch counter and waited to be served. They waited in vain. The group returned the next day but received the same treatment.



Kate Barnard
*Library of Congress's
Prints and
Photographs Division*

On the way to the drug store, after an emotional meeting of the NAACP Youth Council, and after long consultations with other African-American leaders and with parents of the children, Mrs. Luper wondered if they were really ready for a nonviolent war. True, they had worked for months studying nonviolence as a way of overcoming injustices. But were they ready? Did they have the strength to hold to the principles of nonviolence? Did they have the discipline to endure, without returning insult for insult, ridicule for ridicule, blood for blood, until the white society could lose its fears and hostilities and learn to respect the African-American man, woman, and child? Would they help to bring about the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., where a people are judged by “the content of their character,” not by the color of their skin?

The Katz Drug Store was a part of the hub of business in downtown Oklahoma City. Located at Main and Robinson, it was the heart of the city. African-Americans were permitted to shop in the store, and they could order sandwiches and drinks to go. Orders were placed in paper sacks to be eaten outside. But they could not sit at the counter and be served.

Mrs. Luper and her thirteen young soldiers marched into the drug store and sat down in the “for whites only” territory. Among the 13 were her own children.

The waitresses were nervous, and one of them asked what they wanted.

Barbara Posey spoke, “We’d like thirteen Cokes, please.”

“You may have them to go,” the waitress replied.

“We’ll drink them here,” Barbara said, as she placed a \$5 bill on the counter.

The waitress called for assistance.

Mrs. Luper remained outwardly poised and calm when the manager reproached her.

“Mrs. Luper, you take these children out of here — this moment! This moment, I say. Did you hear me?”

“Thirteen Cokes, please,” Mrs. Luper said quietly.

“Mrs. Luper, if you don’t move these colored children, what do you think my white customers will say? You know better, Clara. I don’t blame the children. I blame you. You are just a troublemaker.”

Those customers who didn’t leave grew hostile, and tensions built. Racial slurs and threats filled the air. But Clara Luper and the thirteen

children continued to sit, waiting to be served. It was a long afternoon.

Mrs. Luper later wrote, “It had been a long evening. Barbara, Gwen, and I had a quick conference and we decided to leave without cracking a dent in the wall.” But they had passed the test. They were indeed ready for nonviolent protests that would eventually bring down the walls of *discrimination* and segregation.

The walls first came down at Katz Drug. Within two days, the company announced that its thirty-eight outlets in Missouri, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Iowa would serve all people regardless of race, creed, or color.

After being served at Katz, the group went to other downtown lunch counters where they were served — sometimes reluctantly. But at the John A. Brown Store, the management *staunchly* resisted serving African-Americans at the lunch counter. Because the opening of school was rapidly approaching, the young protestors had to bow to that resistance — temporarily.

After the sit-ins, the NAACP leaders tried negotiations, peaceful marches to the State Capitol, and finally a boycott of downtown businesses — an 11-month boycott without violence.

The sit-ins did not stop. They continued into the mid-sixties. In 1961, as Mrs. Luper sat at a John A. Brown’s lunch counter, waiting to be served, she had plenty of time to think, to remember, and to write. “I constantly thanked God for memory and I wrote, prayed for my people — some of them were African-American and some were white. I wrote letters to America,” said Mrs. Luper.

Dear America,

This morning, James Arthur Edwards started singing from the *Shores of Tripoli*. Listen, we are waiting. Waiting for a hamburger, and in that hamburger, the whole essence of Democracy lies.

Your citizen,
Clara Luper

Dear America,

You must understand that we are yours and “You are ours.” We love you. The eyes of the world are on you. Democracy’s future is in your hands. We can no longer pretend. You must practice what you preach. We aren’t your enemies. We have never betrayed our country. We have not produced any Benedict Arnolds. Even the enemies that you have fed and given aid to talk about our practices, but they never

Do You Know?

Oklahoma has more miles of the original Route 66 than any other state.

criticize yours ideas. Listen, America! Listen!

Your citizen,
Clara Luper

Time passed, tempers flared and then cooled, and public accommodations were finally open to all citizens, regardless of race. The work of Clara Luper and her NAACP Youth Council became a civil rights information center and proved that changes could come about nonviolently under the government of the United States of America.

How did the sit-ins succeed? Many reasons have been given to account for their success. The youthful ages of the protestors made them less threatening than adults would have been. Their ages also made violent reactions to their presence less likely. They were a well-mannered, disciplined group who never *retaliated* against those who cursed them. They had the sympathy of many city and state officials, including Governor J. Howard Edmondson. Certainly the demonstration was effective. But perhaps the best reason for its success was the courage and the pioneering spirit of the leader — Clara Luper.

THE ARTS. In 1967, four American Indian prima ballerinas — Yvonne Chouteau, Marjorie Tallchief, Moscelyn Larkin, and Rosella Hightower — first performed the *Four Moons* ballet, which had been choreographed especially for them. Maria Tallchief did not participate in that unique event because she had already retired from the stage. These five Oklahoma ballerinas had achieved worldwide renown, each becoming the prima (top ballerina) for a major world-famous ballet company, the finest ballet companies in the Western world. It is an artistic miracle that one state could produce five dancers of such quality, and even more miraculous that two of them came from a single family.

In addition to coming from Oklahoma, all the dancers shared a common bond in their Native American ancestry. Maria and Marjorie Tallchief came from the Osage tribe. Moscelyne Larkin came from the Shawnee-Peoria tribe. Rosella Hightower came from the Choctaw tribe. Of the five, Yvonne Chouteau, a Shawnee-Cherokee, has maintained the closest relationship with her native state.

Yvonne Chouteau's roots sink deep into Oklahoma's history. She is a direct descendent of Auguste Pierre Chouteau, who founded the first trading post in what is now the state of Oklahoma. There he *established* what became the oldest white settlement in the state. He was a wealthy trader who built a palatial (like a palace) home in the primitive wilder-

ness.

“My Shawnee-Cherokee father, Corbett Edward Chouteau, was a great influence on my choice to become a dancer,” recalled Ms. Chouteau. “He was a man who loved art and beauty. His father, though blind, played piano and taught violin. Father decided he wanted me to be either a dancer or an opera singer.”

She began her dancing career at age two and one-half. At age four, she represented Oklahoma in the Indian dances on American Indian Day at the World’s Fair in Chicago. At age fourteen, she joined the Ballet Russe De Monte Carlo, the youngest American ever accepted by that fabulous company. She danced with the world-famous ballet company for fourteen years, the last eight as their prima.

Celebrated for her sensitive, romantic roles, Yvonne Chouteau triumphed in such ballet productions as Tschai-kovsky’s *Romeo and Juliet*.

At age eighteen, she became the youngest member elected to the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. She has been a goodwill ambassador for her state and her nation since childhood.

“No matter what nationality you are, your soul is communicated. That’s why dance is such an effective ambassador,” said Ms. Chouteau.

The life she chose for herself has been an exciting and glamorous one. It has required rigid discipline, extraordinary talent, perfectionism, and complete dedication.

Yvonne Chouteau and her husband, Miguel Terekhov, returned to her native state. They *established* Ballet Oklahoma, and they were artists-in-residence at the University of Oklahoma, where they produced popular ballet with excellent quality. Many young people who have lived in Oklahoma were frequently exposed to ballet for the first time when they viewed one of the university productions.

From Oklahoma came more of the great ballerinas of our time than from any similar area of the world, but it has been a cultural exchange. The Indian ballerinas have brought cultural riches back to their native state. They have inspired young dancers to slip on dancing shoes and follow in their dancing footsteps.

SPORTS. Since the early decades of the twentieth century, there has been a complete change in the prevailing attitude of the public toward participation of women in contact athletic events. In the early years, few



**Bertha Frank
Teague**

public schools and even fewer colleges offered athletic activities for girls. Many people even believed that girls were not physically capable of taking part in competitive contact sports such as basketball. Today, girls' basketball is one of the most popular high school sporting events, particularly in Oklahoma. Colleges and universities have women's basketball teams that compete for national honors. They also offer women athletes college scholarships.

One of the people in the forefront who brought changes in attitudes and opportunities is Bertha Frank Teague, the legendary coach of the Byng High School Lady Pirates.

While building a record as the "winningest" coach in the nation, in any sport and on any level of competition, with a win-loss record of 1,157-115, Mrs. Teague fought to bring about changes in the rules of the game, earning her the title of "Architect of Girls' Basketball."

Mrs. Teague never played the game herself, but all will agree that she coached it well.

She began her career in 1927 at a small, rural school in Coal County. Her team was clad in bloomers, and they practiced on a dirt court. They won the pennant anyway.

When her husband, Jess, was hired to teach at Byng, Mrs. Teague went with him and taught the first grade, a position that she held for forty years. When there was no one else who wanted to coach the girls in basketball, Mrs. Teague became their coach and held that position for four decades. In her first five seasons, she compiled a record of 100 wins and only ten losses. During her career, she wrote her name in the coaching record books by such accomplishments as the following:

- 1,157-115 win-loss record
- At ninety-one percent, the highest winning percentage of any coach in any sport in the nation
- Eight state championships
- Seven state runner-up teams
- Forty district titles
- Thirty-eight conference titles
- Twenty-two regional titles
- Twenty-two state tournament appearances
- Ninety-eight consecutive wins (1936-1938)
- Five undefeated seasons
- Undefeated in conference play for seventeen straight years

Many well-deserved honors have been given to Mrs. Teague. In December, 1983, she was inducted into the Hall of Fame of the National Federation of State High School Associations in Orlando, Florida, the only woman ever given such an honor. She was enshrined with 28 other nationally known sports figures including Jesse Owens, Jim Ryun, Bill Bradley, and Oscar Robertson. When her credits were read before an audience of 1,300 spectators and the other inductees, the crowd cheered and gave Mrs. Teague a standing ovation in recognition of her achievements.

With her 1971 induction, Mrs. Teague also became the only woman in the Oklahoma Athletic Hall of Fame. She was the 1967 Oklahoma Girls Basketball Coach of the Year and was an inaugural inductee in 1972 into the Oklahoma Girls' Basketball Coaches Hall of Fame. The Tulsa World named her Coach of the Year in 1969, and the Daily Oklahoman named her Sportsman of the Month in March, 1969. She also received Special Services Awards from the Oklahoma Coaches Association and the National High School Coaches Association in 1975.

A singular honor came to Mrs. Teague when the Boston Celtics of the National Basketball Association (NBA) broke a barrier by nominating her for the Naismith Hall of Fame, making her the first woman considered for enshrinement.

Mrs. Teague wished to share her *expertise* with other coaches of girls' basketball and authored the book that many consider to be the "bible" of girls' basketball, *Basketball for Girls*, published by Ronald Press.

A remarkable individual, indeed! On April 25, 1992, Mrs. Teague was cited for her contributions. In a *proclamation*, Governor George Nigh commended Mrs. Teague for "her incomparable accomplishments as well as her ongoing services to the world of sports."

Her leadership in women's sports produced results. She convinced administrators and coaches to spend more time and money on girls' basketball. She affected rules changes that greatly improved the speed and the quality of the game. She broke the barrier to women as coaches and opened the door for many other young Oklahoma women to enter the field of coaching. After coaching her last game in 1969, she remained active in women's sports, a fact consistent with her lifetime of work and leadership.

GOVERNMENT. The influence of women upon government was

Do You Know?

Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, fathers of western swing music, began their careers in Oklahoma.

felt long before they won the right to vote. Yet relatively few women have had the opportunity to participate as elected officials who conduct the business of government on the state and national levels. Women have served as county officers and a few have been elected as district attorneys and state representatives in the legislature, but no woman has served as the governor of Oklahoma.

Although their numbers have been few, they have left remarkable records of public services.

One of the first women elected to a major office in Oklahoma was Alice Mary Robertson. She was the second woman ever elected to the U.S. Congress and the first woman to *preside* over the U.S. House of Representatives.

Although she was opposed to women's *suffrage*, in 1920 she said of herself, "I am a Christian. I am an American. I am a Republican." She left little doubt that those priorities were in that order. She then declared herself a candidate for Congress.

Even though she ran for office in a district heavily populated by Democrats, she was elected in the Republican landslide of 1920. She claimed that she had run on the issues and her character, and she won.

"Miss Alice," as she was often called, stood against slavery, against women's *suffrage*, against veterans' bonuses and pensions, and against alcohol. She fought against every movement to do away with prohibition.

She was full of contradictions, but people knew where she stood on the issues of the day. Someone described her as "a chip off Plymouth Rock removed to Oklahoma." Often laughed at and mocked for her standards and her steadfast courage, she generously gave of her time, money, and efforts to improve the quality of life for others.

Fluent in the languages of the Five Civilized Tribes, Miss Alice and her mother opened their home to orphan Creek Indian girls. She *established* a school and an orphanage, and the school evolved into the University of Tulsa.

A strong, determined, generous woman, Alice Mary Robertson left her mark on the records of those who worked to make the world a better place in which to live.

In 1968, a new face appeared in state government. Hannah D. Atkins had been elected to represent District 19 in the Oklahoma House of Representatives. Mrs. Atkins was the first African-American woman elected to serve in the Oklahoma Legislature. She served in that posi-

tion for twelve years before she moved to other arenas to champion the causes of human rights, education, public and mental health, and the elderly.

During her *tenure* in office, Mrs. Atkins' hard work and devotion to legislation that would benefit the very young and the aged won her the respect, if not the support, of her colleagues. She referred to herself as a "back-bencher" in the legislature, but she found other back-benchers, and they formed a coalition (united group) to get bills through the legislature.

In the 1970 legislative session alone, Mrs. Atkins was author or co-author of twenty-four bills and seven citations. One of her most effective pieces of legislation was a law requiring immunization for all children entering Oklahoma schools for the first time.

A Southern-bred woman of considerable charm, Mrs. Atkins has not been one to accept the status quo (things as they are), particularly in those areas of major interest and concern to her.

While she was in the legislature, Mrs. Atkins expressed interest in improving the lives of senior citizens. She worked hard for the passage of the Nursing Home Reform Act of 1980.

In 1980, President Jimmy Carter appointed Hannah Atkins as one of ten members of the U.S. delegation to the General Assembly of the United Nations.

When she returned to Oklahoma, she once again became involved in programs for the elderly. She was appointed director of the Special Unit on Aging and the Nontechnical Medical Program at the State Department of Human Services. She visited nursing homes herself and studied living conditions for those Oklahomans living in nursing homes. She also worked to improve and expand the "Meals on Wheels" program so that senior citizens still living at home could have at least one hot meal a day delivered to their houses.

When Mrs. Jeannette Edmondson, widow of the late Governor J. Howard Edmondson, retired from the position of Secretary of State, Governor Henry Bellmon appointed Hannah Atkins to replace her. Mrs. Edmondson had been the first woman to serve as Oklahoma's Secretary of State, and Mrs. Atkins became the first African-American woman appointed to that high office.

In February, 1982, Alma Wilson was officially sworn in as a justice on Oklahoma's Supreme Court. She was the first woman ever to be appointed and to serve on Oklahoma's highest court.



**Judge Alma
Wilson**
Distinctly Oklahoma

As a justice on the state's highest court, she said, "I have a prayer — a prayer that I remain dedicated to the pursuit of excellence, and that I refuse to respond to impulse. But I pray that I follow the law to wherever it takes me, with the courage to press for changes when necessary to preserve the law."

The law had taken Justice Wilson to the state's highest judicial seat. In November, 1994, she became the first woman to be named Chief Justice of the Oklahoma Supreme Court. Justice Yvonne Kauger became Vice-Chief Justice. According to Howard Conyers, Administrative Director of Oklahoma's courts, Oklahoma is the first state in which women held the top two judicial seats.

Justice Wilson had prepared herself well for her position. She had served as a special judge in Garvin County and as Cleveland County district judge, positions that she held with distinction.

When Mrs. Wilson received her law degree in 1941, few women were able to obtain such a degree. She was one of only four women who were admitted to practice law in the state that year.

Jack Boyd, president of the Oklahoma Bar Association, said at the time of the Oklahoma Supreme Court swearing-in, "It is only fitting that women take their place on the benches of this country. It is a great honor that Wilson will be sitting on the highest bench in this state."

A pioneer in corrections was Clara Waters. She became the first woman in the United States to serve as warden of a penitentiary. She accompanied her husband to Granite Reformatory when he became warden in 1920. Following his death in 1926, she moved to Norman, but she returned to Granite in 1927 to accept the post herself.

Exceptionally well-educated for a woman of her day, Mrs. Waters *established* an accredited (certified) school at the reformatory during her husband's time there. She *established* a good understanding relationship with "the boys," and set about to fight the illiteracy that she found so appalling.

Appointed to her position by Governor Henry Johnston, she served under four governors — Johnston, W.J. Holloway, William H. "Alfalfa Bill" Murray, and E.W. Marland.

Johnston bucked the tide of public opinion when he appointed a woman as warden. Mrs. Waters later said that the turmoil just increased her determination to "make good."

It was Alfalfa Bill Murray's supervision that she later recalled most often. The spunky lady warden and the stubborn eccentric governor met

head-on almost monthly. In a 1977 interview with writer M.J. VanDeventer, Mrs. Waters revealed that she always carried her written resignation in her hand to her meetings with Murray.

“I told him I’d never been fired from any job and I certainly didn’t wish to be fired from this one,” she said.

“Well, you can stay another month,” the governor would finally concede.

Clara Waters served Murray’s entire four-year term, one month at a time.

When E.W. Marland took office, Mrs. Waters’ position became even more insecure. In the same 1977 interview, Mrs. Waters observed, “He just didn’t like the idea of having a woman as warden....I moved out almost immediately, and there hasn’t been a woman in the post since.” She added pointedly, “There should be, you know....”

Mrs. Waters is credited with affecting a number of significant changes in prison work. In addition to establishing sound educational programs, she influenced legislation requiring youthful offenders to be separated from hardened criminals.

Clara Waters was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1934. Her most prized honor, however, was the one given her by the National Association of Wardens of Penal Institutions. They named her an “outstanding member” of their group.

Clara Waters died April 28, 1977, at the age of eighty-eight.

In October, 1988, a national magazine named Principal Chief of the Cherokees Wilma Mankiller as one of the 100 most admired women in the United States. This was a remarkable honor for a woman who grew up in a time when Indian families found themselves in poverty.

As a young girl, Wilma Mankiller and her family were moved from Adair County to San Francisco. It was a government effort to bring rural Indians in contact with urban life. Chief Mankiller recalls, “There were nine of us then — nine children — and two adults. They put us on a train to San Francisco, with no preparation at all.” Like other Indian families who had been relocated, the Mankiller family became part of the urban poor.



Wilma Mankiller
Oklahoma Historical
Society

Out of the San Francisco experience, she became an activist for Indian causes.

Wilma Mankiller later returned to her native state, intending to lead a quieter life. She went to work for the Cherokee Nation instead. There she used her many talents and soon came to the attention of tribal leaders. When Principal Chief Ross Swimmer was elected chief in 1983, Wilma Mankiller was elected deputy chief of the tribe. In 1985, when Swimmer left tribal government to head the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C., Mankiller moved up to the position of principal chief. In 1987 she made national news when she was elected in her own right. She became the first woman elected by the tribe to the position of tribal chief. In Oklahoma, Alice Brown Davis had been appointed chief of the Seminoles, but she had not been elected by the tribe.



**Dr. Jeane
Kirkpatrick**

National and international attention enabled Chief Mankiller to share her philosophy and her concerns for Native Americans with a worldwide audience. In 1987, *Ms.* magazine named her Woman of the Year. She did not seek re-election and ended her service as chief in 1994.

Perhaps Oklahoma's most recognized woman in politics nationwide is Jeane Duane Jordan Kirkpatrick. Often mentioned as a possible candidate for Vice-President or even President of the United States, Dr. Kirkpatrick served her country as Ambassador to the United Nations, the highest office held by a woman from Oklahoma.

Dr. Kirkpatrick grew up in Duncan, where her father worked as an oil well drilling contractor. The major influence upon her, however, was her mother, who encouraged Jeane to become well educated. Dr. Kirkpatrick earned her degrees from nationally known universities.

While teaching at Georgetown University, she wrote an article on conservative politics that caught the attention of Ronald Reagan. He asked her to serve as foreign policy adviser in his presidential campaign of 1979. When he was elected president, he appointed her the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations.

As ambassador, she became internationally known and respected. When she left the U.N., she returned to teaching and writing. Her views and advice are still sought by national leaders.

At the 1988 Republican National Convention, she was one of the

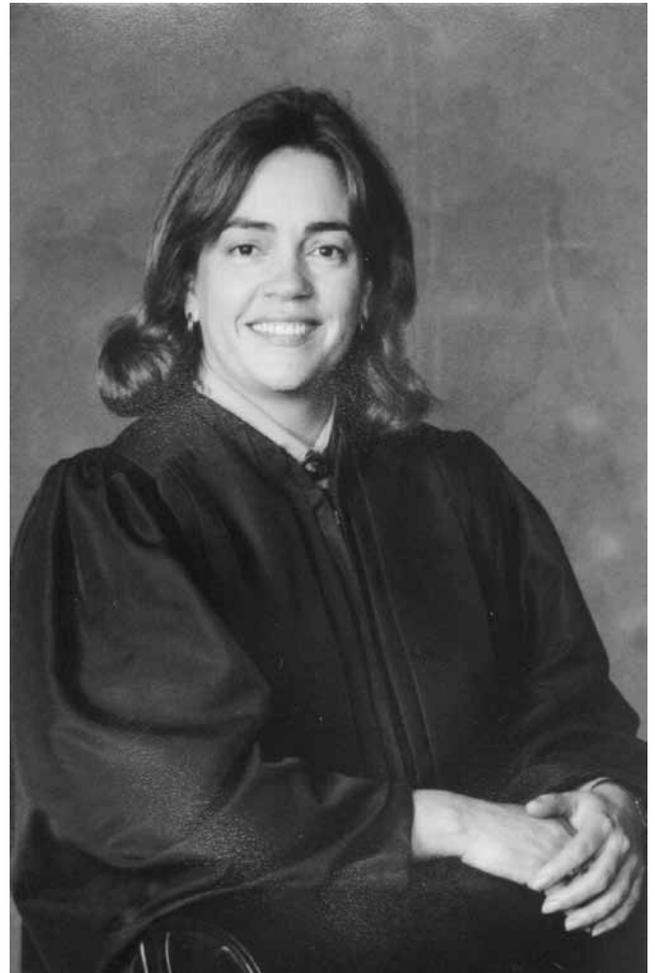
national leaders chosen to *nominate* Vice-President George Bush to become the Republican candidate for President of the United States.

The federal court system in Oklahoma, one of the states in the 10th Judicial Circuit, broke the gender barrier when Edmond native Robin Cauthron was named to the position of U.S. District Judge in the Western Judicial District of Oklahoma. She was sworn in April, 1991, and was the first woman appointed to the federal trial bench in Oklahoma history. Prior to becoming a federal judge, Cauthron served for five years as U.S. Magistrate for the Western District, the first woman appointed as full-time Magistrate Judge in the 10th Circuit. These positions followed years of outstanding service as a Special District Judge in McCurtain County. In 1984, she was named as one of the “Outstanding Young Women of America.”

In 1994, Judge Cauthron was joined on the federal bench by another Oklahoma woman when Judge Vicki Miles-LaGrange became the first African-American woman to become a federal judge in the 10th Circuit. Both Judge Cauthron and Judge Miles-LaGrange were “trailblazers” and exemplify the hard work, accomplishments, and the pioneer spirit of Oklahoma women.

The general election of 1994 brought more women into the government spotlight. Mary Fallin, a former state legislator, became the first Republican and the first woman to be elected Lieutenant Governor of Oklahoma.

Fallin was elected as Governor on November 2, 2010, during a historic election in which she became the first-ever female governor of Oklahoma. She was inaugurated as the state’s 27th governor on January 10, 2011.



Robin Cauthron
Oklahoma Historical
Society