

OKLAHOMA'S FIRST CONGRESSWOMAN



ALICE MARY ROBERTSON
EDUCATOR,
SOCIAL WORKER &
CONGRESSWOMAN

Alice Mary Robertson was the second woman to serve in the U.S. Congress and the first from Oklahoma.

She was an American educator, a social worker, and a government official. She was also the first Oklahoma female to defeat an incumbent congressman. People said she was strong-willed. In addition, she was known to be against feminism and was committed to Native American issues.

She was born January 2, 1854, in Creek Nation, Indian Territory, to William Schenck Robertson and Ann Eliza Worcester Robertson, who were missionaries. The older Robertsons translated the Bible and other books into the Creek language. Alice Mary Robertson was home-schooled under the supervision of her parents. When she was old enough, she attended Elmira College, in Elmira, New York.

Robertson worked as a clerk in the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C., from 1873 until 1879. She returned to the Indian Territory and taught briefly in the school at Tullahassee. Later, she taught at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, from 1880 to 1882.

After returning to the Indian Territory, Robertson established the Nuyaka Mission, which was run by Presbyterians reporting to the Creek Council. She taught in Okmulgee, where she had charge of a Presbyterian boarding school for Native American girls. It eventually developed into Henry Kendall College and then the University of Tulsa.

She was appointed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs as the first government supervisor of Creek Indian schools, and she served from 1900 to 1905. She was next appointed the postmaster of Muskogee, Oklahoma, from 1905 to 1913. Her canteen service to the troops during World War I was the start of the Muskogee Chapter of the American Red Cross.

Robertson was elected by the 2nd District of Oklahoma as a Republican Representative to the 67th Congress, defeating the incumbent William Hastings. She was the first woman to defeat an incumbent representative. She beat Hastings by 228 votes in an election with 50,000 citizens voting. She served from March 4, 1921, to March 3, 1923, but was unsuccessful in running for reelection in 1922 and was defeated by Hastings.



Robertson was the second woman to hold a seat in Congress, after Representative Jeannette Rankin from Montana who served from 1917 to 1919. Before the expiration of her term, Rebecca Felton was appointed for one day to the Senate, and representatives Winnifred Huck from Illinois and Mae Nolan from California both won special elections; they were the third, fourth, and fifth women to serve in Congress. During her term, Robertson became the first woman to preside over the House of Representatives, on June 20, 1921.

Robertson was the first woman elected to Congress after passage of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution guaranteeing women the right to vote. She opposed feminist groups such as the League of Women Voters and the National Women's Party. Robertson voted against bills funding maternity and childcare on the grounds that they were an unwarranted governmental intrusion on personal rights. This earned her the support of the Daughters of the American Revolution, of which she was a member.

In later life, Robertson was appointed by President Warren G. Harding as a welfare worker at Veterans Hospital Number 90 at Muskogee in May 1923. She retired to run a dairy farm.

Robertson died in Muskogee and was interred in Greenhill Cemetery.

Until the election of Mary Fallin in 2006, Robertson was the only female member of Congress to serve the state of Oklahoma.

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presides over the U.S.
House of Representatives.
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