

## DISTINGUISHED OKLAHOMA WOMEN

*Jennifer Paustenbaugh, Sarah Kay Kunkler, R. Darcy,  
Cathy Seagraves and David Peters*

**M**embers of the *Almanac* Advisory Committee were provided with a list of over 1800 women whose accomplishments have been documented in some way for inclusion in the Women's Archives at Oklahoma State University. Women who are in the Oklahoma Women's Hall of Fame were excluded from consideration. Committee members selected women whose accomplishments were most noteworthy or newsworthy, bringing honor and distinction to themselves and to Oklahoma.

*Information for all women in this section was obtained from multiple sources; for the sake of brevity, only the major source of information is listed.*

\* Also in the Oklahoma Hall of Fame

† Also in the National Women's Hall of Fame



**LaRita "Rita" A. Bly Aragon**  
**Born: 1947; Shawnee, Oklahoma**  
**Education: Central State University**  
**(now the University of Central**  
**Oklahoma) (B.S., 1970; M.S., 1979)**

In March 2003, Rita Aragon became the first woman to command a state Air National Guard and the first female general officer of Native American descent (Cherokee and Choctaw) when she achieved the rank of Brigadier General. In December 2005, she was promoted to the rank of Major General (2 stars). Aragon joined the Oklahoma Air Guard in 1979 to supplement her teacher's income. She received her officer's commission less than two years later. In 1984, she became an elementary school principal and served in this capacity until her retirement from the Oklahoma City Public Schools in 1996 when she went on active duty. In the aftermath of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, Aragon ran the morgue for the bombing victims as a Major in the Guard.

For more: Aragon, Rita A. Interview with Jennifer Paustenbaugh, 22 February 2005. Digital video recording, Women's Archives at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

**Rilla Askew**

**Born: 1951**

**Education: University of Tulsa (1981);**

**Brooklyn College (M.F.A., 1989)**



Author Rilla Askew is recognized for both her short stories and full-length novels. In 1993 she received the Oklahoma Book Award for her short story collection *Strange Business*.

Her novel *The Mercy Seat* received the same award in 1998. Her latest novel, *Fire in Beulah*, is set during the time of the Tulsa Race Riots. Askew teaches writing at the college level and at writers conferences. In 2003 she was inducted into the Oklahoma Writers Hall of Fame.

For more: [www.rillaskew.com](http://www.rillaskew.com)

*Photo courtesy of Viking by Marion Ettlinger*



**Harriett George Barclay\***

**Born: 31 August 1901; Minneapolis, MN**

**Died: 25 May 1990**

**Education: University of Minnesota (B.A., 1923; M.A., 1924); University of Chicago (Ph.D., 1928); University of Tulsa (B.A., 1945)**

Harriet Barclay became head of the University of Tulsa's Botany Department in 1953 after the death of her husband and department founder George Barclay. She was department head for five years then continued to teach in the department until her mandatory retirement in 1972. Barclay was an inspiring teacher and tireless field researcher who discovered 19 new plant species during her field work around the globe. She was the driving force behind the creation of Redbud Valley Nature Preserve in northeast Tulsa. Barclay was also an accomplished painter who earned a B.A. in art from the University of Tulsa while she was raising her sons. Barclay was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1976.

For more: *Tulsa Tribune*, May 26, 1990, p. 17C

*Photo courtesy of Oklahoma Heritage Association*

**Mabel Luella Bourne Bassett\***

**Born: Chicago, IL**

**Died: 3 August 1953**

**Education: Missouri School of Social Economy, St. Louis**



Mabel Bassett came to Sapulpa, Oklahoma from Billings, Montana in 1900 with her husband. In 1910, they established one of Oklahoma's first humane organizations for children, the Creek County Humane Society. After two unsuccessful attempts, Bassett was elected Commissioner of Charities and Corrections in 1922 and held the position for six terms through 1947. Charged with protecting orphans and inmates of mental and correctional institutions, this office held only investigative power. Under Bassett's leadership the state Pardon and Parole Board was created as was a building for women prisoners at McAlester. Bassett's administration was noted for its promotion of fair living conditions and opportunities for inmates. In 1946, in what was viewed as the upset of the statewide election season, Bassett lost the race to Buck Cook. She ran again for the position in 1950 and again lost to Cook. A women's correctional center in McLoud bears her name today.

For more: *Who is Who in Oklahoma* (Guthrie, OK: Co-operative Publishing Co., 1935)

*Photo courtesy of William Finley Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society*



**Joann Bell**  
**Born: 1941**

Joann Bell came to state and national prominence when she became the lead plaintiff in a federal lawsuit against the Little Axe, OK School District. The 1981 suit, successfully fought for Bell by the American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma over a six-year period, sought an injunction on morning prayer gatherings in the Little Axe schools. Bell's children, who attended the Little Axe schools, were harassed for refusing to participate in organized prayer sessions. In recognition of her tireless fight for the separation of church and state, Bell received numerous awards including the ACLU's 1983 Angie Debo Civil Liberties Award and the 1989 Hugh M. Hefner First Amendment Award. Following this legal battle, Bell was hired first as a part-time litigation coordinator for ACLU of Oklahoma and then as the organization's executive director in 1990.

For more: <http://www.acluok.org/AboutUs/ExecutiveDirectorJoannBell.htm>

*Photo provided*

**Laura Woolridge Boyd**

**Born: 5 June 1949; Charlottesville, VA**

**Education: Duke University (B.A., 1970);**

**Marywood College (M.S., 1978);**

**International College (Ph.D., 1982)**



Laura Boyd interrupted a successful practice as a marriage and family therapist to represent Oklahoma District 44 (Norman) from 1992-1998. The Democratic legislator put her education to work as chair of the House Community and Family Relations Responsibilities Committee. Her effectiveness as a legislator has been recognized by a wide range of groups including the Oklahoma Sierra Club (Outstanding Public Servant Award, 1996); and the National Association for Child Advocacy Award for Child Advocacy Leadership in Government. In 1998 Boyd was a gubernatorial candidate and in 2002 ran for Lieutenant Governor. She is the owner and CEO of Policy Performance Consultants, a firm specializing in the handling of profit and non-profit clients' government-relations agendas as well as in acquisitions and mergers between companies across the United States.

For more: *Who's Who in American Politics* 1999-2000 (New York: Bowker, 2000)

*Photo provided*



**Maimee Lee (Robinson) Browne\***  
**Born: 3 March 1881; Pittsburg, Texas**  
**Died: 11 June 1963**

Maimee Lee Browne, known best publicly as Mrs. Virgil Browne, served as a founding member and first president of the Planned Parenthood Association of Oklahoma City from 1937-1953. Mrs. Browne was very active in many civic, church, and patriotic organizations, including the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). Her fundraising efforts helped house the state DAR library in the Oklahoma Historical Society, creating one of the best genealogical libraries in the nation. She is also credited with founding the Rotary Anns, an auxiliary organization of Rotary International. She was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1938 and was elected Oklahoma Mother of the Year in 1951.

For more: *Daily Oklahoman* May 15, 1985, and Oklahoma Hall of Fame

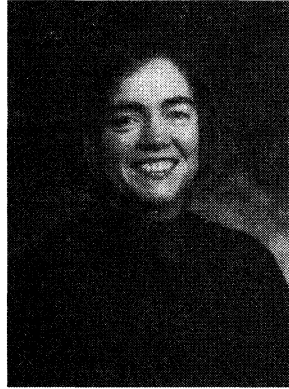
*Photo courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society*



**Robin Johnson Cauthron**

**Born: 14 July 1950; Edmond, OK**

**Education: University of Oklahoma (B.A., 1970); Central State University (M. Ed., 1974); University of Oklahoma (J.D., 1977)**



On March 25, 1991, Robin Cauthron became the first Oklahoma woman federal judge when she was sworn in as a judge in the Western District of Oklahoma. Prior to her appointment as federal judge, she served as magistrate in Oklahoma City federal court from 1986 and as McCurtain County special judge from 1983-1986. Her 1986 appointment as magistrate made her the first full-time female magistrate in the 10th Circuit District. Cauthron has served as chief judge of the Western District since 2001.

For more: <http://air.fjc.gov/>

*Photo provided*



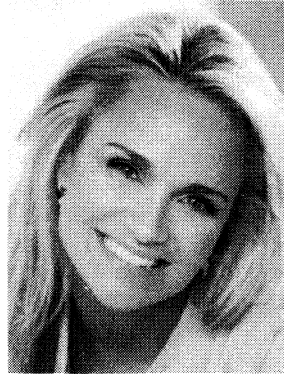
**Leta Mae McFarlin Chapman\***  
**Born: 8 October 1889; Texas**  
**Died: 13 March 1974**  
**Education: Holdenville (OK) High School**  
**(1907)**

Leta Chapman and her husband James A. Chapman were outstanding philanthropists who provided extensive financial support to organizations throughout Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the southwestern United States. With wealth created from their oil and ranching interests the Chapmans established several large trusts including the J.A. and Leta M. Chapman Charitable Trust in 1949. Their gifts benefited higher education, medicine, and children including the University of Tulsa, The Children's Medical Center of Tulsa, and the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation. Leta Chapman was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1967 and in 1973 was named "Woman of the Year" by Downtown Tulsa Unlimited.

For more: *Tulsa Tribune*, 14 March 1974, p. E1, E3.

*Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Heritage Association*

**Kristin Chenoweth**  
**Home Town: Broken Arrow, OK**  
**Education: Oklahoma City University**  
**(B.A., M.A.)**



A Broadway, movie, television and recording star, Kristin Chenoweth's career is just starting. On Broadway she appeared in "Wicked" (2003), "You're a Good Man Charlie Brown" (1999), "Epic Proportions" (1999) and "Steel Pier" (1997). She has also performed Off-Broadway and, recently in London for a production of "Divas at the Donmar." Movie roles include "Bewitched" and "The Pink Panther," both released in 2005. Television roles include PBS' Great Performances "Candide," "The Music Man," "Annie," "Frasier," "Sesame Street," "Kristin," and a recurring role on "The West Wing." Sony albums include "As I Am" (2005), "The Music Man Soundtrack" (2003) and "Let Yourself Go" (2001). She won a Tony, as well as a number of other awards, for "You're a Good Man Charlie Brown." New projects include an independent movie "Asphalt Beach," Disney's animated "Rapunzel" and movies "Stranger than Fiction" and "Running with Scissors."

For more: <http://www.kristinchenoweth.com/bio.html> and  
<http://www.broadwayworld.com/bios/viewstar.cfm?starid=183>

*Photo courtesy [www.kristinchenoweth.com](http://www.kristinchenoweth.com)*



**Mildred Imache Cleghorn**

**Born: 11 December 1910; Fort Sill, Oklahoma**

**Died: 15 April 1997**

**Education: Haskell Institute; Cameron Junior College; Oklahoma A&M College (B.S., 1941); University of Oklahoma**

Cleghorn was born one of 500 Apache prisoners of war at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma. Her family, who were part of Geronimo's Chirihua Apache-Warm Springs band, was freed in 1913 and settled on a government allotment near Apache, Oklahoma. After receiving her college degree she taught elementary school and home economics at Indian schools in Anadarko and Lawton. Cleghorn then went into extension work with the Indian Service and worked with many tribes in the Southwest and Kansas. As a hobby and a means for educating others about the variety of Native American culture, she created dolls with highly detailed authentic costumes and received national acclaim for her art. In the 1970s, she helped reorganize the Ft. Sill Apaches and in 1977 became the first woman to be elected chairperson (chief) of an Apache band. She held this position until her retirement in October 1995.

For more: *Indomitable Oklahoma Women* by Opal Hartsell Brown (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Heritage Association, 1994)

*Photo copyright, The Oklahoma Publishing Company*

**Name: Sheri Buben Coale**  
**Born: 19 January 1965**  
**Education: Oklahoma Christian University (B.S., 1987); University of Oklahoma (M.S., 1993)**



After graduating summa cum laude and as an Academic All-American from college, Coale was hired as JV basketball coach at Edmond Memorial High School from 1987-1989. She then accepted a head coach job at Norman High School. During her seven years as a high school head coach, she led Norman to two Class 6A state championships and was named regional, all-state, and big all-city high school coach of the year in 1993. In 1996, she made the jump to the collegiate level when she was named head coach for women's basketball at the University of Oklahoma. She has achieved great success at this level, too, directing her team to three successive Big Twelve Conference championships (2000-2002) and to the national championship game in 2002. Among the many honors Coale has garnered are Big Twelve Conference Coach of the Year in 2000 and 2001 as well as 2001 National Coach of the Year by *ESPN The Magazine*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *Women's Basketball Journal*.

For more: [soonersports.com](http://soonersports.com)

*Photo courtesy of the University of Oklahoma Athletic Department*



**Name: Florence Etheridge Cobb**  
**Born: 20 September 1878; Bridgeport, CT**  
**Died: 1946**  
**Education: Columbia University;**  
**Washington College of Law (LL.B. 1910;**  
**LL.M, 1911)**

In her early career Florence Etheridge served as professor of law at Washington College of Law, a U.S. probate attorney for the U.S. Indian service, and treasurer and vice-president of the Federal Employees Union. She married fellow jurist T.A. Cobb of Wewoka and moved to Oklahoma. In 1922, she was elected Chair for Oklahoma of the National Women's Party, a non-partisan group devoted to equal rights for women. For many years she was a strong and eloquent voice in the fight to change the Oklahoma Constitution to allow women to run for major state offices. She was a newspaper publisher, librarian, writer, and was appointed Wewoka's first Justice of the Peace in 1940.

For more: *Who is Who in Oklahoma* (Guthrie: Co-operative Publishing Co., 1935)

*Photo courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society*

**Geraldyn “Jerrie” M. Cobb\***  
**Born: 5 March 1931; Norman, OK**  
**Education: Oklahoma College for Women,  
Chickasha**



Sparked early by her father's interest in aviation, Cobb received her pilot's license on her 17th birthday in 1948. After a brief stint in college, she decided to pursue flying full-time and took numerous jobs that allowed her to fly and get more aviation experience. While waiting on a pilot's slot to open at Miami International Airport she met Jack Ford, president of Fleetway, Inc. Reluctantly, he hired her on as a pilot to deliver surplus American planes purchased by other countries. After four years with Fleetway, she became chief pilot for Kansas City Flying Service. In 1960, Cobb began NASA testing and later was selected as America's first woman space pilot candidate. Hoping to be the first woman into space, Cobb was bitterly disappointed when her superior skill and performance with NASA was not rewarded with selection as an astronaut candidate. Cobb resigned from NASA and focused her flying skills on serving tribal peoples of South America. Friends formed the Jerrie Cobb Foundation to support her missionary work. Cobb has received numerous awards including Woman of Year in Aviation by the Women's National Aeronautical Association, and the Harmon International Trophy in 1973 for being the top aviatrix in the world. Cobb was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1976.

For more: *Distinguished Oklahomans* by Victoria Lee (Tulsa: Touch of Heart Publishing, 2002)

*Photo courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society*



**Elizabeth "Bessie" Coleman†**  
**Born: 26 January 1892; Atlanta, TX**  
**Died: 30 April 1926**  
**Education: Langston Industrial College;**  
**Caudron Aircraft Manufacturers Co.,**  
**Lecrotoy, France**

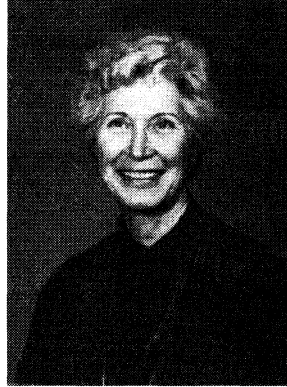
Bessie Coleman was born to a mostly Cherokee father from the Indian Territory and an African-American mother. One of 13 children, she picked cotton in Texas before coming to Oklahoma to attend the Colored Agricultural and Normal College at Langston. Inspired by her brother's WWI stories of French women pilots, Coleman traveled to France to study aviation. In June 1921, she received the first pilot's license awarded to an American woman by the French Federation Aeronatique Internationale and she became the only licensed African-American woman pilot. Later that year she studied aviation in Germany, where she received the first pilot's license granted to an American woman by the German aviation authority. After returning to the U.S. in 1922, she became an accomplished stunt and exhibition pilot as well as a skydiver. She lectured around the country informing African Americans of opportunities to be had in aviation. She died in a crash in Orlando, Florida during a practice run for a May Day celebration. Her championing of aviation in the African American Community led to the founding of the Bessie Coleman School in Los Angeles as well as Bessie Coleman Aero Clubs, which promoted aviation within the African American Community. Coleman was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in 2002.

For more: *American National Biography Online*

*Photo courtesy of Dr. Jilda Motley*



**Nancy Jane (Frantz) Davies\***  
**Education: University of Oklahoma (B.A., 1949)**



In 1966 Governor Henry Bellmon appointed Davies to the University of Oklahoma Board of Regents for a seven-year term, making her the first woman to fill that post, and later appointed her to the Oklahoma Constitution Revision Study Commission in 1988. Davies served as chair of both of these groups during her tenure of service. In 1976, President Gerald Ford appointed her to the National Council on the Humanities. Davies also served on the Phillips University's Board of Trustees and provided leadership during the financial crisis that led to the close of the Enid institution. She has served on numerous corporate and civic boards including the Board of Directors of Bank of Oklahoma, the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation, and the Oklahoma School of Science and Math Foundation. She was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1986 and the Oklahoma Higher Education Hall of Fame in 1995.

For more: *PR Newswire*, 26 September 1995.

*Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Heritage Association*



**Alice Brown Davis\***

**Born: 19 September 1852; near Park Hill,  
Indian Territory**

**Died: 21 June 1935**

**Education: schools of Indian Territory**

Alice Brown Davis became the first woman chief of the Seminole tribe when President Warren Harding appointed her to the position in 1922, a position she held until her death in 1935. Prior to her appointment she served the tribe in numerous capacities as an educator, administrator, diplomat, and interpreter. She led several tribal delegations to Mexico where she negotiated for historic Seminole lands. She was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1930 and the National Hall of Fame for Famous American Indians at Anadarko in 1961.

For more: *Indomitable Oklahoma Women* by Opal Hartsell Brown (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Heritage Association, 1994)

*Photo courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society*

**Nancy Randolph Davis**

**Education: Langston University (B.S., 1948); Oklahoma A&M College (M.S., 1952)**



Sapulpa native Nancy Randolph made Oklahoma history when she became the first African American to enroll at Oklahoma A&M College (now Oklahoma State University) in the 1949 summer school session. Although initially denied enrollment, Randolph, a graduate student in home economics, was later admitted for the session. Following graduation, Davis spent the next 43 years teaching high school home economics. Since her retirement in 1991, Davis has continued to volunteer as a teacher at the NAACP Freedom Center in Oklahoma City. She has been the recipient of numerous awards including the Distinguished Alumni Award from the Oklahoma State University Alumni Association.

For more: *A History of Equal Opportunity at Oklahoma State University* by Pauline W. Kopecky (Stillwater: Oklahoma State University Press, 1990)

*Photo courtesy of Pauline Kopecky*



**Carrie Barefoot Dickerson**

**Born: 24 May 1917; 13 miles west of Okmulgee, OK**

**Education: Oklahoma A&M College (B.A., 1945; M.A., 1950) Hillcrest Center School of Nursing (R.N.)**

In 1973, Carrie Dickerson, a former school teacher, nurse, and owner of a nursing home in Claremore, began a nine-year battle to fight the construction of a \$450 million nuclear power plant in nearby Inola. To raise money to stop the construction of the "Black Fox" plant, she sold her nursing home, mortgaged her home, and sold quilts at raffles. In 1981, the Oklahoma Corporation Commission determined that the Black Fox plant was no longer economically viable. Dickerson and the organization she founded, Citizens' Action for Safe Energy (CASE), declared victory. Dickerson remains involved in environmental issues especially those dealing with nuclear pollution.

For more: *Aunt Carrie's War Against Black Fox Nuclear Power Plant* by Carrie B. Dickerson (Tulsa: Council Oak Publishing, 1995)

*Photo provided*

**Mary Frates**

**Born: 20 January 1940, Ponca City,  
Oklahoma**

**Education: University of Oklahoma (B.A.,  
1962)**



Mary Frates has been a major force on the Oklahoma art scene since the 1970s. She founded the Oklahoma Arts Institute at Quartz Mountain in 1976 and served as its president until 1994. The Oklahoma Arts Institute provides professional training for Oklahoma youths and workshops for artists and educators throughout the state. Also under Frates' direction, a permanent art collection was commissioned and installed at the Quartz Mountain Arts and Conference Center in Lone Wolf. She has served on the Board of Visitors for the Fred Jones Jr. Museum at the University of Oklahoma and is a former board member of many Oklahoma City arts organizations including the Oklahoma City Philharmonic, and Ballet Oklahoma, an organization she served as President.

For more: *Tulsa World*, 26 July 1994, p. E4.

*Photo provided*



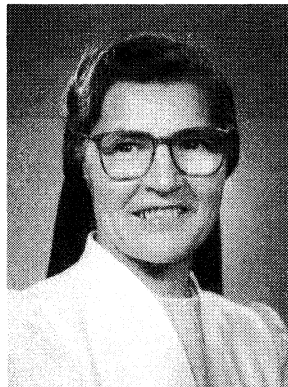
**Eddie Faye Gates**  
**Born: 1934; Preston, OK**  
**Education: Tuskegee Institute; University of North Dakota (B.S., 1968); University of Tulsa (M.A., 1974)**

Eddie Faye Gates is a former high school history teacher, school administrator, curriculum writer, educational consultant, and author. She has served several terms on the State Textbook Committee, chaired the Oklahoma Educational Television Authority Board of Directors, served on the Oklahoma Historical Society Board, and served on the Tulsa Race Riot Commission. As part of the Tulsa Race Riot Commission she was one of the strongest proponents of survivor reparations and her efforts to uncover and document the 1921 events included obtaining the narratives of more than 200 survivors of the riots as well as information from more than 300 of their descendants. She is the author of two books documenting the Tulsa Race Riots: *They Came Searching: How Blacks Sought the Promised Land in Tulsa* (Eakin Press, 1997) and *Riot on Greenwood: The Total Destruction of Black Wall Street* (Eakin Press, 2003).

For more: [www.tulsa-riot.com](http://www.tulsa-riot.com)

*Photo provided*

**Sister Mary Therese Gottschalk**  
**Born: 21 June 1931; Doellwang, Germany**  
**Education: Creighton University (B.S., 1960);**  
**St. Louis University (M.H.A., 1970)**



At the age of 21 Sister Mary Therese Gottschalk took her vows in the Roman Catholic order of Sisters of Sorrowful Mother. She came to the United States in 1953 and became a naturalized citizen in 1959. A year later she received her pharmacy degree and managed the pharmacy at St. Mary's Hospital in Roswell, NM. She moved into the upper management of this hospital before coming to Tulsa to serve as assistant administrator of the St. John Medical Center from 1970-72. After two years as CEO at St. Mary's in Roswell, she returned to Tulsa and assumed the post of president and CEO at St. John's in 1974. She held this post until 1999 when she became CEO of the St. John Health System. Gottschalk has also served as president of Marian Health System, a non-profit corporation that is the nation's fourth-largest Catholic health-care organization.

For more: *Marquis Who's Who* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005)

*Photo courtesy of St. John Health System*



**Lori Hansen**

**Education: University of Oklahoma School of Medicine (M.D., 1979)**

In 1994, plastic surgeon Dr. Lori Hansen established Face-to-Face: National Domestic Violence Project, a national effort to reconstruct battered women's faces through plastic surgery. The program, an outgrowth of Hansen's Christian faith and desire to help physically abused women begin to feel good about themselves again, was quickly adopted by the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery in partnership with the National Coalition against Domestic Violence. Hundreds of Academy members in the U.S. and Canada volunteer their services and time to the program. In 1995, Hansen received the Academy's Community Service Award in recognition of her efforts. In 1998, *Vanity Fair* named her to its list of 200 Most Influential Women in the United States.

In 2001, Hansen, spouse of Oklahoma County District Attorney Wes Lane II, made public her addiction to prescription pain medication and in November 2001 pled guilty to two felony counts of obtaining a controlled substance by misrepresentation. In 2002, her medical license was suspended for two months. It was reinstated with a five-year probation. Hansen has spoken widely about her struggle and recovery in overcoming her chemical dependence and has continued her surgical practice and work assisting victims of domestic violence.

For more: [http://www.facemd.org/patient/humanitarian/pa\\_ffviolence.html](http://www.facemd.org/patient/humanitarian/pa_ffviolence.html)

*Photo provided*



**Suzan Shown Harjo**

**Born: 2 June 1945; El Reno, OK**



Suzan Shown Harjo (Cheyenne and Hodulgee Muscogee) is President and Executive Director of the Morning Star Institute, a Washington, D.C. based organization she founded in 1984 for Native People's traditional and cultural advocacy, arts promotion and research. Harjo has been one of the most influential public policy advocates for the protection of Native American sacred places, arts, and cultures including the preservation of native languages. Under her leadership strides have been made in the fight against disparaging uses of Native American names and representations, including a much publicized case against the Washington Redskins in which Harjo and others petitioned the U.S. Patent & Trademark Office to cancel federal trademark protection for the team's name. In the Carter administration she served as congressional liaison for Indian Affairs and worked for the National Congress of American Indians, serving as its executive director from 1984-1990.

Harjo is also a well-recognized journalist, poet, writer, lecturer, and curator. She is a regular columnist for *Indian Country Today*, the leading national Native American newspaper and, with her late husband Frank Harjo, was the co-producer of the public radio program "Seeing Red," the first regularly-scheduled Indian news and analysis show in the U.S. Among the many cultural and arts boards she serves on, she was a founding Trustee of the National Museum of the American Indian and continues to be very involved in the Museum's programs.

For more: <http://www.indiancountry.com/author.cfm?id=26>

*Photo provided*



**Edith Kinney Gaylord**

**Born: 5 March 1916; Oklahoma City**

**Died 28 January 2001**

**Education: Colorado College; Wells College  
(B.A., 1937)**

Edith Gaylord was the first woman to serve on the general news staff of The Associated Press in Washington, D.C., covering Eleanor Roosevelt and other prominent women. In 1944, she served as president of the Women's National Press Club. She returned to Oklahoma City and worked as a corporate secretary and member of the board of directors of the Oklahoma Publishing Company. She was perhaps best known in Oklahoma as a philanthropist who supported numerous statewide efforts to advance the cause of women, education, and ethical journalism. Her legacy was the establishment of the Inasmuch Foundation, for the support of charitable and educational projects.

For more: Various editions of the *Oklahoman*.

*Photo copyright, The Oklahoma Publishing Company*

**LaDonna Vita Crawford Harris**  
**Born: 15 February 1931; Temple, OK**



LaDonna Harris's career of political activism on behalf of American Indians began almost simultaneously with that of her husband's, Fred Harris's, political career first as Oklahoma State Senator for eight years and then as U.S. Senator (1964-1975). LaDonna Harris of Comanche and Irish descent was raised by her Comanche grandparents whose tribal values and world view continue to inform Harris's activism today. In 1965, Harris formed Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity (OIO), the first intertribal organization in Oklahoma, to help Oklahoma tribes improve their economic situation and alleviate poverty and discrimination against indigenous peoples. When she moved to Washington with her husband she used OIO as a model for forming Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO). This was only the start of her activism at the national level. She also became an advocate for children and the mentally ill. President Johnson appointed her to the National Women's Advisory Council on the War on Poverty in 1967. Other presidential appointments followed in succeeding administrations. In 1976, after her husband's failed presidential bid, Harris relocated to New Mexico. In 1980 she was the vice presidential candidate on the Citizen's Party ticket with Barry Commoner. She has continued to be extraordinarily involved with feminist issues and those affecting all aspects of American Indians' lives through her leadership of AIO.

For more: *Native American Women: A Biographical Dictionary* edited by G. Bataille and L. Lisa (New York: Routledge, 2001)

*Photo copyright, The Oklahoma Publishing Company*



**Peggy Varnadow Helmerich**

**Born: 18 March 1928; Columbia, MS**

**Education: Northwestern University (B.A., 1948)**

At the age of 20 Peggy Varnadow made her screen debut in the 1949 film “Undertow.” Actress Peggy Dow appeared in eight more films, including the 1950 classic “Harvey” with Jimmy Stewart and the 1951 film “Bright Victory,” the post-war story of a veteran blinded in combat, for which she won a special award presented by President Harry Truman. She retired from the silver screen in 1951 to marry Walter Helmerich III. The mother of five sons became active in Tulsa’s social and community life, providing leadership and support to a wide variety of organizations. Most notably she has been closely associated with the development of the Tulsa Library Trust and has built it into a significant philanthropic support organization for the Tulsa City-County Library system. In 1985 she helped establish the Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author Award, the Trust’s major, annual fund-raising event that has brought some of the world’s best literary talent to Tulsa. She has been the recipient of numerous awards including the 2004 Governor’s Arts Award, the National Society of Fund Raising Executives’ Outstanding Philanthropist of the Year and citations from both the American and Oklahoma Library associations.

For more: “Tulsa’s ‘Movie Star’ Civic Leader: Peggy Helmerich” by Missy Kruse in *Tulsa People Magazine*, October 1995.

*Photo provided*

**Elizabeth Fulton Hester\***

**Born: 1838**

**Died: 1929**

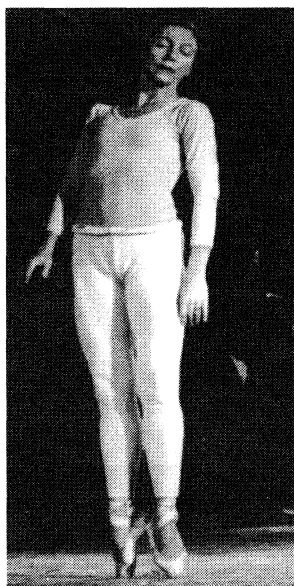
**Education: Southern Masonic Female  
Seminary, Covington, GA**



Elizabeth Fulton Hester's parents were missionaries among the Cherokees in Georgia. In 1857, she came to Indian Territory as a teacher in Tishomingo where she also served in the mission work of the Methodist Episcopal Church. She organized the First Woman's Foreign Missionary Society in Indian Territory and even after her marriage, returned to teaching in local schools during the Civil War. Five of her students became chiefs of their tribal nations. Her daughter Daisy married Oklahoma's first U.S. Senator Robert L. Owens. In her later years she continued to be active in the work of the Methodist Church in Muskogee and in various philanthropic activities. She was the first woman to be inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame when she was named to the first class of inductees in 1928.

For more: *Encyclopedia of World Methodism* (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 1974).

*Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society*



**Rosella Hightower**

**Born: 20 January 1920; Durwood, OK**

At age 18 Rosella Hightower, of Choctaw and Irish descent, joined the newly formed Ballet Ruse de Monte Carlo after years of training in Kansas City and New York. In her second year she was promoted to soloist after dancing the solo role in "Pas de Quatre." Three years later in 1941, she joined Ballet Theatre as a soloist. In 1943 she was promoted to ballerina and was hailed as "one of the finest of young ballerinas of inherent brilliance and fluency." At the end of the 1946-1947 season she replaced fellow ballerina Alicia Markova in "Giselle" with just six hours of rehearsal. Her performance was critically acclaimed. Following this role came the chance to join Grand Ballet de Monte Carlo (later called the Grand Ballet de Marquis de Cuevas) as the leading ballerina. The Cannes-based company grew in popularity and toured the world. In 1962 Hightower established her own school of ballet in Cannes, the Centre de Danse International Rosella Hightower, where she has been since, except for two years from 1984-1986, which she spent as director of the Ballet at La Scala (Italy). Hightower has received numerous honors including appearing in the mural portrait of Oklahoma's five Indian ballerinas in the Oklahoma capitol rotunda.

For more: *American Indian Ballerinas* by Lili Cockerille Livingston (University of Oklahoma Press, 1997)

*Photo copyright, The Oklahoma Publishing Company*

**Fannie E. Hill**

**Born: 1904 or 1905; Americus, GA**

**Education: Quinn College (B.A., 1927)**



Fannie Hill and her late husband the Reverend Ben Hill came to Tulsa in 1949 after working as educators in Mississippi. He became the pastor of Vernon A.M.E. Church and later a state representative. Jointly they were leaders in Oklahoma's civil rights movement.

Fannie Hill has been recognized numerous times for her service to the city of Tulsa, to women and children, to the interfaith community, and to senior citizens. For more than 30 years she has been involved with the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) of Tulsa, serving as both associate director and as the volunteer coordinator. She served on the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women under three different administrations and as a regent for the Tulsa Osteopathic College of Medicine (now the OSU Health Sciences Center), including one year as vice chair.

For more: *Tulsa World*, 2 May 1997.

*Photo copyright, The Oklahoma Publishing Company*



**Susan Eloise (S. E.) Hinton**  
**Born: 1950; Tulsa, Oklahoma**  
**Education: University of Tulsa (B.A., 1970)**

Hinton's first book, *The Outsiders* (1967), was published during her freshman year of college. It was an immediate success revolutionizing the world of young adult (YA) writing and publishing by portraying teenagers realistically. The book was made into a Francis Ford Coppola film in 1983. Hinton has written many other YA and children's books including *Rumble Fish* (1975), *That Was Then, This is Now* (1971), and *The Puppy Sister*, a 1997 Oklahoma Book Award Finalist. In 2004, she published her first novel for an adult audience, *Hawkes Harbor*. The Tulsa native was inducted into the Oklahoma Writers Hall of Fame in 1998 and was awarded the Oklahoma Center for the Book's Arrell Gibson Lifetime Achievement Award in 1997. She has received numerous national literary awards and honors including several Best Young Adult Book citations by the American Library Association.

For more: <http://poetsandwriters.okstate.edu/halloffame/sehinton.html>

*Photo courtesy of Tulsa People Magazine*



**Wanda LaVonne Jackson**  
**Born: 20 October 1937; Maud, OK**



Wanda Jackson's music career began while she was still in high school during which time she performed on the Oklahoma City radio station KLPR. Country music legend Hank Thompson heard her and helped her land a 1954 recording contract with Decca Records, where her duet "You Can't Have My Love" (with Billy Gray) landed on the country top ten charts. A friendship with Elvis Presley encouraged her to add rock elements to her musical style and she was soon known as the "Queen of Rockabilly." Throughout the 1960s she recorded many crossover hits with Capital Records and enjoyed great popularity at home as well as in Japan and Europe. In the 1970s she added gospel to her repertoire and for that decade much of her recording and performance focus was gospel. She has been inducted into numerous music halls of fame including the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame, the Oklahoma Country Music Hall of Fame, and the International Gospel Music Hall of Fame.

For more: <http://www.oklahomamusichalloffame.com/inductees.html>

*Photo courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society*



**Jayne Jayroe**

**Born: 1948; Hammon, OK**

**Education: Oklahoma City University  
(B.A., 1969) University of Tulsa (M.A.)**

In 1967 as a college sophomore Jayne Jayroe became Oklahoma's second Miss America. After finishing her reign she returned to college and finished her degree. In 1978 she began her career as a news anchor for television stations in Oklahoma City. In 1996 she became the first woman to be elected chair

of the Oklahoma Academy for State Goals, a statewide public policy think-tank. Later that same year she became co-host of the weekly "Discover Oklahoma" statewide television show promoting Oklahoma tourism. In 1999, Governor Frank Keating appointed her Secretary for Tourism and Recreation in his cabinet and Executive Director of the same department, positions Jayroe held until she resigned from both in 2003.

For more: *Distinguished Oklahomans* by Victoria Lee (Tulsa: A Touch of Heart Publishing, 2002).

*Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society*

**Phylis Lee Isley “Jennifer Jones”****Born: 2 March 1919; Tulsa, OK****Education: Northwestern University, American Academy of Dramatic Arts**

From a young age Phylis Isley knew that she wanted to be an actress. Her parents owned a small acting troop called the Isley Stock Company and later her father owned a chain of movie theaters, further influencing her ambition to be on stage and screen. After a brief time at Northwestern University, she went to New York to continue her education at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts where she met fellow student Robert Walker. They married and had two sons while both continued to pursue acting careers—Robert on the radio and Phylis on the stage. The young Phylis Walker met producer David O. Selznick during Walker’s audition for “Claudia.” Selznick was captivated by her and although she didn’t get the role, she did get a personal seven year film contract. Selznick believed that Phylis Walker needed a star quality name and his fondness for the name Jennifer paired with the short last name Jones became Phylis Walker’s new stage name and finally her legal name, Jennifer Jones. In 1942 Selznick selected Jones for the lead role in the movie “Song of Bernadette.” Jones was an immediate star and received an Academy Award (1944) for her work in the film.

Jones and Walker divorced and in 1949 Jones and Selznick married. Selznick cast Jones in a wide variety of roles from the sultry Pearl Chavez in “Duel in the Sun” to the vulnerable Carrie Meeber in “Sister Carrie.” Following Selznick’s death in 1965, Jones met Hunts Food chief and art collector Norton Simon and they wed in 1971. Simon encouraged Jones to return to acting and she enjoyed a Golden Globe nominated supporting role as Lioslette Mueller in the 1974 epic “The Towering Inferno.” Through Simon, Jones developed a strong interest in art and in 1977 Simon named her Chairman of the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena. The Simons also became extremely active in supporting mental health organizations and Jones established the Jennifer Jones Simon Foundation for Mental Health. Following Norton Simon’s death in 1993, Jones has maintained an active role in mental health and charity organizations as well continuing her service as chair of the Norton Simeon Foundation Board.

For More: <http://home.hiwaay.net/~oliver/jones.html> (a large number of photographs throughout Jones’ career are available at this site)

*Photo: A copyright cleared photo of Jennifer Jones was not available at the time of publication.*



**Lou C. Kerr**

**Born: 24 January 1937; Oklahoma City, OK**

**Education: Oklahoma City University (B.S.)**

As vice-president (1985-1999) and then president (1999-present) of the Kerr Foundation, Lou Kerr has helped organizations around Oklahoma and the country through her philanthropy and creative leadership. During her tenure, the Kerr Foundation has given funds to a wide variety of organizations that support the arts, education, medical research, and youth programs. Her service to the women of Oklahoma and the U.S. has been particularly noteworthy as she has not only served on the boards of a number of women-focused organizations such as the Oklahoma Commission on the Status of Women, International Women's Forum, the Goddess Fund for Stroke Research in Women, and the Oklahoma Advisory Commission on Breast Cancer Prevention and Treatment, but she has also provided significant resources to organizations such as the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation for the Lou C. Kerr Endowed Chair in Biomedical Research. Kerr has also given substantial time, energy, and funds to arts organizations in Oklahoma and in the U.S. She chaired the State Capitol Preservation Committee, was a founder of the internationally acclaimed Red Earth Festival, serves on the National Symphony Orchestra National Advisory Board, and is a trustee of National Public Radio.

For more: Various editions of the *Oklahoman*

*Photo provided*

**Eleanor Blake Kirkpatrick\***  
**Born: 10 March 1909; Mangum, OK**  
**Died: 21 May 1999**  
**Education: University of Oklahoma; Smith College (B.A., 1931)**



Raised in Oklahoma City, Eleanor Kirkpatrick returned to Oklahoma City for good following her husband's World War II naval service.

Almost immediately she became involved in the Oklahoma City arts, founding the Beaux Arts Ball in 1946 to benefit what is now the Oklahoma City Art Museum. This fundraising event continues to this day to benefit the museum. Her involvement with the museum continued to grow and she served as president of the museum's Women's Association and, with her husband John, donated funds for a building at the State Fairground, the museum's home from 1958 to 2001. Her interest in the arts extended beyond the fine arts to music and theater, in which she was also active as a volunteer leader and as a benefactor. She and John Kirkpatrick founded the Kirkpatrick Foundation in 1955. In its fifty years the Foundation has been a major force in arts and education philanthropy in Oklahoma City. Eleanor and John Kirkpatrick were also the driving force behind the 1969 establishment of the Oklahoma City Community Foundation, an organization that administers the charitable funds of over 900 different individual donors and organizations.

For more: *John & Eleanor: A Sense of Community* by Max J. Nichols (Tulsa: Council Oak Books, 1995)

*Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Heritage Association*



**Debbe McLain Leftwich**  
**Born: 7 September 1951; Chandler, OK**  
**Education: Oklahoma Baptist University;**  
**University of Central Oklahoma**

Senator Debbe Leftwich has been involved in Democratic politics since her teenage years. In addition to managing state house races and numerous local races, she has served three terms as the vice-chair of the Oklahoma Democratic Party (1997-99, 2001-2005) and President of the Oklahoma Federation of Democratic Women (1993-97). In 1997 she was named the Federation's Outstanding Woman of the Year and in 1998, she was inducted into the Federation's Hall of Fame. In December 2003, Leftwich was elected to fill Senate Seat 44 (Oklahoma County), which was left vacant by the death of her husband Senator Keith Leftwich. In her short time in the Oklahoma Senate, Leftwich has gained a reputation as a strong advocate for women, children, and Oklahoma families; she has numerous committee appointments including chair of the Business and Labor Committee. Prior to her election to the Oklahoma Senate, Leftwich worked for the office of the Chief Medical Examiner and served in numerous organizations including the Oklahoma Commission on the Status of Women, which she chaired from 2002 to 2003.

For more: [www.oksenate.gov/senators/biographies/leftwich-bio.html](http://www.oksenate.gov/senators/biographies/leftwich-bio.html)

*Photo provided*

**Marcia Yockey Manhart**

**Born: 14 January 1943; Wichita, KS**

**Education: University of Tulsa (B.A., 1965;  
M.A. 1971)**



Marcia Manhart began her 32-year career with Tulsa's Philbrook museum of Art in 1971 when she took the post of education director. From there she moved to the position of assistant director in 1977 and was selected to lead the organization as its executive director in 1984, a position she held until her retirement in January 2003. During her tenure as executive director she moved the museum from a position of significant debt to one of financial stability and into the ranks of a world-class, regional art museum. Under Manhart's leadership the museum undertook several expansion and renovation projects including restoration of the Philbrook grounds and gardens. Manhart has been curator and co-curator for numerous traveling exhibits that have showcased the museum's collections and has also procured many high profile traveling exhibits from Europe and America. Manhart is the recipient of numerous awards including the 1992 Governor's Arts Award for Excellence in the Arts.

For more: Various editions of the *Tulsa World*

*Photo provided*



**Mary Ellen McAnally**

**Born: 21 January 1939; Vandalia, IL  
Education: University of Tulsa (B.A., 1962);  
Princeton Theological Seminary (B.Div.,  
1965); Columbia University (M.A., 1968);  
Phillips Theological Seminary (M.Div.,  
1991)**

McAnally is an ordained Presbyterian minister, an award-winning poet, and has directed numerous progressive social organizations around the U.S. and in the Tulsa area. Since 1962, McAnally has led local and regional organizations with services for women, children, the elderly, and the incarcerated. She was the first woman to teach behind the walls of an Oklahoma state prison when she taught creative writing to inmates at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary at McAlester and she has served as the Director of Corrections Ministries for the Tulsa Metropolitan Ministry.

McAnally's first book of poetry, *We Will Make a River* (West End Press) was published in 1978 and she has published numerous collections including *Coming of Age in Oklahoma* (1987). Her poetry has received recognition nationally including the Carl Sandburg Award for poetry (1978), and a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Fellowship (1981-82), making her the first Oklahoma woman poet to receive NEA funding.

Major Source: *Contemporary Authors Online* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005)

*Photo provided*



**Eddie-Rue “Rue” McClanahan**

**Born: 21 February 1935; Healdton, OK**

**Education: University of Tulsa (B.A., 1956)**

Trained as a dancer, McClanahan aspired from her teen years to be a stage actress. After graduation from the University of Tulsa she moved to New York to attempt a theatrical career and almost immediately found a stage role and appeared in a number of long-running Broadway and off-Broadway productions. In the late 1960s she made the move to television roles and has appeared in over 40 television shows and movies in both leading and guest appearance roles. Her most well-known role and longest-standing was that of the feisty, ultra-feminine Blanche Devereaux on the NBC sitcom “The Golden Girls” from 1985-1992. In 1987 she received an Emmy award for her work as Blanche. McClanahan continues to act on both television and stage.

For more: *Distinguished Oklahomans* by Victoria Lee (Tulsa: A Touch of Heart Publishing, 2002)

*Photo: A copyright-cleared photo of Rue McClanahan was not available at the time of publication. For photos of McClanahan go to: [www.theruecrew.com](http://www.theruecrew.com)*



**Reba Nell McEntire\***

**Born: 28 March 1954; (some sources say 1955) Chockie, OK**

**Education: Southeastern Oklahoma State University**

McEntire began singing at an early age in church and community productions and by the time she was in high school she had joined her siblings in a band called “The Singing McEntires.” Her first big break came as a college student when famed rodeo announcer Clem McSpadden arranged for her to sing the National Anthem at the 1974 National Rodeo Finals in Oklahoma City. Country music legend Red Steagall was in attendance and encouraged her to go to Nashville, which she did in early 1975. Although she was not an immediate success, McEntire worked hard to get her name and musical talent out to the public. In 1983, McEntire’s “Can’t Ever Get the Blues” hit number one on the Country music charts and in 1984, she received the first of four Female Vocalist of the Year awards by the Country Music Association (CMA). McEntire’s awards have continued to pour in and in addition to recognition for her work as a musical performer, her humanitarian work has also been recognized including receiving the CMA’s Humanitarian of the Year award in 2002.

For more: *Oklahoma Women in American Music* by George Carney (Oklahoma Humanities Council, 1999)

*Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Heritage Association*

**Louise “Lou” Davis McMahan\***  
**Born: 18 January 1873; St. Joseph, MO**  
**Died: 8 Feb 1966**  
**Education: Camden Point Christian College**  
**(MO)**



McMahan moved with her husband Eugene P. McMahan and son Eugene P. McMahan, Jr. to Lawton in 1901 where Mr. McMahan established his law practice. After their son's success in the oil business, the McMahans joined their son in San Antonio. Following her husband's death, mother and son established the McMahan Foundation. The early death of her son brought Mrs. McMahan back to Lawton to construct a building for the Foundation, which provided support for humanitarian projects as well as education and the arts. The first floor of the foundation building included an auditorium that served as a meeting room for cultural performances, clubs, and conferences. A separate, larger auditorium was constructed during the early 1950s and presented to the city of Lawton providing a significant venue for lectures and the performing arts. The McMahan Foundation continues its work today.

For more: *Indomitable Oklahoma Women* by Opal Hartsell Brown (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Heritage Association, 1994)

*Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society*



**Dale Fleming McNamara**  
**Education: University of Oklahoma;**  
**University of Tulsa**

McNamara began playing golf at the age of 11 and was soon playing in tournaments around the country. As a mother and Tulsa volunteer in 1974, she was approached to start a women's golf program at the University of Tulsa. Initially declining the offer, her husband persuaded her to accept this challenge. During the next 26 years she built an outstanding women's golf program at the University of Tulsa that included four national team championships, five national runner-up finishes, National Coach of the Year honors, and the development of numerous LPGA players including Nancy Lopez and her own daughter Melissa. She retired from the University of Tulsa in 2000 but continues to stay active in the golf world as a consultant and volunteer. She was inducted into the National Collegiate Golf Hall of Fame in 1988 and was presented with the College Golf Foundation's Gladys Palmer Award in 2004 for her outstanding service and contributions to women's collegiate golf.

For more: *Distinguished Oklahomans* by Victoria Lee (Tulsa: A Touch of Heart Publishing, 2002)

Photo copyright. *The Oklahoma Publishing Company*

**Perle (originally Pearl) Reid Skirvin Mesta\***  
**Born: 12 October 1889 or 1891; Sturgis,**  
**Michigan**  
**Died: 16 March 1975**



Mesta grew up in her father's Oklahoma City hotel. She skillfully managed her inheritances from her deceased husband, George Mesta of Mesta Machine Company, and her father, Billy Skirvin, Oklahoma City businessman, to become an extraordinary business woman, hostess, and political activist. In the late 1930s Mesta became actively involved in the women's rights movement joining the National Woman's Party and lobbying for the Equal Rights Amendment. She left the Republican Party in the early 1940s and became active in the Democratic Party. She raised critical funds for President Truman's re-election campaign, was co-chair of his inaugural committee, and became his administration's unofficial hostess. She continued her role as the premier hostess on the national scene during the Eisenhower administration and was recognized for her ability to bring together leading political leaders from both parties. She became only the third woman to serve as a foreign minister when President Truman appointed her as ambassador to the Duchy of Luxembourg. She was so successful in that role that she became the first woman to receive that country's highest honor, the Grand Cross of the Crown of Oak. In 1950, Irving Berlin's musical "Call Me Madam," based on Mesta's life, became a Broadway hit and a film version in 1953 followed. She continued to entertain and be part of the Washington social scene into her 80s.

For more: *American National Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999)

*Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society*



**Shannon Miller**

**Born: 10 March 1977; Rolla, Missouri**

**Education: University of Houston (B.B.A., 2003) Boston College (J. D. /M.B.A. in progress)**

Shannon Miller's gymnastic career began at the age of 4 and at age 10, she took part in her first national competition. At 11, the Edmond girl was named the best gymnast in the country in the children's division at the U.S. Classic and was selected for the senior national team at 13. Miller finished first at the 1992 Olympic trials. As a member of the U.S. Olympic team she won five medals, the most of any American athlete at the winter or summer games that year. In 1996, she returned to the Olympic Games and won two gold medals—one in the balance beam and one for the team championship. Miller is the most decorated American gymnast in history, having won more Olympic and World Championship medals than any other American gymnast, male or female. In 2003 she was inducted into the U.S. Gymnastics Hall of Fame and in October 2005 Miller was named to the class of 2006 inductees to the U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame. Miller is currently pursuing law and M.B.A. degrees at Boston College while continuing to be active in the gymnastics world as a television commentator, clinic coach, and motivational speaker.

For more: <http://www.usa-gymnastics.org/athletes/bios/m/smiller.pdf>

*Photo copyright, The Oklahoma Publishing Company*

**Teresa Miller**

**Born: 23 November 1952; Tahlequah, OK**  
**Education: Northeastern Oklahoma State University (B.A., 1973; M.Ed., 1975)**



In addition to being the author of two well-received novels: *Remnants of Glory* (1981) and *Family Correspondence* (2000), Miller has been Director of the Oklahoma Center for Poets and Writers since 1994, the year she founded the Center. The Center, now affiliated with Oklahoma State University -Tulsa, sponsors a biannual book festival, "Celebration of Books," one of the largest and most successful literary events in the southwestern United States. Miller also oversees the Oklahoma Writers Hall of Fame. Her extraordinary work in promoting Oklahoma authors and bringing the best literary talent to Oklahoma has been recognized by numerous groups. Her weekly television program "Writing Out Loud" on OETA Public Television is noted for its intelligent, in-depth interviews and the comfortable interplay between Miller and her guests.

For more: *Contemporary Authors Online* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005)

*Photo provided*



**Angela Zoe Monson**

**Born: 31 July 1955; Oklahoma City**  
**Education: Oklahoma City University (B.S., 1976); University of Oklahoma (M.P.S., 1987)**

In 1990, Democrat Angela Monson was elected to the Oklahoma House of Representatives. In 1993, she was elected to the Oklahoma Senate where she served until term limits forced her from office in 2005. She has chaired the Senate Finance Committee and served as Assistant Majority Leader. From 2002-2003, Monson served as President of the National Conference of State Legislatures, becoming the first African-American woman to lead the organization. She attracted national attention when she proposed that treatable mental illnesses be covered by health insurance and helped open low-income health clinics at elementary schools in Oklahoma City. Prior to coming to the Oklahoma legislature Monson served as executive director of the Oklahoma Health Care Project and as a probation/parole officer for the Oklahoma Department of Corrections.

For more: Various editions of the *Oklahoman* and *Ebony* magazine

*Photo provided*



**Carrie Amelia Moore Nation**

**Born: 25 November 1846; Garrard County, KY**

**Died: 9 June 1911**



Perhaps motivated by her first husband's drunkenness, Nation became active in the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) when she moved to Medicine Lodge, Kansas in the 1890s. She worked to enforce Kansas's 1880 constitutional prohibition amendment at local saloons. Through public demonstrations, social pressure, and ultimately violence, her raids on saloons with rocks and hatchets created a great deal of controversy and she became the subject of ridicule in the largely conservative press. In 1905, she moved to Guthrie, Oklahoma Territory. Although she spent only four years in Guthrie, her influence helped bring Oklahoma to statehood under prohibition. During her latter years, including those in Oklahoma, she spent much of her time on the Vaudeville circuit preaching her message of anti-smoking and temperance and selling her autobiography and commemorative hatchets.

For more: *American National Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999)

*Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society*



**Clara Ann Fowler “Patti Page”\***  
**Born: 8 November 1927; Claremore, OK**

During high school Clara Ann Fowler was drawn to the stage as a singer and actress. After graduation, Fowler went to work in the advertising department of Tulsa’s KTUL and got her big break when she served as a last minute substitute for the program “Meet Patti Page,” sponsored by the Page Dairy. This led to a regular spot in the afternoons and a permanent stage name. She was soon discovered by band manager Jack Rael and the two formed a business partnership that lasted more than 40 years. Rael moved her to Chicago and she won a spot on ABC’s radio show “The Breakfast Club.” By 1948, she had signed a recording deal with Mercury Records. At Mercury she pioneered the technique of overdubbing in which her voice was recorded as many as four times singing the various parts of a song. Her 1950’s hit “Tennessee Waltz” was the most successful song commercially to use this technique. Page enjoyed wide popularity throughout the 1950s and had a number of hits including “Old Cape Cod” and “Doggie in the Window.” In 1957, she hosted her own television variety hour called “The Big Record” that featured recording stars singing their hit songs. This was followed by “The Patti Page Show” in 1958. Neither show was a big success. In the 1960s and 70s she moved over into the country music arena and eventually into the Las Vegas club circuit. She was in the first class of inductees in the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame (1997) and was a 2002 inductee to the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame.

For more: “Patti Page” in *Contemporary Musicians* v. 11 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Research, 1994)

*Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Heritage Association*

**Francine “Fran” Leffler Ringold**  
**Born: 1934; New York, NY**  
**Education: University of Michigan (B.A., 1955); University of Tulsa (M.A., 1964; Ph.D.,)**



Since 1967, Dr. Ringold has been editor-in-chief of *Nimrod International Journal*, a literary magazine active in the discovery and publication of new writers. She is the published author of poetry, plays, and creative writing textbooks as well as a producer of radio programs on poetry. She has taught for over 40 years and has been on the English faculty at the University of Tulsa. She has also taught and designed programs for the deaf, the physically challenged, and the elderly. In 1996, she received the Oklahoma Book Award for Poetry for her book *The Trouble with Voices* and was named poet laureate for the state of Oklahoma in 2003 and 2005 by Governor Brad Henry.

For more: Various editions of the *Tulsa World*

*Photo courtesy of Nimrod International Journal*



**Alice Mary Robertson\***  
**Born: 2 January 1854; Tullahassee Mission,  
Creek Nation, Indian Territory**  
**Died: 1 July 1931**  
**Education: Elmira College (New York)**

Alice Mary Robertson was the daughter of Presbyterian missionaries to the Indian Territory. As a young woman she served as clerk in the Indian office in Washington; taught in Indian schools in her native Tullahassee and in Carlisle, PA; and ran a boarding school for Indian girls that developed into Henry Kendall College and later the University of Tulsa. Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft appointed her postmistress of the Muskogee Post Office, where she served from 1905-1913. A lifelong Republican, she unsuccessfully ran for the office of county superintendent of public instruction in 1916. In 1920, in the Republican Harding landslide, she successfully challenged Democratic incumbent W.W. Hastings for his seat in Congress. She ran on the platform, "I am a Christian, I am an American, I am a Republican," which she spread in the coal mines, in her cafeteria, and by open cockpit biplane. Although she was the only woman in Congress (and only the second elected to the body) the self-confirmed "old maid" was unpopular with feminists. She was anti-suffragist, anti-birth control, and firmly believed that women should stay close to home. She was overwhelmingly voted out of office in 1922 and returned permanently to Muskogee.

For more: *American National Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999)

*Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society*

**Cynthia Susan Gibson Ross**  
**Born: 7 December 1950; Enid, OK**  
**Education: Oklahoma State University**  
**(B.A., 1983; M.S., 1986; Ed.D., 1989)**



Dr. Cynthia Ross has served in leadership positions in Oklahoma Higher Education for more than a quarter-century—at the comprehensive university level, the state system level, and as president of Cameron University. In these positions she has emphasized academic quality, student success and institutional accountability. She has been a champion of the needs of non-traditional students, having completed all three of her degrees while working at Oklahoma State University, her last position being Director of Academic Affairs Administration. In 1990, she joined the staff of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education as Associate Vice Chancellor and in 1994 was named Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, the chief academic officer for the state system. In this role, Ross provided system-wide leadership for all academic policy and degree programs. When she was named president at Cameron in 2002, Ross became only the third woman to serve as a university president and the first selected from a national search. Her three-year tenure as President of Cameron University has seen significant growth and advancement for Oklahoma's third-largest regional university and has been characterized by a strong partnership in the private sector resulting in a 70 percent increase in scholarship funding, endowed professorships, and the largest cash contribution in the school's history.

For more: [www.cameron.edu/media-pr/pr02/109president.june.html](http://www.cameron.edu/media-pr/pr02/109president.june.html)

*Photo provided*



**Susan M. Savage**

**Born: 30 March 1952; Tulsa, OK**

**Education: Beaver College, (Glenside, PA)  
(B.A., 1974)**

Susan Savage became the first woman elected mayor of Tulsa and served in this position from 1992-2002. Her administration was characterized by record job growth, improvements to air and water quality and to neighborhoods, and the implementation of more than \$1 billion of city infrastructure investments. She served on the President's Council on Sustainable Energy and chaired the U.S. Conference of Mayors' Energy and Environment Committee. In 2000, she was named one of "100 to Watch" by *The New Democrat Magazine*. She was appointed Oklahoma Secretary of State in January 2003 by Governor Brad Henry.

For more: [www.sos.state.ok.us](http://www.sos.state.ok.us)

*Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society*

**Norma Des Cyngé Smallwood**  
**Born: 12 May 1909; Bristow, OK**  
**Died: 8 May 1966**  
**Education: Oklahoma College for Women**  
**(now University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma)**



Norma Smallwood began winning beauty contests at the age of 1 and became Oklahoma's first Miss America when she won the crown in 1926. She also became the first Native American woman to win the title as she was of Cherokee descent. During her year as Miss America she received many endorsement opportunities and performance contracts from which she saved money to further her art career. She met wealthy oil man Thomas Gilcrease and they were married in 1928. Their marriage produced one daughter and they were divorced in a highly publicized trial in 1934. A few years later she married Wichita oil man George Bruce, president of Aladdin Petroleum. She spent the rest of her life quietly pursuing her painting and doing charity work.

For more: *Petticoats, Politics, and Pirouettes: Oklahoma Women from 1900-1950* by Glenda Carlile (Oklahoma City: Southern Hill Publishing Co., 1995)

*Photo courtesy of the Pioneer Woman Museum, Ponca City, OK*



**Kathryn La Verne Starks “Kay Starr”\***  
**Born: 21 July 1922; Dougherty, OK**

By the time Kathryn Starks was 13 she was singing on a local radio show five days a week. She sang with Glenn Miller at age 15. Her real break came, however, when jazz violinist and orchestra leader Joe Venuti heard her and signed her to perform with his band. She gained even more recognition and fan support when she joined Charlie Barnet’s band. Her number one hit record, “Wheel of Fortune” (1952) made her one of the top female pop stars of the early 1950s. Her 1956 hit “Rock and Roll Waltz” was considered the first hit by a female vocalist in the rock and roll era. In addition to her work in radio, she performed extensively on stage, television, movies, and big bands. Starr’s low vocal range was her distinctive trademark and the part Native American, part Irish singer was frequently mistaken for an African-American vocalist. Among other awards, she is a 2002 inductee of the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame and a 1988 inductee of the Oklahoma Hall of Fame.

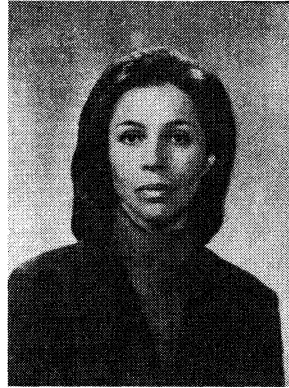
For more: “Kay Starr” in *Contemporary Musicians* v. 27 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Group, 2000)

*Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Heritage Association*



**Elizabeth Maria Tall Chief (Maria Tallchief Paschen)\*†**

**Born: 24 January 1925; Fairfax, OK**



“Betty Marie” Tall Chief, of Osage, Scottish, and Irish descent, began piano and dance lessons at an early age and showed enormous aptitude for both. At the age of 12 she began studying at the Hollywood studio of the legendary Bronislava Nijinska while continuing to give solo piano recitals and to make appearances with chamber music groups. Before she finished high school she decided to focus on a career in dance and in 1942 was hired by the Ballet Ruse de Monte Carlo. Her first major role with the company was in 1943 in the “Chopin Concerto,” in which critics hailed her stunning performance. In 1944 she became the protégé and, for a brief time, the wife of renowned Russian choreographer George Balanchine, who created many roles specifically for her including “Swan Lake,” “Serenade,” and “The Nutcracker.” In 1947, Tallchief became the first American ballerina in more than 100 years to perform on the stage at the Paris Opera and achieved international fame as the United States’ first great prima ballerina in 1947 for her performance in “Firebird.” She retired as an active performer in 1965, served as artistic director of the Chicago Lyric Opera Ballet, and in 1979 with her sister, ballerina Marjorie Tallchief Skibine, founded the Chicago City Ballet, where Maria remained as artistic director until 1987. She has received numerous awards including the 1996 Kennedy Center Honor, the nation’s highest award for lifetime contribution in the performing arts. She was inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fame in 1996 and she is featured in the “Flight of Spirit” mural portraying the five Indian ballerinas in the state capitol building.

For more: *American Indian Ballerinas* by Lili Cockerille Livingston (University of Oklahoma Press, 1997)

*Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Heritage Association*



**Myra Yvonne Chouteau Terekhov\***  
**Born: 7 March 1929; Ft. Worth, TX**  
**Education: School of American Ballet;**  
**Professional Children's School**

After an early performing career in Oklahoma City as a powwow dancer and ballet student, Yvonne Chouteau, of French, Shawnee and Cherokee heritage, won a lifetime scholarship to the School of American Ballet at the age of 12. In 1943 at 14 she was hired by the Ballet Ruse de Monte Carlo, one of the most famous ballet companies of the time. On her 16th birthday she had her solo debut as Prayer in the third act of "Coppelia." She continued to climb the ranks of soloist and received wide critical acclaim for her lyricism, purity of classical line and her ethereal qualities. In 1950 she was promoted to ballerina after her triumphant portrayal of Juliette in "Romeo et Juliette." In 1957 she resigned from Ballet Ruse and went to the Montevideo State Opera as guest artist with her husband and fellow dancer, Uruguayan born Miguel Terekhov. In 1959, University of Oklahoma President George Lynn Cross invited Chouteau and Terekhov to teach a few ballet classes at the university. From this modest start, they developed a full-fledged and highly regarded dance program. They also opened and ran the Chouteau-Terekhov Academy of Ballet from 1961-1988 and in 1963 staged the debut of the Oklahoma City Civic Ballet with a production of "The Nutcracker." Among the many awards Chouteau received, she is part of the mural portrait of Oklahoma's five Indian ballerinas hanging in the north arch of the Oklahoma capitol rotunda.

For more: *American Indian Ballerinas* by Lili Cockerille Livingston (University of Oklahoma Press, 1997)

*Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Heritage Association*

**Helen Robson Walton\***  
**Born: 1919; Claremore, OK**  
**Education: University of Oklahoma (B.S., 1941)**



Helen Robson Walton married Sam Walton, the founder of Wal-Mart, in 1943. As the couple amassed a fortune, she became involved in directing the family's philanthropic efforts. She has been active in promoting education and the arts, serving on boards and providing financial support to institutions in her home state of Oklahoma and her adopted state of Arkansas. A lifetime member of the Presbyterian Church, she was the first woman to chair the United Presbyterian Church USA Foundation and first woman to serve on the national board of the Presbyterian-affiliated University of Tulsa. She was also the first woman to serve on the Arkansas State Parks and Recreation Commission and was President of the Arkansas National Museum for Women of the Arts.

For more: *Tulsa World*, 25 April 1991

*Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Heritage Association*



**Carolyn Whitener**

**Born: 26 February 1941; Corpus Christi, TX**

Carolyn Whitener and her husband operated the Honk-N-Holler, Stillwater's first curbside convenience store. She was also an OSU art student whose drawings would one day illustrate *Down Home Cookin'* published by the Grady County Extension Homemakers.

Oklahoma allowed Carolyn to sell 3.2 beer to females age 18 and males age 21. She thought the law was pretty flawed, like many of the petty regulations small business owners deal with. In 1972 an OSU freshman, Mark Walker, talked Carolyn into signing on to a legal challenge to the law.

The two young people knew what they were doing. They were not challenging a beer law. They were going after sex discrimination. Ruth Bader Ginsburg and many others helped with their case. The case took four years to resolve. Eventually it wound up before the US Supreme Court. There was endless ridicule from the media. Headlines included "Justices Hear Sex Bias Case Amid Sarcasm, Laughter," "Fun Foams as Top Court Talks Beer," "Beer Sales Gripes Highlight Sex Bias Dispute," "3.2 Beer's Weak But So May Be Court Case," and "Women Aid Those Thirsty Young Men." These were not easy times for a conservative, non-drinking business woman. After Mark Walker's tragic death Whitener was the only plaintiff.

On December 20, 1976 she won. The Supreme Court granted her standing to sue on behalf of others under 'exceptional circumstances.' The Court also ruled that gender discrimination could be permissible only if it served an important governmental function and the discrimination was substantially related to the achievement of those objectives. Sex discrimination became legally suspect. If Oklahoma's overturned beer law could not pass judicial scrutiny then what could? The answer was hardly anything. Sex discrimination became unconstitutional. The Equal Rights Amendment was placed into the Constitution by Supreme Court decision. Ruth Bader Ginsburg called Carolyn Whitener, Oklahoma business woman and homemaker, a "heroine."

For more: R. Darcy and Jenny Sanbrano "Oklahoma and the Development of Equal Rights: The ERA, 3.2% Beer, Juvenile Justice and Craig v. Boren." *Oklahoma City Law Review* 22 (Fall, 1997):1009-1049.

**Esther Ann Winterfeldt**  
**Born: 27 July 1926; Stigler, OK**  
**Education: Oklahoma A&M College**  
**(now Oklahoma State University) (B.S.,**  
**1948; M.S., 1957), Ohio State University**  
**(Ph.D., 1970)**



Dr. Esther Winterfeldt is a national leader in the field of Nutrition and Dietetics. The primary focus of her 45-year career has been to promote good health through nutrition and dietetics. Winterfeldt began her career in 1949 and has been a dietician and dietetics and nutrition educator in hospitals and universities throughout the United States. She served as Department Head of Nutrition and Dietetics Departments at Auburn University, the University of Texas at Houston, and Oklahoma State University, where she was the first woman faculty member appointed as a Regents Professor. She was elected president of both the 70,000-member American Dietetic Association (ADA) (1980) and the president of the ADA Foundation (1986). In 1983 she directed the Human Nutrition Information Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, in Washington, D.C. In 1993 Dr. Winterfeldt received the highest honor awarded by the ADA for her work in the dietetics profession, the Marjorie Hulsizer Copher Award, and in 2002 was inducted into the Oklahoma Higher Education Hall of Fame.

For more: *A History of the Oklahoma State University College of Home Economics* by Lorene Keeler-Battles (Stillwater, OK: Oklahoma State University Press, 1989.)

*Photo provided*



**Anna Luella Witteman\***

**Born: 1872; Ohio**

**Died: 4 November 1957**

Anna Luella Witteman began assisting young, unwed mothers when a girl working in her parents' Kansas home came to her for help. She found help for her in a Wichita institution, a ministry of the Free Methodist Church, and seeing the need for this type of agency joined their staff. In 1900, she went to Guthrie to head the Oklahoma Rescue Home. She moved the home to Oklahoma City in 1909 when a property was purchased there. She built the home that is now the Deaconess Home from an empty 30x50 building. As the home grew, a free-standing hospital developed around it, first to provide medical services to the pregnant women and then later to provide general medical services to the community. This hospital became Oklahoma City's Deaconess Hospital. During her 58-year career Witteman provided comfort, shelter, and assistance to more than 10,000 women who needed her help. When a new wing was added to the home in 1955, it was named in her honor. Her humanitarian service to the state was recognized when she was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1938.

For more: *Daily Oklahoman*, 5 Nov 1957, p. 11

*Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Heritage Association*

**Alfre Woodard**

**Born: 8 November 1953; Tulsa, OK**

**Education: Boston University, (B.F.A., 1974)**

Alfre Woodard began acting at Bishop Kelley High School in Tulsa at the suggestion of one of her teachers. After graduating from Boston University she moved to Los Angeles to pursue a television/film acting career. Her television credits include "St. Elsewhere," "Hill Street Blues," "LA Law," and the made-for-cable film "Mandela" (1987) for which she earned a cable television ACE award. Woodard has appeared in more than 40 feature films including her debut appearance in 1978 in "Remember My Name," her Oscar-nominated performance in "Cross Creek" (1983); "Star Trek: First Contact" (1996); and "Radio" (2003). According to a 1994 interview in *Essence*, Woodard is "always on the lookout for that story that will make me run, fly, leap, and jump all in the same character."

For more: Joe Kuskowski, "Alfre Woodard" in *Black Biography*, v. 9, p. 270 (NY: Gale Research, 1995)

*Photo: A copyright-cleared photo of Alfre Woodard was not available at the time of publication. For photos of Woodard go to: [www.imdb.com/name/nm0005569/](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0005569/)*



**Muriel Hazel Wright\***

**Born: 31 March 1889; Lehigh, Choctaw Nation, Indian Territory**

**Died: 27 February 1975**

**Education: East Central State College (now East Central University) (B.A., 1912)**

Muriel Wright was the granddaughter of Choctaw Chief Allen Wright, the man who proposed the name “Oklahoma” for Indian Territory. After completing her B.A. degree in 1912, Wright held a number of teaching and administrative positions in the rural schools of southeastern Oklahoma. Her family background and academic training led her to focus her energy on Indian activism and historical research on Oklahoma, particularly the role of Native Americans in the state’s history and development. She wrote or co-authored 12 books on Oklahoma and Indian history including *Guide to Indian Tribes of Oklahoma* (1951). She also served as editor of the Oklahoma Historical Society’s *Chronicles of Oklahoma* from 1943-1973, shaping it into a well regarded publication. Among her many honors she was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1940. In 1971 she was named outstanding Indian Woman of the twentieth century by the North American Indian Women’s Association and in 1993 became the first woman inducted into the Oklahoma Historians Hall of Fame.

For more: *American Women Historians, 1700s-1900s* by Jennifer Scanlon (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996).

*Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society*