



Jeannette Rankin

First Female Representative in Congress (1917-1918; 1941-1942)

Jeannette was born on a Grant Creek ranch near Missoula in 1880 and became involved in the women's suffrage movement in 1910. She was castigated by both the Montana and national press for her vote against entering World War I, but during her first Congressional term she supported the striking Butte miners after the Speculator Mine Disaster. After her failed bid for the U.S. Senate in 1918 Jeannette retired for the next 20 years in Georgia, advocating for peace. Elected again to the House in 1940 she continued her peace advocacy by being the only Congressional member to vote against entry in World War II. Jeannette died in 1973.



Ella J. Knowles Haskell

First Female Lawyer in Montana (1888)

Originally from New Hampshire, Ella graduated from Bates College in Lewiston, ME with honors in 1883. After coming to the Montana Territory for health reasons, Ella successfully lobbied the Montana legislature to allow women to practice law and was admitted to practice in 1888, becoming the first woman to do so. Ella was also the state's first notary public. In 1892, she ran for state Attorney General, becoming the first woman in the nation to run for that office. Ella narrowly lost to Henri Haskell, who later nominated her as Assistant Attorney General. In 1896 Ella became the first Montana woman elected to a political convention. She argued and won cases before the U.S. Circuit Court and the U.S. Supreme Court.



No
Photo
Available

Emily E. Mullenger Sloan

First Female County Attorney (1924-1926)

Emily was born in Wisconsin in 1878. She attended the University of Montana Law School from Oct. 1, 1917 to June 2, 1919. She didn't graduate but attended as long as she was able. She was accepted to law school without having a high school diploma but had raised four children before attending and chose law because it was the only course her husband would pay for; he later withdrew his support and she was unable to graduate. She passed the bar exam and was admitted to the Montana Bar in June 1919. She worked as the Carbon County Attorney from 1924-1926.



Emma Ingalls

One of two first Female State Legislators (1917-1920)

Born in Wisconsin in 1860, Emma and her husband moved to Corvallis in 1886. They relocated to Kalispell in 1891, starting the newspaper *Inter Lake*. Emma was elected to represent Flathead County in the state legislature in 1917. In 1918 she sponsored the bill creating a separate reform facility for girls (Helena's Mountain View Vocational School). In the 1920 special session to ratify the Woman Suffrage Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, Emma introduced it in the House. Emma died in 1940.



Maggie Hathaway

One of two first Female State Legislators (1917-1920)

Born in 1866 in Ohio, Maggie was a teacher/principal at Helena's Broadwater School from 1895-1905. She was a campaigner for women's suffrage and was elected to the Montana legislature representing Ravalli County in 1917. Maggie served three terms and was the author of Montana's Mother's Pension Act in 1917 which provided money for children whose fathers didn't support them. Maggie was a Democratic National Convention delegate in 1920; in 1921 she became one of two women in the nation elected to serve as floor leader for her party. She lobbied for eight-hour work days and equal pay for women and was the first woman appointed to head a state agency. Maggie died in 1954.



Edna Hinman

First Female Supreme Court Clerk (1955-1959)

Born in 1902 in York, MT Edna began a career in state politics in 1928. She worked for 24 years as a Montana Legislative staffer. In 1955, Edna became Montana's first female Clerk of the Montana Supreme Court, remaining in that position until 1959. In 1960, Edna ran for Montana State Treasurer and was elected. She served as treasurer from 1961-1965. Edna was selected as the first female Chief Clerk of the Montana House of Representatives in 1967. She died in 2001.



No
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Doris Swords Poppler

First Female U.S. Attorney for the District of Montana (1991– 2004)

Doris Swords was born in 1924 in Billings. After completing service in the United States Navy, Doris enrolled at the University of Montana Law School, the only female in her class. After graduating from law school in 1948, Doris married her law school classmate, Louis Poppler. Doris practiced law with her father in Billings before she and Lou started their family of six. When Lou died in 1972, Doris resumed her legal career by joining the Yellowstone County Attorney's Office. During this time, Doris met fellow attorney, Diane Barz, and together they formed the Poppler and Barz Law Firm, the first women's law firm in Montana. In 1991, President George H.W. Bush appointed Doris as U.S. Attorney for the District of Montana, the first woman to hold this office. After completion of her term as U.S. Attorney, Doris became a Senior Field Agent for the National Indian Gaming Commission. When she retired in 2002, Doris was elected to the Billings City Council, where she was voted Deputy Mayor of Billings. Doris died in 2004.



Diane Barz

First Female Supreme Court Justice (1989-1991)

First Female District Court Judge (13th Judicial District 1979-1989; 1994-2003)

First Female Law Clerk Montana Supreme Court (1968-1970)

In September 1989, Governor Stan Stephens appointed Montana native, Diane MacDonald Barz to serve on the Montana Supreme Court. She served through 1991. Prior to her appointment, Diane had established several other firsts for Montana women in the law. She was the first woman law clerk at the Montana Supreme Court. In 1979, she was sworn in as a district court judge in Yellowstone County, making her not only the first woman to serve as a district court judge but also the youngest person ever to be elected to the district court bench. After leaving the Montana Supreme Court in 1991, Diane went to the U.S. Attorney's Office where she worked under her former law partner, Doris Swords Poppler, the first woman U.S. Attorney General for Montana. In 1994, Diane was again elected to to a district court judgeship in Yellowstone County. She served there until her retirement in 2003. In total, Diane served 20 years on the district court bench.



Karla Gray

First Female Supreme Court Chief Justice (2000-2008)

Karla Gray is the first woman elected to the Montana Supreme Court and the first woman Chief Justice of the Montana Supreme Court, elected in 2000. Appointed to the court in 1991, she won election to it in 1992 and again in 1998, During her tenure on the bench she authored close to 800 opinions and was a strong advocate for “Access to Justice.”



Patricia Cotter

Montana Supreme Court Justice (2001—Present)

Justice Cotter graduated in 1972 with honors from Western Michigan University with a B.S. in Political Science and History, and graduated from Notre Dame Law School in 1977. After practicing law in her native South Bend, Indiana, for six years, she and her husband Michael moved to Montana, and in early 1984 began practicing law with John Hoyt in Great Falls. In 1985, they established the firm of Cotter & Cotter.

In 1992 and again in 1998, Justice Cotter received the Montana Trial Lawyers Association's Public Service Award for her contributions in the preparation and filing of amicus curiae briefs before the Montana Supreme Court. In 1993, she became chair of the Association's amicus committee, and served in that capacity until resigning to run for the Court in 1999.

On November 7, 2000, Justice Cotter won election to the Montana Supreme Court and assumed the position previously held by retiring Justice William Hunt. She was re-elected to a second eight-year term in November, 2008.



Beth Baker

Montana Supreme Court Justice (2011—Present)

Justice Baker was raised in Spokane, Washington, and graduated magna cum laude from the University of Washington in 1982 with a bachelor's degree in Speech Communication. In 1985, she graduated with high honors from the University of Montana School of Law. Following graduation from law school, Justice Baker served four years as a law clerk for the Hon. Charles C. Lovell, U.S. District Judge for the District of Montana. From 1989 through 2000, she worked as an Assistant Attorney General for the Montana Department of Justice, including four years as Assistant Chief Deputy Attorney General and four years as Chief Deputy Attorney General. Justice Baker spent the next ten years in private practice with the firm of Hughes, Kellner, Sullivan and Alke. Justice Baker was elected to the Montana Supreme Court on November 2, 2010, and was sworn into office January 3, 2011, to fill the position of retiring Justice W. William Leaphart.

Justice Baker now serves as the Montana Supreme Court's representative and chair of the Court's Access to Justice Commission.



Laurie McKinnon

Montana Supreme Court Justice (2013—Present)

Justice McKinnon is a graduate of the University of Baltimore School of Law and began practicing law in 1987, handling a wide variety of civil and criminal litigation. She spent ten years as a prosecutor in the Glacier and Teton County Attorney's Office and the Baltimore City State's Attorney's Office in Maryland. From 2006 to 2012 she served as District Judge of the Ninth Judicial District Court. In 2010, Justice McKinnon was awarded Judge of the Year by the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Montana for her work in cases involving abused and neglected children. Justice McKinnon serves on the District Court Performance Measurement Advisory Committee to the Montana Supreme Court, the Judicial Education Committee, and the Justice Initiatives Committee, and is a member of the District Drug Court Judges.

On November 6, 2012, Justice Laurie McKinnon was elected to the Montana Supreme Court for an eight-year term, filling the position of retiring Justice James C. Nelson.



Susan Watters

First Female U.S. District Ct. Judge (2014 – Present)

Susan P. Watters is a U.S. District Court Judge for the District of Montana, presiding in the Billings Division. Susan was appointed to the United States District Court by President Obama, with the advice and consent of the United States Senate, on December 18, 2013. Susan is the first woman appointed to the U.S. District Court in the history of the State of Montana. Prior to her appointment to the federal bench, Susan was a state district court judge for the 13th District, Yellowstone County for 16 years. Susan was appointed to the state bench in 1997, elected to the state bench in 1998, and re-elected to the state bench in 2000, 2006 and 2012. During her tenure on the state bench, Susan implemented and presided over the first family drug court in the state of Montana, the Yellowstone County Family Drug Treatment Court. Susan was voted Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) of Montana Judge of the year in 2006. Susan graduated from Eastern Montana College (now MSU-B) in 1980 and from the University of Montana School of Law in 1988.



Carolyn Ostby

First Female Federal Magistrate (2002 – Present)

A 1977 graduate of the University of Montana School of Law, Carolyn Ostby has been a Magistrate Judge since 2002. Carolyn was a partner in the Crowley Law Firm in Billings from 1981 through 2001, where she practiced primarily in the areas of natural resources litigation and complex commercial litigation. From 1979 to 1981, she worked in the Office of Legal Counsel of the U.S. Department of Justice in Washington, D.C. From 1977 to 1979, Carolyn was a law clerk to Chief Judge Russell E. Smith, U.S. District Court for the District of Montana.

Female District Court Judges

Dorothy McCarter 1st Jud. Dist. 1989 – 2012 (retired)

Margaret Johnson 8th Jud. Dist. 1994 – 2003 (retired)

Katherine Curtis 11th Jud. Dist. 1995 – 2013 (retired)

Deborah Kim Christopher 20th Jud, Dist. 2000 – Present

Katherine Bidegaray 7th Jud. Dist. 2000 – Present

Julie Macek 8th Jud. Dist. 2001 – Present

Ingrid Gustafson 13th Jud. Dist. 2004 – Present

Holly Brown 18th Jud. Dist. 2004 – Present

Kathy Seeley 1st Jud. Dist. 2009 – Present

Karen Townsend 4th Jud. Dist. 2011 – Present

Mary Jane Knisely 13th Jud. Dist. 2011 – Present

Brenda Gilbert 6th Jud. Dist. 2013 – Present

Heidi Ulbricht 11th Jud. Dist. 2013 – Present



Female Delegates to 1972 Constitutional Convention



Betty Babcock – Helena
Grace C. Bates – Manhattan
Virginia Hogan Blend – Great Falls
Jean M. Bowman – Billings
Daphne Bugbee – Helena
Marjorie Cain – Libby
C. Louise Cross – Glendive
Dorothy Eck – Bozeman
Marian S. Erdmann – Great Falls
Rachell K. Mansfield – Geyser
Katie Payne – Missoula
Catherine Howell Pemberton – Broadus
Arlyne E. Reichert – Great Falls
Mae Nan Robinson – Missoula
M. Lynn Sparks – Butte
Lucile Speer – Missoula
Veronica Sullivan – Butte
Edith Van Buskirk – Havre
Margaret S. Warden – Great Falls



Women Admitted to State Bar of Montana 1889—1939

1889 Ella Knowles [Haskell]
1901 Eveleen Kennedy
1902 Josephine Harris Sherwood
1906 Pearl Kennedy Hilbert
1909 Anna Marie Lambert
1910 Marguerite Young
1912 Cora C. Miles
1914 Elsa M. Fasel
1915 Harvena M. Cannon
1915 Bernice Selfridge Forbes* (1st woman to graduate from UM Law School)
1915 Nellie J. Wilson
1916 Hedwig Federle
1916 Ethel S. Abbott
1917 Jessie Roscow
1918 Cynthia Coles
1918 Edna Rankin [McKinnon]*
1918 Jane Bailey*
1918 Mary Frances Garrigus*
1918 Nellie MacNamara
1918 Helen A. Henderson Glover
1919 Emily E. Sloan
1919 Teresa M. Fitzgerald
1919 Eglatine Bessette Roper
1920 Helen Fredericks Leber*
1921 Fanny Neyman
1923 Louis Harriet James Schnebly*
1925 Virginia Marie McGuire Fitz*
1926 Geraldine M. O'Hara Grant MacDonald*
1926 Louise A. Steele
1930 Frances Caroline Elge*
1930 Mabel E. Crenshaw
1931 Laura Page Knudson
1932 Dorothy Marie Hannifin*
1933 Astrid Arnoldson*
1938 Margaret Holmes [McDowell]*
1939 Sara Jane Reynolds Kaulback

* Asterisk graduates of UM School of Law