

A TRIBUTE

Introduction: Michelle Kerin

Judge Beckerman would like to pay tribute to the *first* women lawyers and judges in Oregon, who paved the way for all of us. Who better to honor our foremothers, than the following young women law and pre-law students:

Charis Wolfe, a rising 3L at Lewis and Clark College of Law;

Samantha Hellwig and Jayme Mori, recent graduates of Willamette Law School;

Jennifer Martin and Andrea Thompson, Judge Beckerman's 1L summer externs from Lewis and Clark College of Law; and

Jazmyn Ortiz, a student from Portland State University who wants to attend law school someday.

Charis Wolfe:

The entry of women into the legal profession was initially thwarted by views that women were unfit to practice law, because they were too "tender" and not smart enough.

In 1873, the United States Supreme Court affirmed a decision that denied a woman admission to the state bar, noting: "The paramount destiny and mission of woman are to fulfill the noble and benign offices of wife and mother."

Indeed, the legendary lawyer Clarence Darrow once famously told a group of women lawyers: "You can't be shining lights at the Bar because you are too kind. You can never be corporation lawyers because you are not cold-blooded. You have not a high grade of intellect. I doubt you could ever make a living."

As late as 1961, the Supreme Court held that women could be excluded from jury duty, because "women are still regarded as the center of home and family."

Samantha Hellwig:

Slowly, courts came to accept women as lawyers. The first woman lawyer in Oregon was Mary Leonard, admitted to practice in 1885.

In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified, granting women the right to vote and ushering in a new era of women's rights. During this time, women began assuming judgeships.

The first female state court judge in Oregon was Mary Jane Spurlin, in 1926. Justice Betty Roberts was the first woman to serve on the Oregon Court of Appeals (in 1977), and on the Oregon Supreme Court (in 1982).

Jayne Mori:

The first federal judgeship was created in 1789. However, a woman was not appointed to serve as a federal judge until Burnita Shelton Matthews was appointed in 1949, in the District of Columbia.

The first woman to be appointed to the Oregon federal district court was Judge Helen Frye, who was appointed in 1980, and served until 2011.

Jennifer Martin:

Judge Frye opened the courthouse doors, and other women followed her in. Chief Judge Ann Aiken was appointed to the federal bench in 1998, and is the first woman to serve as Chief Judge of this court. Judge Anna J. Brown was appointed one year later, in 1999.

Judges Polly Higdon and Elizabeth Perris were appointed to the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Oregon in 1983 and 1984, and both served as Chief Judge of the Bankruptcy Court. Judge Trish Brown was appointed in 1999.

Andrea Thompson:

The first woman to be appointed to serve as a federal magistrate judge in Oregon was Janice Stewart, who was appointed in 1993. The second was Patricia Sullivan, in 2005. Judge Beckerman is the third woman to serve as a federal magistrate judge in Oregon.

Jazmyn Ortiz:

In 1998, Judge Susan Graber became the first woman from Oregon to serve on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

The U.S. Supreme Court currently counts three women among its nine justices for the first time in history. Four of the 112 justices ever to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court -- Sandra Day O'Connor, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Sonia Sotomayor, and Elena Kagan -- have been women.

Michelle Kerin (in conclusion):

Today, we take it for granted that women share an equal right to practice law and to serve as judges, but that hasn't always been true. Thank you to all of the heroic trailblazers upon whose shoulders Judge Beckerman now stands.