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# RISING TO THE CHALLENGE: WOMEN ATTORNEY “FIRSTS” IN MINNESOTA

April 11, 2022



Elvira Embser-Herbert, Minnesota State Law Library

# FIRST, A BIT OF EARLY HISTORY

- 1638 - Margaret Brent, first woman lawyer arrives in the colonies. Court records show her name 134 times between 1642 and 1650
- 1848 – Seneca Falls Convention resolved to secure for women “an equal participation with men in the various trades, professions and commerce.”
- 1868 - Myra Bradwell publishes *The Chicago Legal News*
- 1869 – Arabella Mansfield, first woman admitted to practice in the U.S. (Iowa)
- 1870 – Ada Kepley, first woman to graduate from law school (would become Northwestern)
- 1872 – Charlotte Ray, first African American woman admitted to practice
- 1879 - Belva Lockwood admitted to Supreme Court Bar – argues case in 1880
- 1878 - Martha Angle Dorsett, first woman admitted to practice in Minnesota
- 1893 - Flora E. Matteson, Marie A. McDermott, and Nora L. Morton graduate from UMN Law School

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# MYRA BRADWELL

- 1868: *The Chicago Legal News*
- 1872: *Bradwell v. Illinois*
- 1890: admitted to the Illinois bar
- 1892 admitted to the bar of the U.S. Supreme Court



- 1868: launched with Myra Bradwell as the editor – first woman to edit a legal publication
- Was known for legal commentary and reporting legal developments
- 1869: legislature recognizes it as a legal source
- An inscribed copy of the first issue was donated to the Library of Congress by Susan B. Anthony

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# CHICAGO LEGAL NEWS.

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*Lex vincit.*

**MYRA BRADWELL, Editor.**

*Published EVERY SATURDAY by the*  
**CHICAGO LEGAL NEWS COMPANY**  
NO. 87 CLARK STREET.

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**TERMS:**

**TWO DOLLARS AND TWENTY CENTS** per annum, in  
advance. Single Copies, **TEN CENTS.**


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CHICAGO, SEPTEMBER 10, 1887.

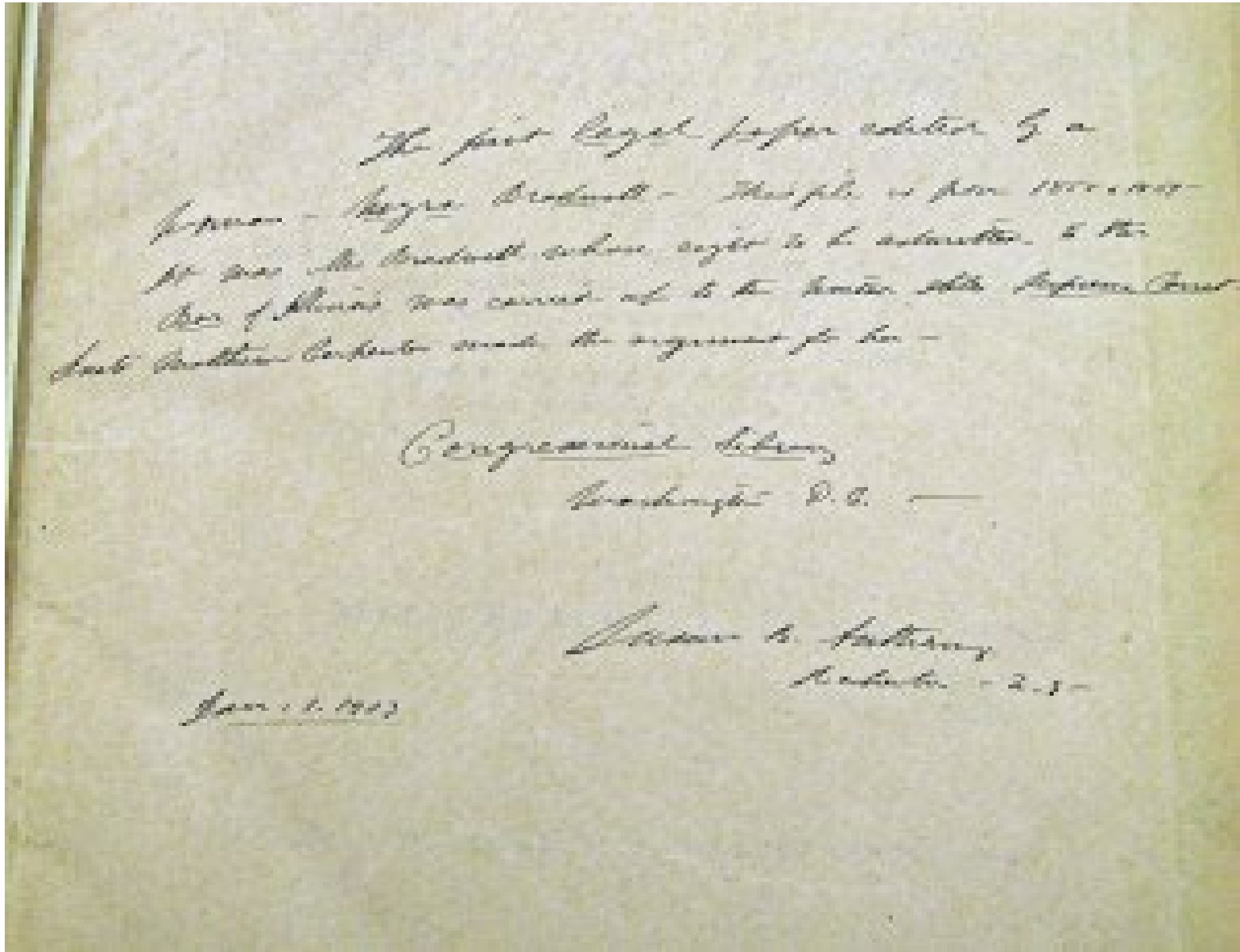
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 **The Chicago Legal News Office**  
has been removed to No. 87 CLARK St.,  
directly opposite the court house.

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The first legal paper edited by a woman – Myra Bradwell – This file is from 1868 & 1869 – It was Mrs. Bradwell whose right to be admitted to the Bar of Illinois was carried up to the United States Supreme Court. Senator Matthew Carpenter made the argument for her. Congressional Library Washington DC

Susan B. Anthony  
Rochester – N.Y.

Jan. 1.1905

## THE UNBEARABLY EXASPERATING LANGUAGE OF THE TIME

Bradwell v. People of State of Illinois, 83 U.S. 130, 141–42, 21 L. Ed. 442 (1872)

- natural and proper timidity and delicacy
- no legal existence separate from her husband
- true that many women are unmarried ... but these are exceptions to the general rule
- the paramount destiny and mission of women are to fulfill the noble and benign offices of wife and mother

# BELVA LOCKWOOD

## FIRST ADMITTED TO SUPREME COURT BAR

- 1866: Open Seminary School for women
- 1871: Enrolled in National University
- 1876: Denied admission Supreme Court Bar
- 1879: Admitted to Supreme Court Bar
- 1880: First woman to argue before the Supreme Court
  - Kaiser v. Stickney, 102 U.S. 176 (1880)



# CHARLOTTE E. RAY

## FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN ATTORNEY

- 1872: Obtained law degree from Howard University and admitted to D.C. bar
  - Applied under the name “C.E. Ray”
- One of three sister, all of whom went to college
- After graduation, opened her own law practice specializing in commercial law
  - Advertised in Frederick Douglass’s *New National Era and Citizen* to attract clients.
  - Racial prejudice was strong. She returned to teaching in 1879.
- There is an award in her name from The Minority Corporate Counsel Association (MCCA)



# MARTHA ANGLE DORSETT

## MINNESOTA'S FIRST FEMALE LAWYER

- 1876: Hennepin County Court of Common Pleas denies Martha Dorsett entry to the Minnesota Bar.
- 1877: S.F. 12 passes, allowing attorneys of any sex to practice law.
- 1878: admitted to practice in Hennepin County



## CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

### ATTORNEYS AND COUNSELLORS.

#### SECTION

1. What persons entitled to admission to practice.
2. Application for admission, how made.
3. Applicant shall be examined.
4. Order of admission shall contain, what.
5. General duties of attorneys.
6. Penalty for deceit or collusion.
7. Penalty for permitting person to sue out process in his name.
8. Person not admitted to practice shall not appear in action.
9. Authority of attorneys.
10. Proceedings when attorney appears without authority.
11. Court may require attorney to produce or prove his authority.

#### CHANGE OF ATTORNEYS.

12. Attorney in an action, how changed.
13. Notice of change to be given.
14. If attorney of one party dies, the other party shall require appointment of another attorney—notice, how served.

#### LIEN OF ATTORNEYS.

15. Lien of attorneys for compensation.

#### SECTION

#### SUMMARY POWER OF THE COURT OVER ATTORNEYS.

16. Power of the court over attorneys.
17. Proceedings when attorney claims a lien.

#### REMOVAL OR SUSPENSION OF ATTORNEYS.

18. Supreme court may suspend or remove attorneys—causes of suspension or removal.
19. Proceedings, by whom instituted.
20. Accusation to be in writing, when.
21. Accusation shall be verified.
22. Court may order accused to appear and answer.
23. Appearance and answer of accused—proceedings on default.
24. Answer to contain what.
25. Objection to sufficiency of accusation, how made.
26. If objection is overruled, accused shall answer.
27. Proceedings on plea of guilty or on default.
28. On judgment of suspension or removal, accused may make case.
29. What papers constitute judgment roll.
30. Power of courts (except justices' courts) over attorneys—order of suspension shall state, what.

Persons are  
to admis-  
practice.

**SECTION 1.** Any male person, of the age of twenty-one years, of good moral character, and who possesses the requisite qualifications of learning and ability, is entitled to admission to practice in all the courts of this state.

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## CHAPTER 123.

### AN ACT TO REGULATE THE ADMISSION TO PRACTICE OF ATTORNEYS AND COUNSELLORS AT LAW.

*Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Minnesota :*

SECTION 1. That section one (1) of chapter eighty-seven (87), Statutes of one thousand eight hundred and sixty-six (1866), the same being section one (1) of chapter fifty (50), Bissell's compilation of the laws of one thousand eight hundred and seventy-three (1873), be amended to read as follows : Any person of the age of twenty-one (21) or upwards, of good moral character, and who possesses the requisite qualifications of learning and ability, is entitled to admission to practice in all the courts of this State.

SEC. 2. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after its passage.

Approved February 28, 1877.

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Approved February 28, 1877.

Relating to the admission of attorneys.

When not to take effect.

# LENA OLIVE SMITH

## MN'S FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN LAWYER

- 1921: Graduated from Northwestern College of Law and admitted to practice law in MN
- Prior to becoming a lawyer, she owned a business and worked as a realtor
- 1930: elected the first woman president of the Minneapolis NAACP
- NAACP's prosecuting attorney in the Arthur A. Lee case in 1931
- 1966: dies at age of eight-one.
- 2021: MH creates scholarship in her name



# MARY ELEANOR NOLAN

## FIRST WOMAN DISTRICT COURT JUDGE

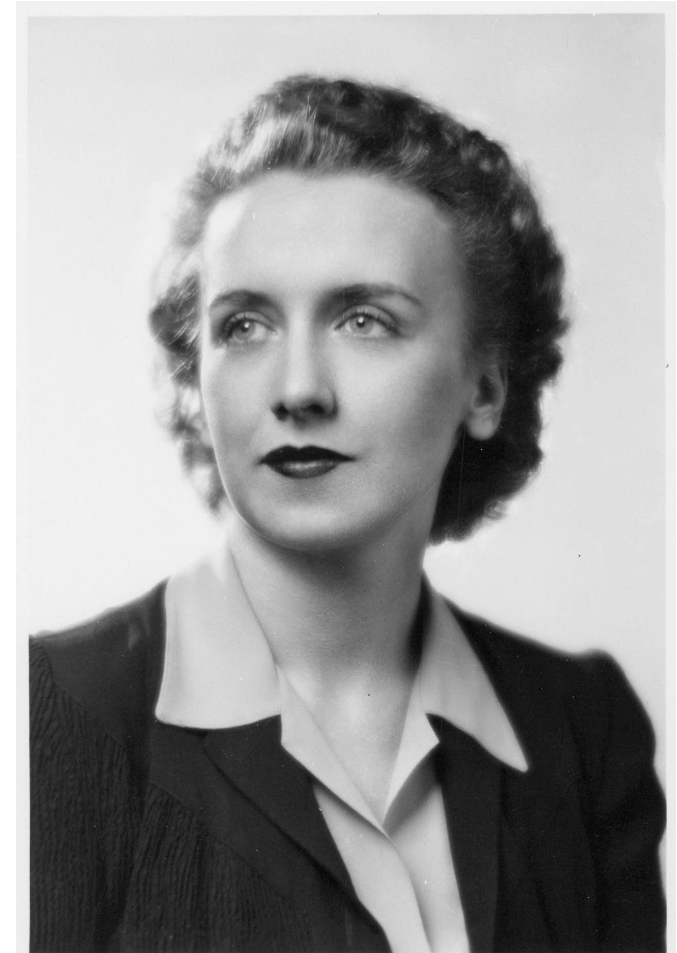
- 1940: Becomes the first woman to serve as a Municipal Court Judge
- Recipient of two Bronze Starrs
- 1955: Formed Nolan, Alderman, and Holden
- 1957: First woman to serve as District Court Judge
- Pre-WWII only woman practicing law in northern Minnesota




# BETTY WASHBURN

## FIRST WOMAN JUDGE IN HENNEPIN COUNTY

- 1943: Practiced law at Dorsey, Colman, Barker, Scott, and Barber.
- 1947: Hennepin County Commissioner
- 1950: Appointed Municipal Judge -Hennepin County
  - She was 33 years old
  - Second in the state due to Eleanor Nolan serving briefly as special judge in Brainard.
- Chose to keep her last name after marriage
- Died of cancer in 1962. She was only 45.



Law Firm	First Woman Lawyer	First Woman Partner/ Shareholder	First Woman on Management/ Executive Committee	First Woman Chairperson/ President
 BRIGGS BRIGGS AND MORGAN	Bonnie Berezovsky 1972	Bonnie Berezovsky 1978	Ann Huntrods 1992	
 DORSEY™ always ahead	Betty Washburn 1943	Faith Ohman 1973	Marianne Short 1987	Marianne Short 2005
 FAEGRE BAKER DANIELS	Eva Caperton c. 1980s	Bonnie Fleming & Randy Lebedoff 1983	Mary Stumo 2000	
 Fredrikson & BYRON, P.A.	Judith Dowdle 1974	Judith Dowdle 1980	Board: Faye Knowles 1991 Executive Committee: Ann Ladd 2004	
 LINDQUIST	Louise Saunders 1951	Louise Saunders c. 1950s	Carol Rieger c. 1992	
 MASLON	Roberta Levy Unknown	Marcy Wallace c. 1978	Barbara Hauser Unknown	Terri Krivosha 2003
 Moss & Barnett	Ann Newhall 1977	Ann Newhall 1980	Ann Newhall Unknown	Ann Newhall 1998
 ROBINS & KAPLAN LLP	Deborah Palmer 1973	Deborah Palmer 1979	Kathleen Flynn Peterson 1990	
 STINSON LEONARD STREET	Irene Scott 1952	Irene Scott 1957	Allison Murdock 2010	

# CHARLOTTE FARRISH

## FIRST TO ESTABLISH A SUCCESSFUL LAW PRACTICE

- 1926: Graduated from UMN Law School
- 1926: “Hired” by JW Schmidt with whom she establish firm known today as Farrish Johnson.
- 1940s: took over practices during the war and gave them back after
- Practiced 64 year, retiring at the age of 86 in 1990

# JOYCE A. HUGHES – LOTS OF FIRSTS!

- 1965: First Black woman to graduate from UMN Law
- 1971: First woman to serve on UMN Law Faculty
- First Black woman tenure-track law professor at a predominantly white institution,
- First Black and first woman to be a federal law clerk in the district of Minnesota



# MARGARET TREUER

## FIRST NATIVE AMERICAN WOMAN LAWYER IN MINNESOTA

- 1977: First Native American woman lawyer in Minnesota
- First Native American woman judge in U.S.
- Tribal Judge for the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa
- Tribal Judge for the Red Lake Nation
- U.S. Assistant Attorney for the District of Minnesota
- Federal Court Judge
- Lifetime achievement award winner - National Association of Women Judges

ROSALIE WAHL  
FIRST WOMAN ON THE MN SUPREME COURT (1977)



# ESTHER M. TOMLJANOVICH

## FIRST WOMAN REVISOR OF STATUTES

- Assistant Revisor of Statutes: 1957-1966;
- Revisor of Statutes: 1974-1977 (first woman)
- Tenth District bench: 1977 -1990
- MN Supreme Court Justice 1990-1998
- Founding Mother of MWL



# DIANE MURPHY

## FIRST WOMAN ON US DISTRICT COURT MN

- 1980: First woman U.S. District Judge in Minnesota
  - Also, first woman on a district court in the Eighth Circuit
- 1992: First woman Chief Judge of the U.S. District Court, District of MN
- 1994: First woman appointed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit
- 1999: First woman to chair the U.S. Sentencing Commission



# MINNESOTA'S FIRST MAJORITY – JANUARY 4, 1991

AND THE FIRST IN THE NATION

- Rosalie Wahl (1977–1994)
- Mary Jeanne Coyne (1982-1996)
- Esther Tomljanovich (1990-1998)
- Sandra Gardebring (1991-1998)



# KATHLEEN BLATZ

## THE FIRST CHIEF JUSTICE ON MN SUPREME COURT

- Appointed Chief Justice 1998
- Minnesota House of Representatives 1979-94 – youngest female legislator
- Only woman to have served in the Legislature and on the MN Supreme Court.



# PAMELA ALEXANDER

## FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN JUDGE IN MINNESOTA

- 1977: Graduate UMN Law
- 1980: First African American woman prosecutor
- 1983: Appointed to the Hennepin County Municipal Court
- 1986: Appointed District Court Judge
- 1990: First judge to call out the sentencing disparities between powder and crack cocaine
  - In 2007 U.S. Sentencing Commission finally caught up with her



# WILHELMINA WRIGHT

## FIRST AFRICA AMERICAN WOMAN ON MN SUPREME COURT

- 2012: First African American woman appointed to the MN Supreme Court
- 2016: Minnesota's first African American woman to serve as a federal judge.
- She is the first and so far, only, Minnesota jurist to have served on all three levels of the state courts: District, Court of Appeals, and Supreme Court.
- Currently serving as U.S. District Court for the District of Minnesota



# REGINA CHU

## FIRST ASIAN AMERICAN WOMAN APPOINTED JUDGE IN MINNESOTA

- 2002: Appointed Judge in Hennepin County
- Became famous during the Potter trial
- Announced her retirement before imposing sentence.
- Plans to retire in May



# AMRAN FARAH

## LIKELY FIRST SOMALI AMERICAN TO MAKE PARTNER

- 2013: J.D. Hamline University School of Law
- 2016: Co-Founder and President Somali American Bar Association
- 2015: President of Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers
- 2020: Made partner at Greene Espel



# LUZ MARIA FRIAS

## FIRST LATINA DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL IN MINNESOTA

- 2020: Appointed Deputy Attorney General
- Founder and first woman president of the Hispanic Bar Association
- First girl of five children in her family
- Undergraduate department chair refused to write her a letter of recommendation for law school despite her “A” average.
  - “...my conviction to succeed far outweighed his stereotype of what an inner-city Latina, daughter of immigrants, could accomplish.



THE SENATE CONFIRMS

# KETANJI BROWN JACKSON

TO SERVE ON THE U.S. SUPREME COURT

On February 25, 2022, President Joe Biden nominated Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson to become the 116th Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court.

On April 7, 2022, a bipartisan group of Senators confirmed Judge Jackson's nomination.



# JUDGE LAJUNE THOMAS LANGE

- 1978: First African American woman to serve as a public defender in Hennepin County
- 1985: Appointed Hennepin County District Court Judge
  - Served for 21 years
- 1994: Founder International Leadership Institute
- Currently: Senior Fellow, Roy Wilkins Center for Human Relations and Social Justice at the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs



# LYNN ANDERSON

- 1988: First woman general counsel at a mid cap or large company in Minnesota
  - Realized this when preparing her own presentation about women lawyers
- Executive Advisor to Verdant Technologies
- Chair of the Board of Directors of Global Rights for Women



# THANK YOU AND ON TO OUR PANEL

- Thank you for listening!
- Feel free to send me your questions:  
[elvira.embserherbert@courts.state.mn.us](mailto:elvira.embserherbert@courts.state.mn.us) or  
[AskALibrarian@courts.state.mn.us](mailto:AskALibrarian@courts.state.mn.us).