Women Who Serve: Legislature and Supreme Court
By Marcia Cuccaro and Mona Reno

2019 is an important date for women’s history in Nevada and a date Assemblywoman Sadie Hurst of Washoe County could have only dreamed of in 1919. Sadie Hurst was the first woman elected to the Nevada State Legislature shortly after women won the right to vote in Nevada (1914) and she began her Legislative service in January 1919.

Today in 2019 Nevada’s Assembly holds a female majority as women hold 23 of the 42 Assembly seats. In the Nevada Senate women hold 9 of the 21 seats and when you combine both the Senate and the Assembly seats, Nevada has an overall female majority, the first in the nation! Really who could have imagined?

Since 1919, Clark and Washoe counties have been represented by the most women (77 and 31 respectively) and Douglas County is the only county in Nevada to have never been represented by a woman.

Thirty-two female members of the Nevada legislature pose for photos before the start of the 80th Legislative Session, Feb. 4, 2019.

The first female native Nevadan to serve was Ruth Averill, born in Virginia City on September 19, 1897 and elected to the Nevada Assembly in 1920.

There have been 6 two-generations families, 2 three-generation families and 1 four-generation family who have served in the Nevada Legislature. Those generational families included both men and women.

I (Marcia) wrote my granddaughter today and shared with her the fact that when I was her age in 1953, most all professional and non-professional workers were male. My daughter will never have that memory nor will my granddaughter. When Legislators came to visit my father (he was Nevada’s Mine Inspector and then Warden of the Nevada State Prison), they were 100% male. State elected government was 100% male. Today my father would probably be surprised by the advent of women in the State Legislature, government and private enterprise although he certainly supported his daughters and granddaughters in their career endeavors. I guess one could say he “evolved” with the times.

2019 is also an historic year for the Nevada Supreme Court with a female majority of Justices.

“It’s about time,” Miriam Shearing, the state’s first female Supreme Court Justice, told the Las Vegas Review-Journal. “I think that Nevada citizens are realizing that women can be just as effective—if not more so—as men in high positions in the legal profession. I’m very gratified to see it.”

Miriam Shearing served from 1993-2005 and was Chief Justice from 1997-2005.

Today, young and older women have fully embraced politics and their place in it. Since women constitute over 50% of this country's population, laws will certainly evolve and change to reflect needs of the majority population and the needs of their families. We owe a great deal of gratitude to the women who pioneered the right to vote, to hold elected office, to serve on juries, to work in fields of their choice without regard for gender.


Paper Guides are available at the Legislative Building in Carson City.
Patti Bernard
2019 Roll of Honor

Patti Bernard has been inducted into the Nevada Women’s History Project Roll of Honor. Her contribution to this organization has been transformative. Since 2014, when the NWHP was involved in the Women of Diversity Productions, Inc. NV150 project to video interview women in Northern Nevada, Patti saw a need to video interview more women.

Now, with Patti’s motivation and fund-raising the NWHP can interview living women. This is a complicated and time-consuming activity which required scheduling, photography, assisting with transcription edits and follow-up with the interviewees. This work began prior to Patti being elected Chair of the NWHP and has grown under her current leadership. Patti has been the force behind the NWHP webpage “Nevada Women: Gold in the Silver State.” This page has photos, short biographies, and links to the interviewee’s videos.

Traditionally the NWHP had been a biography research organization. That is still a significant function of the group. Patti conducts research of selected women and provides that work to writers, who produce the biography. Then Patti works with the web biography editor, Janice Hoke, and the author to help finalize the biographies. She has motivated several women to write biographies for NWHP and these women have grown in their personal lives because of this work.

Patti also was instrumental in the NWHP having a current Strategic Plan. Following the inception of NWHP working on these Strategic Plans by Lynn Bremer, Patti has continued to keep the Strategic Plan a living document. She tracks the plan to be sure NWHP is accomplishing its goals and reminds the Board of Directors that we are Strategic Plan driven.

Patti plans and attends all, or most, of the programs of the NWHP. These programs are the only place many of the NWHP members interact with the organization, so they are central to the mission of NWHP. Planning events is a difficult endeavor. She has the help of several members, primarily Christianne and Jon Hamel, who make programs run smoothly.

Patti is also an active member of the Jean Ford Research Center which is involved in collecting names of women found in manuscript collections of libraries and archives. This is a fun activity that turns into a valuable webpage on the NWHP page.

The NWHP is grateful to Patti Bernard for her exceptional service to this organization.
Membership and Donations - Jan—March 2019

**New Members**

**Individual - $30**
Karen Blair  
Gilda Johnstone  
Lorraine Renee Petersen  
Florence K. Suenaga  
Dorismae Weber

**Family of Two - $55**
Mariah Evans & Sarah Kelley

**Friend - $100**
Michelle Gardner

**Honorary Members:**
Mary Anne Convis  
Dawn Gibbons  
Betty Glass  
Gertrude Gottschalk  
Dema Guinn  
Kathy List  
Sandy Miller  
Catharine Sanders  
Kathleen Sandoval  
Holly Van Valkenburgh  
Linda Wyckoff

**Renewing Members:**

**Individual - $30**
Cheri Abbott  
Faye I. Andersen  
Byllie D’Amato Andrews  
K. Ellen Barkow  
Richann Bender  
Karen L. Benna  
Sarah Brit  
Susan Burkhamer  
Madeline H. Carpenter  
Dr. Linda Clements  
Joyce M. Cox  
Marcia Cuccaro  
Kathy Drake  
Catherine Eardley  
Carleen Ernest  
Isabel Espinoza  
Jacki Falkenroth  
Candice Fife  
Dr. Barbara R. Guerin  
Peggy Hamel  
Shirley Hammon  
Janice Hoke  
Lois Kelly  
Virginia (Ginnie) Kersey  
Marian E. LaVoy  
Janet Loverin  
Nancy J. Oakley  
Stanley W. Paher  
Cynthia Pickett  
Judith Reuter  
Vickie Rylant  
Joan T. Shonnard  
Patrick Simpson  
Sue Smith  
Charlene Sprague  
Nancy Stiles  
Maggie Thomson  
Peggy Twedt  
Sue Wagner  
Patricia Wallace  
Holly Walton-Buchanan

**Family of Two - $55**
Carolyn and Don Bernard  
Jean & Dave Carbon  
Gwen Clancy and Tess Opferman  
Catherine Cuccaro & Jeff Milligan  
Sue & Ray Davis  
Grace & Kenneth Davis  
Barbara & Dave Finley  
Carolyn & Richard Gardner  
Jon & Christianne Hamel  
Lisa-Marie & Bruce Lightfoot  
Lillian & Lin Manning  
Kathy & Charlie Noneman  
Elizabeth Rassiga-White & Warren White  
Margie Richardson & Wendy Ritter  
Jocelyne Roy & Andre Roy

**Organization - $50**
Churchill County Museum Association

**Friend - $100**
Dana Bennett  
Kathleen Bennett  
Donna Clontz  
Helen DeMarco  
Bonnie & Katie Drinkwater  
Gail Duwe  
Fritsi H. Ericson  
Mary Lee Fulkerson  
Nancy Hudson  
Betty Hulse  
Jim Hulse  
Cherry Jones  
Dr. Jaculine C. Jones  
Neil Sanders  
Sharon A. Walbridge

**Good Friend - $250**
Patricia D. Cafferata

**Good Friend Plus - $300**
Barbara Thornton

**Best Friend - $500**
Patti Bernard

**Best Friend Forever:**
Lynn Bremer  
Mona Reno

**Donations:**

**Endowment Fund**
Marcia Cuccaro - $470  
Janice Hoke - $30

**Donations:**

**Facebook**
Anonymous - $20  
Patti Bernard - $100  
Rick Cooper - $20  
Marcia Cuccaro - $100  
Michelle Shelly Gardner - $100  
Theo McCormick - $25  
Mona Reno - $100  
Francisco Ruiz - $45

**Donations:**

**General Fund**
Faye I. Andersen - $70  
Karen L. Benna - $20  
Susan Burkhamer - $40  
Joyce M. Cox - $50  
Shirley Hammon - $20  
Gilda Johnstone - $20  
Virginia Kersey - $25  
Ron and Mona Reno - $250  
Florence K. Suenaga - $100  
Maggie Thomson - $10  
Sue Wagner - $20

**Donations in memory of:**

**Phil Earl**
(Nevada Historical Society)
Patti Bernard - $100  
Ron and Mona Reno - $250
It's that time of the year to renew your membership. The membership is for a calendar year, January to December. If you have renewed, “Thank You!”

NWHP currently has 128 members: 97 members in good standing and 29 members in arrears. NWHP has 5 organizations: 1 good standing and 4 in arrears. NWHP has two Life Members (Best Friends Forever).

Thank you,
Christianne Hamel, Membership

The Year to Date, as of February 11, 2019 financial report shows a bank and PayPal balance of $67,790.80, $426.72 in fixed assets, $0.00 liability and a net YTD income of $1,429.90 The total equity plus liability of the NWHP is $68,217.52.

Jon Hamel, Treasurer
Featured Historic Nevada Woman: Nevada Senator Debbie Smith

Legislator’s achievements spanned education, health, and family issues

At a glance:

Born: January 14, 1956, Tucson, Arizona  
Died: February 21, 2016, Sparks, Nevada  
Maiden Name: Deborah June Bilbrey  
Race/Nationality/ethnic background: Caucasian  
Married: Gregory Eugene Smith  
Children: Olivia, Ian and Erin

Primary city and county of residence and work: Sparks, Washoe County, Nevada

Major Fields of Work: Benefits Information Representative, Operating Engineers, Nevada State Senator and Assemblywoman and a board member on numerous school and community organizations.

Other Role Identities: Wife, mother, grandmother

Deborah June Bilbrey moved to Battle Mountain, Nevada with her parents Coy and Jonny Lester Bilbrey when she was in fourth grade. She graduated Battle Mountain High School in 1974 and married Gregory Eugene Smith, also of Battle Mountain, shortly after. Little did Nevada know the number of contributions this woman would make to our state during her life – a life that was cut short by cancer.

Debbie started her working career at the Battle Mountain Hospital as an x-ray technologist and a physician’s receptionist. She then worked for Duval Mining in the human resource office.

She began serving Nevada at the age of 22 when she was elected to Lander County School Board (1978-1980). After moving with her family to Sparks, Nevada in 1981, she continued to support public education as president of the Nevada PTA and a member of the National PTA Board of Directors.

Governors Bob Miller (D) and Kenny Guinn (R) appointed her to chair the Council to Establish Academic Standards where she served eight years and led the state process of developing its first academic standards. She received numerous awards for her efforts including induction into the Public Education Hall of Fame and the Director Award from the Nevada Association of School Boards.

While employed as a benefits information representative by the Operating Engineers for 30 years, she also served children on the board of the Girl Scouts of Sierra Nevada, the Washoe County Education Alliance and on advisory boards for the Northern Nevada’s Children’s Cancer Foundation and the Nevada After School Alliance. She was also an autism advocate in 2011.

In 2000 Debbie ran for the state legislature as a Democrat and won a tight battle against the Republican candidate. Rising through the ranks, she served on and chaired the Assembly Ways and Means Committee. She also served as Assistant Majority Whip and Speaker Pro Tempore (2000-2002, 2004-2011). Then in 2012 Debbie won a seat in the Nevada Senate where she served as Assistant Majority Floor Leader, Chair of the Senate Finance Committee and Assistant Minority Floor Leader (2012-2016).

While in the Nevada Legislature, Debbie sponsored a bill in 2005 for a 2-1-1 telephone
line, a one-stop resource for residents needing services. By dialing this number citizens can learn about a variety of resources including medical care, child care, tutoring and energy assistance. Another bill she sponsored was the School Works bill “WC-1” that gave Washoe County School District more access to bond funding to rehabilitate older schools, thus freeing up construction funding for other projects. This idea was expected to be used by other school districts as well. She also sponsored a bill for full-day kindergarten in 2010.

In 2011, Debbie sponsored three important pieces of legislation. One was for men and women to buy raffle tickets for a big game hunting tag, called the Dream Tag. The money raised goes to habitat restoration. A second bill required accountability and performance-based budgeting. The third bill required accountability and transparency for the use of “Star Bonds,” a funding mechanism for public/private projects. It also gives taxpayers more information on how the money is used.

In the 2013 legislative session Debbie supported Brianna’s Law requiring a DNA sample whenever a person is booked for a felony arrest, to help track down those suspected of sexual assault crimes. Another law that she helped pass required all schools to keep EpiPens in stock to counteract potentially lethal allergic reactions.

Debbie became the first Nevada legislator to serve as an officer on the largest organization for state legislators. She served as President of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), a nonpartisan organization serving 7,383 lawmakers. She was a graduate of Toll Fellow Council of State Governments, Flemming Fellows, Emerging Political Leaders and Western Legislative Academy programs.

Unfortunately, in 2015 Debbie was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor. She underwent surgery to remove the tumor at MD Anderson Cancer Clinic in Houston. She returned to Nevada to serve the final six weeks of that year’s legislative session and was greeted by standing ovations.

As an example of the show of respect and admiration among her colleagues, Senate Minority Leader Aaron Ford, D-Las Vegas, was overcome with emotion as he welcomed her back. He said, “You’re fantastic, irreplaceable. You’re strong and you’re a survivor.” The senators took a break after that emotional scene before they could return to the floor votes.

Debbie Smith died at the age of 60. Among the many statements at her death came one from Governor Brian Sandoval saying that Smith “was an extraordinary public servant whose record of accomplishments and presence in the Nevada Legislature will remain unmatched in the years ahead.” He called her a “true Nevadan with a fierce devotion to her constituents and state, particularly to public education and the children of Nevada.”

Researched by Patti Bernard and written by Victoria Ford.

Sources of Information can be reviewed with her online biography.

https://www.nevadawomen.org/research-center/biographies-alphabetical/debbie-smith/
Nevada Senate Proclamation

Celebrates Sadie Hurst, first woman legislator in 1919 and that in 2019 over 50% of the Legislature are women.

By Catherine Cuccaro

February 20, 2019, in the Nevada State Senate Chamber, the Nevada Women’s History Project, along with the Nevada Commission for Women, were recognized and received a proclamation celebrating the Centennial of the first woman to serve in the Nevada State Legislature (Assemblywoman Sadie Dotson Hurst in 1919), recognizing the battle for women’s suffrage, and celebrating Nevada as being the first state in the nation to have a female majority in its State Legislature.

The struggle for women’s suffrage in Nevada first went before the Nevada Legislature in 1869, 150 years ago. The proposal to amend the Nevada constitution failed again and again and again before finally gaining legislative approval in 1913 and voter approval in 1914.

Nevada women were allowed to vote in city elections in 1915 and in state elections in 1916. In 1916 Rita D. Millar became the first woman to hold public office in Nevada when she was elected County Recorder in Mineral County.

Sadie Dotson Hurst was elected to the Nevada State Assembly in 1918, and was the first woman to participate in the Nevada State Legislature in 1919 (exactly 100 years ago). Sadie Hurst was instrumental in convening the 1920 Special Session in which the Nevada Legislature ratified the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution making women’s suffrage the law throughout the nation. (Women were not allowed to vote for national offices until 1920.)

Meanwhile back in Nevada, 100 years after our first woman Legislator, the 2019 Legislature marks Nevada being the first state in the nation in which women constitute a majority of the members of the State Legislature.

NWHP members and friends were hosted by Senator Julia Ratti, District 13, Washoe County, and we could have not asked for a better host. Not only was she thoughtful, intelligent and gracious, but she also has a tie to the Nevada Women’s History Project. Jean Ford, the founder of NWHP, was one of Julia Ratti’s last instructors before Ms. Ratti graduated from the University of Nevada, Reno. The circle could not be more complete. I think Jean Ford would be more than proud that NWHP was recognized, and that one of her students is a Senator in the first State Legislature to have a female majority.

Sincerest thanks to Senator Julia Ratti, the Nevada State Senate and Nevada State Legislature.
Text of the Proclamation

WHEREAS, One hundred years ago, in January 1919, Sadie Hurst became the first woman to serve in the Nevada Legislature; and

WHEREAS, Assemblywoman Hurst, who was born Sadie Dotson in Iowa in 1857, had long been active in women’s clubs and the suffrage movement, having served as President of the Washoe County Equal Franchise Society in 1914, President of the Women’s Citizen Club, and a member of the Women’s Republican Committee of Washoe County and the Twentieth Century Club; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Hurst was instrumental in convening the 1920 Special Session in which the Nevada Legislature ratified the 19th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States making women’s suffrage the law throughout the nation, a tremendous step toward realizing the ideals of American democracy; and

WHEREAS, The struggle for women’s suffrage in Nevada was long and hard-fought, extending over a period of 45 years; and

WHEREAS, The first proposal to amend the Nevada Constitution came before the Nevada Legislature in 1869 only to be rejected then and again in 1883, 1885, 1887, 1889 and 1897 before gaining final legislative approval in 1913 and voter approval in 1914; and

WHEREAS, In 1916, Rita D. Millar, who later also served in the Assembly [1922-1924], became the first woman to hold public office in Nevada when she was elected County Recorder in Mineral County; and

WHEREAS, In the year 2019, Nevada has become the first state in the nation in which women constitute a majority of the members of the state Legislature; now, therefore, be it

PROCLAIMED, That the women of Nevada are to be congratulated for the progress they have achieved over the last 150 years in gaining equal legal and political rights; and be it further

PROCLAIMED, That all citizens of Nevada are called upon to recognize and celebrate the tremendous contributions that women in public life have made to our communities, state, and nation.

DATED this 1st day of March, 2019.

Signed:
Julia Ratti
Nevada State Senator

Patti Bernard, Kay Bennett, Marcia Cuccaro, Catherine Cuccaro, Michelle Gardner, Sue Davis, Holly Van Valkenburgh, Linda Walsh, Isabel Espinoza, Kathy Noneman, Mona Reno
March 23, 2019
Dr. Karen Gedney, author of *30 Years Behind Bars: Trials of a Prison Doctor*. Her long career as a prison physician has given her a unique perspective in human behavior, and what it takes for individuals and institutions to transform and change. As the first woman prison physician in the Nevada State Correctional System, she was recognized in both the medical and correctional fields. Dr. Gedney will touch on some of the more successful programs that could reduce recidivism of our prison populations.

**Date:** Saturday, March 23, 2019  **Time:** 1:00-2:30  
**Venue:** The Continuum, 3700 Grant Drive, Building A  
**Cost:** $20 for members, $25 for nonmembers  
[https://nwhp.eventbrite.com/](https://nwhp.eventbrite.com/)  
Refreshments will be served.

April
Plans are still forming for a luncheon at the historic Bethel AME Church in Reno to celebrate Black Women’s History Month. This luncheon will be similar to our 2018 “Celebrating Women of El Salvador.” There will be traditional foods, and wonderful African American traditional music. More information will be forthcoming as soon as details are finalized.

May 18, 2019 will be Nevada Magazine Publisher, Janet Geary who will present a program on her experiences. She has traveled statewide, and will talk about her many experiences in “getting” and producing just the “right” stories that highlight the many attractions of our state, and which receives great national exposure.

**Date:** Saturday, May 18, 2019  **Time:** 1:00-2:30  
**Venue:** The Continuum, 3700 Grant Drive, Building A  
**Cost:** $20 for members, $25 for nonmembers  
[https://nwhp.eventbrite.com/](https://nwhp.eventbrite.com/)  
Refreshments will be served.

June 22, 2019
Kim Harris as Laura Fair in a Chautauqua presentation. Laura, popular Virginia City boarding house owner, murdered her paramour, well known attorney, Alex Crittenden who she met there but murdered him in San Francisco, and was sentenced to hang. You will love the story and sympathize the plight of Mrs. Fair. Additional details TBA.

July 13, 2019 we will take a trip to Genoa in Carson Valley to visit the Genoa Museum and other Carson Valley historical sites. The cost is $40 for members, $45 for nonmembers, which will include museum entrance fare and a delicious old-fashioned box lunch. We will leave Reno at 10 a.m. in private cars and return approximately at 4 p.m. in private cars. Ride sharing is encouraged.  
Additional details TBA.

August 17, 2019 will be our Annual Meeting which is open to members and nonmembers. Cindy Southeron will bring Carson City resident Anne Hudnall Martin to life and will entertain you with an interesting recount of her life as the 2nd woman newspaper owner/publisher, teacher and 1st woman superintendent of the U.S. Assay Office (formerly the U.S. Carson City Mint), and explain why she is dismayed when she is often mistaken for suffrage advocate, Anne Henrietta Martin.  
**Date:** Saturday, August 17, 2019  **Time:** 11:30-1:30  **Venue:** TBA  
**Cost:** $40 for members, $45 for nonmembers  
[https://nwhp.eventbrite.com/](https://nwhp.eventbrite.com/)

August or September Jean Ford Wildflower Hike. We do not know where or when, but we will let you know. This event is free and is a lot of fun.

For All Events Send Reservations and payment to:
NWHP Programs, 770 Smithridge Drive, Suite 300, Reno, NV  89502 or use [https://nwhp.eventbrite.com/](https://nwhp.eventbrite.com/)  
For additional information: Barbara Guerin 949-202-7524, Patti Bernard 775-826-3612
Thank you for your ongoing support of the Nevada Women’s History Project. You are vital to maintaining our educational website of women’s biographies and interviews, having special events and to offset the operational costs of the NWHP.

Please notice that we have added a lifetime membership category, Best Friend Forever. Membership comes with an event discount and a newsletter. All levels of membership may be tax deductible since NWHP is an educational non-profit.

Membership Levels

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I also enclose an additional donation for the NWHP.

________________________ General Fund
________________________ Endowment Fund

___I prefer the digital copy of the newsletter.

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Send this membership form to:
Nevada Women’s History Project
770 Smithridge Drive, Suite 300, Reno, NV 89502

Thank you for your Membership
In This Issue

Women Who Serve: Legislature and Supreme Court | 1-2 | Roll of Honor: Patti Bernard | 3

National Women’s History Alliance | 3 | Membership and Donations | 4

Woman of Achievement: Jennifer Budge | 5 | NWHP Positions Available | 5

Membership Report | 5 | Financial Report | 5

Featured Historic Woman: Senator Debbie Smith | 6-7 | Nevada’s Big Give | 7

Nevada Senate Proclamation | 8 | Proclamation Text and Attendees | 9

2019 Saturday Programs | 10 | Membership Form | 11

Board of Directors | 11 | Amazon Smile | 12

NWHP now on Amazon Smile

Access Amazon via https://smile.amazon.com and select the Nevada Women’s History Project as your chosen organization. NWHP will get .5% of eligible purchases whenever you shop Amazon by visiting the site.

We much appreciate your support!