NWHP
NEVADA WOMEN'S HISTORY PROJECT

MILDRED BRAY

At A Glance:

Born: May 14, 1892, Reno, Nevada

Died: October 26, 1975, Carson City, Nevada

Race/Nationality/Ethnic Background: Caucasian

Primary City and County of Residence and Work:
Minden, Douglas Co.; Carson City, Ormsby Co.; Goldfield, Esmeralda Co.; Reno, Washoe Co.

Major Fields of Work:
Teacher, Nevada State Superintendent of Schools, civic worker, secretary, writer, women's club leader

Mildred Bray
Courtesy Nevada Historical Society

First female state school superintendent born to family of educators

Mildred Bray, a native Nevadan, had a wide variety of interests and occupations but is remembered for her career in education and her three-time election as state superintendent.

Mildred Nevada Bray, dedicated educator and native Nevadan, was born in Reno (some accounts say Dayton) on May 14, 1892, to parents who were both involved in education. Her father, John Edwards Bray, was principal of Reno High School at the time of her birth and the students had participated in the event by suggesting names in a sort of contest — her name was pulled from a hat. Her maternal grandparents came to Nevada Territory by covered wagon in 1861 and her mother, Minnie Leslie, was born enroute.

Mildred's mother was a teacher, and her father followed his career in teaching and school administration by being elected to the office of State Superintendent of Instruction. He served from 1909 to 1919 in a position which would eventually be held also by his daughter. Mildred once wrote that during a period of 75 years, there was not one year in which some member of her family was not involved in education.

Mildred never married although she did occasionally enjoy the company of men friends. She loved children and felt badly that she hadn't had her own family. She took great interest in her friends' children. She led a very busy life and one cannot imagine that it could have been less than full. She belonged to many organizations and was an avid reader.

Upon completion of her education in Reno public schools and graduation from college, Mildred became a teacher. She taught at the Esmeralda County High School at Goldfield, which was then a bustling mining camp, at Minden Elementary Schools, and at Sparks Elementary School.

She varied her pursuits with travel all over the state and developed her lifelong interest in politics. She was employed for a year at the Nevada State Journal, worked in the Comptroller's office, and was a secretary for a private law firm in Reno in the early years. She later was secretary in the Attorney General's office under the administrations of M.A. Diskin and Gary Mashburn.

Miss Mildred Bray
Manhattan High School, 1914

Mildred Bray was State Superintendent of Schools from 1938-1950. From the time she had been a secretary for the department, her abilities were recognized, and she was elected to the post of State Superintendent in 1938 after being appointed, upon the death of Chauncy Smith, to fill out his term.

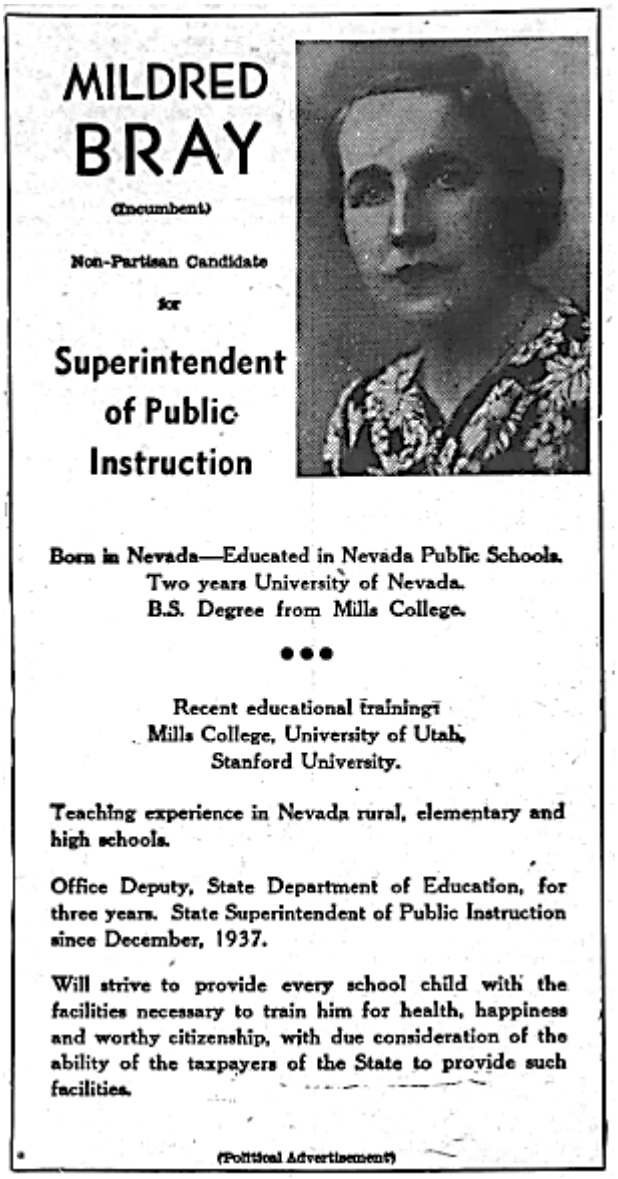
She was the only woman to hold the position until Mary Peterson was appointed in 1995 and the only person in Nevada history to be elected to three successive terms as State Superintendent. She held the position during World War II, an especially problematic and challenging time during which many adjustments had to be made, and she saw it through the transition period following the war.

She originated the basic state aid to education plan (still in use in1997) which secured state aid for rural schools and county aid to district high schools. In addition, during her years as superintendent, the school code was revised, a minimum salary law for teachers was established, the public-school teachers' retirement system was integrated with the state employees' pension system, statewide workshops were created, a curriculum development program was inaugurated, and a state committee was established for the evaluation and revision of high school curriculum. Nevada was the first state to have a statewide curriculum development program and received national recognition for it.

Following her retirement from the Nevada Department of Education in 1950, she became personal secretary to Governor Grant Sawyer. She called herself a "night person" and often dictated letters at 3 or 4 a.m. to be typed the following morning.

In addition, Mildred was affiliated with Delta Kappa Gamma Sorority, was a member of the Carson City Mineral Society and a member of both the Business and Professional Women's Club and the League of Women Voters. She was a charter member of the Desert Gardeners Garden Club. Mildred attended St. Peter's Episcopal Church which was located just two blocks from her home.

Mildred was honored in 1969 for her dedication to the field of education. An elementary school in Carson City (the "blue school") was renamed for her and she is remembered in an annual celebration at the school. She was recipient of the "Distinguished Nevadan" citation for the indelible mark she had made in her field. This award was given annually by the University of Nevada Board of Regents to its chosen recipient(s) for "significant achievements contributing to the social, economic and cultural advancement of our state and nation and for exceptional service to the well-being of humankind." Ceremonies were held during commencement exercises at the University of Reno, which was also Miss Bray's alma mater. She had also attended Mills College in Oakland, California.



MILDRED BRAY

(Incumbent)

Non-Partisan Candidate

for

Superintendent of Public Instruction

Born in Nevada—Educated in Nevada Public Schools.
Two years University of Nevada.
B.S. Degree from Mills College.

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Recent educational trainings
Mills College, University of Utah,
Stanford University.

Teaching experience in Nevada rural, elementary and high schools.

Office Deputy, State Department of Education, for three years. State Superintendent of Public Instruction since December, 1937.

Will strive to provide every school child with the facilities necessary to train him for health, happiness and worthy citizenship, with due consideration of the ability of the taxpayers of the State to provide such facilities.

(Political Advertisement)

Las Vegas Age advertisement, 1938

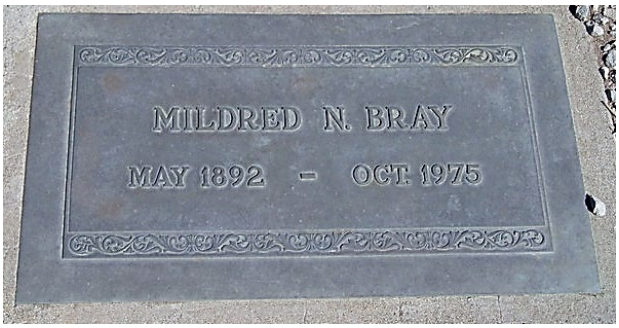
Bray also was honored in 1973 by the Nevada State Society of Washington, D.C. The society selected women who, through their professions and their interests, had made exemplary contributions to the nation and to the State of Nevada, its communities and citizens. A plaque, with the names of all 20 women so honored, was on display in the J.W. Calhoun Changing Gallery at the Nevada State Museum in Carson City for many years. It was titled "The Feminine Frontier."

Such an avid Democrat was she, that she would call her pet Boston bull terrier "Mike" (for O'Callaghan, Nevada governor) when he was good and "Dick" (for former President Richard Nixon) when he was bad. She was quite a "character" as remembered by Joan Houghton, who visited her when she was elderly, and Ellen Couch, a retired teacher and sorority sister of Mildred's, who taught during Mildred's tenure.

Mildred Bray died in Carson City in the fall of 1975 at the age of 83 years. She was remembered by those who knew her as someone quite unique who cared very much about the school children around the state and about the job she performed because it was so important to her to be accomplished and useful.

She was a model for the women of her time, working tirelessly in her efforts to improve the school system for teachers and students alike.

Mildred Bray is buried in Knights of Pythias Cemetery, Reno, Nevada with her parents and sister Florence.



Biographical sketch by Sally Wilkins from a research paper by Christine Gridley. Updated 2025.

Sources of Information:

Ancestry.com. *U.S., Find a Grave® Index, 1600s-Current* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012. [Mildred N Bray]

Ancestry.com. *"U.S., School Yearbooks, 1880-2012"*; School Name: *University of Nevada*; Year: *1917.* [Mildred Bray]

Ancestry.com. *"U.S., School Yearbooks, 1880-2012"*; School Name: *Manhattan High School*; Year: *1914.* [Miss Mildred Bray]

Ancestry.com. Year: *1900*; Census Place: *Reno, Washoe, Nevada*; Roll: *943*; Page: *10*; Enumeration District: *0042.* [Mildred Bray]

Ancestry.com. Year: *1910*; Census Place: *Reno Ward 5, Washoe, Nevada*; Roll: *T624_859*; Page: *4a*; Enumeration District: *0072*; FHL microfilm: *1374872.* [Mildred Bray]

Ancestry.com. Year: *1920*; Census Place: *Carson Ward 3, Ormsby, Nevada*; Roll: *T625_1004*; Page: *4A*; Enumeration District: *34.* [Mildred Bray]

Ancestry.com. Year: *1930*; Census Place: *Carson City, Ormsby, Nevada*; Page: *6A*; Enumeration District: *0001*; FHL microfilm: *2341031.* [Mildred N Bray]

Ancestry.com. Year: *1940*; Census Place: *Carson, Ormsby, Nevada*; Roll: *m-t0627-02280*; Page: *15A*; Enumeration District: *13-1.* [Mildred Bray]

“Born. Bray – In Reno, May 14, 1892, to the wife of Johns Edwards Bray, a daughter.” *Nevada State Journal* (Reno, Nevada), 15 May 1892, p.2.

Couch, Ellen M. interview with Sally Wilkins or Christine Gridley, 1993; retired teacher and former State Superintendent of School Lunch Programs.

“Educator Mildred Bray Died, 83.” *Nevada Appeal* (Carson City, Nevada), 24 October 1975.

Houghton, Joan S. interview with Sally Wilkins or Christine Gridley, 1993; distinguished Carson City community volunteer, community theater.

Inside Nevada Schools: A Challenge for the Future; Nevada State Retired Teachers Association, 1976.

“Mildred Bray.” *Reno Evening Gazette* (Reno, Nevada), 3 Nov 1975, p.4.

“Minnie L. Bray Dies in Carson.” *Reno Evening Gazette* (Reno, Nevada), 12 Aug 1955, p.11.

“Two Prominent Nevadans to be Honored Saturday.” *Nevada Appeal* (Carson City, Nevada), 5 June 1969.

“Woman Seeks School Post. Miss Bray Boasts of Fine Record.” *Nevada State Journal* (Reno, Nevada), 30 Oct 1938, p.17. [photo]

Women Who Made Their Mark; Delta Kappa Gamma, Nu Chapter, Research Committee, 1981-82.