

GLADYS WITTENBERG DONOVAN

At A Glance:

Born: July 9, 1909, Tonopah, Nevada

Died: April 3, 1975, Silver City, Nevada

Maiden name: Gladys Wittenberg

Race/Nationality/ethnic background: Caucasian

Married: William M. Donovan, 1939

Children:

Lois Ruth Donovan Naab [daughter of Lois Crane],

William Michael Donovan

Shiela E Donovan Marshall

Terry May Donovan



Gladys Wittenberg Donovan
Nevada State Journal, 1938

Primary city and county residence and work:

Lyon County, Ormsby County/Carson City

Major fields of work: Mining mill owner; Deputy State Controller

Other role identities: Accountant

Tonopah native was multi-talented

Born into a mining family, Gladys Wittenberg worked as a mining chemist and as a deputy state controller. She served as a planner for Nevada's Centennial celebration, including the traditional drilling contests.

Gladys Wittenberg was born on July 9, 1909, in Tonopah, Nye County, Nevada. Her father, Charles Frederick Wittenberg, was a miner, teamster, and warehouse owner. He was born in Eureka in 1876 to a Prussian father. Charles F. Wittenberg later became a Democratic state senator in Nye County. Gladys' mother, Elizabeth "Bessie" F. Kopp, was also born in Eureka, Nevada, in 1878. Her father was a miner who became a partner with her husband.

Tonopah social columns of 1912-1925 reported that young Gladys was a socially active girl who at 3 months of age won a baby show, then at age 5 attended a wedding as a flower girl, and later in school acted in children's plays, and was invited to birthday parties. She won first place in a fundraising effort when she was 13 and played on a basketball team at 15. In 1924, Gladys attended a Father-Daughter Rotarian dinner and was her sophomore class president. Most remarkably, she saved a man's life from severe burns in a garage fire when she was 16 years old.

In 1927, Gladys left Tonopah to study at the University of Nevada, Reno. She was a member of the Gamma Beta Sorority and was elected secretary of her freshman class. Gladys lived on West 4th Street in Reno and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1931.



Gladys Wittenberg
Artemesia, UNR
1928

From 1933 to 1938, Gladys Wittenberg was a resident of Carson City and a highly regarded chief clerk at the Nevada State Controller's office for six years. In 1938, she was elected as a delegate to attend the state Democratic convention. That year, Gladys also won a vacation and "a beautiful set of rawhide luggage" in the *Nevada State Journal's* "Courtesy and Efficiency Travelark" popularity contest.

On January 22, 1939, 29-year-old Gladys married prominent Silver City, Nevada mill operator William M. Donovan, 17 years her senior, at a secret wedding in Markleeville, Alpine County, California. William's first wife Lois Crane Donovan had died in 1938. It was understood that Gladys would give up her job at the state controller's office and join him to live and work in Silver City. They were a well suited and devoted couple, raising three daughters and a son together.

In 1956, at 47 years of age, and after 17 years working alongside her husband at the mill, Gladys was noted in a *Nevada State Journal* article as the "chemist at the active Donovan Mill." Her job included assaying ore samples and managing the chemicals used for gold extraction, involving both mercury amalgamation and the cyanidation process. Another article mentioned that "Mrs. Donovan comes from a Tonopah mining family and is probably the only woman stamp mill operator in the U.S." *Nevada State Journal*, June 2, 1957.



George Yori instructs
Gladys Donovan
Reno Evening Gazette, 1958

During this time, Gladys was an active community member and volunteer. Her main charity was the Comstock Chapter of the American Women's Volunteer Service; she served as chairman in 1956 and hosted an event to honor veterans with a trip to Virginia City for a party. In 1958, she was a member of the prestigious planning committee for Nevada's state centennial celebration and assisted in planning the drilling contest event.

In 1958 Gladys took welding classes at Reno High School. "After several shutdowns last summer due to operational failures that could have been repaired immediately by a welder Mrs. Donovan decided to do something about the matter."

In 1961, after the mill had closed down, Gladys Donovan, at 52 years of age, returned to work at the Nevada State Controller's office as an accountant, and subsequently, in 1965, she was named deputy state controller. She also continued with her volunteer work and in 1968, raised money with the AWVS to fund a scholarship for a Virginia City student.

Three years after her husband William Donovan died in 1972, Gladys Wittenberg Donovan passed away at age 66 at her home in Silver City on April 3, 1975. Gladys and William are buried in the Mountain View Cemetery in Reno, Nevada.



Researched and written by Lisa Jayne. 2026

Sources of Information

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