



NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION
COMMITTEE ON WOMEN IN THE LAW

WOMEN ATTORNEY TRAILBLAZERS IN NEW YORK STATE



WOMEN ATTORNEY TRAILBLAZERS IN NEW YORK STATE

New York State has a rich history of amazing trailblazing women attorneys who broke through barriers and blatant discrimination to make major contributions in the legal profession. Their stories are ones of fierce determination, passion for the law, keen intelligence, and inspiring achievement.

From the late 19th Century, when women began gaining admission to state bars, through the 1960s, women attorneys faced widespread discrimination. Women were turned away from law firms, or only offered jobs as librarians or secretaries. Later, women applicants were told that the quota for hiring women was already filled. Or that clients would be uncomfortable with a woman attorney. In the 1970s, women filed complaints alleging discrimination in hiring against 10 major New York law firms. The suits were transformed into a class action under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. In a 1977 settlement, the firms agreed to guidelines assuring the hiring of women associates. Through the 1980s, the presence of women attorneys increased greatly in firms, with many electing its first woman partner. Still, in 1986, the New York Task Force on Women in the Courts concluded that there was pervasive sex bias in the courts and that female lawyers were “routinely” demeaned and treated patronizingly by male judges and attorneys.

Women have made tremendous strides in the past 40 years — largely due to the efforts of women attorneys who overcame obstacles and blazed a path for other women attorneys to follow. Today, the roadblocks to the advancement of women in the legal profession are more subtle. But they still lead to concrete consequences for women attorneys who, research shows, do not attain the same leadership positions and opportunities for advancement as their numbers would dictate. Despite almost three decades of graduating law classes composed of at least 40% women, women are still not proportionally represented in the higher-level tier of the profession, according to the latest NAWL National Survey on the Retention and Promotion of Women in Law Firms. Only 17% of equity partners at the nation’s top 200 law firms are women, while women make up about half of associates (47%) and almost two-thirds, or 64%, of staff attorneys, the lowest paid attorneys at the surveyed firms.

The Committee on Women in the Law — whose first chair, Ruth Schapiro, was one of the women trailblazers at New York State Bar Association - is delighted to spotlight the lives and careers of 10 women lawyers who have paved the way for other women attorneys. This exhibit features women who fought discrimination and gained a foothold in a range of careers: among them the first woman admitted to the New York State Bar, the first black woman judge, the first woman elected district attorney, the inaugural head of New York’s Civil Rights Bureau, and the first woman judge of New York’s highest court. The exhibit also spotlights the career of the New York State Bar Association’s first woman president, Maryann Saccomando Freedman, who served from 1987-1988. NYSBA was, and remains, a pioneer in welcoming women to its ranks. In 1901, the Association became the first major bar association in New York to elect a woman to membership. Still, in the 138-year history of NYSBA, there have been only six female presidents; the seventh, Sharon Stern Gerstman, will take office in 2017.

These women have paved the way for other women attorneys, serving as role models and, often, as mentors. We hope that you will draw inspiration from the stories of these 10 remarkable New York Attorneys.

Sincerely,

Maureen Bezuhly

Co-chair, Committee on Women in the Law
Best Practices Subcommittee
New York

Monica P. Ruela

Co-chair, Committee on Women in the Law
Best Practices Subcommittee
Garden City

Susan L. Harper

Co-chair, Committee on Women in the Law
Bogota, New Jersey

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Co-chair, Committee on Women in the Law
New York City

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KATE STONEMAN

FIRST WOMAN ADMITTED TO PRACTICE LAW IN NEW YORK



When Kate Stoneman graduated from college in 1864, there were only seven occupations open to women, she later told an interviewer: "housekeeping, sewing, cooking, tailoring, domestic nursing, teaching in 'dame' schools, and shop work." So Stoneman began teaching, geography and penmanship, at the precursor to the University at Albany. When she was named executrix for the large estate of a great aunt, however, she became interested in law. On weekends and at nights, while teaching during the day, she clerked at the law office of a family friend, reading through his law books.

In 1885, Stoneman passed both the written and oral bar exams on her first try. Her application for admission to the bar was summarily rejected, and for only one reason: her gender. "No precedent," "No English precedent," and "No necessity" were the rulings of the three New York State Supreme Court justices. As an avid suffragist, Stoneman was familiar with the political process from her work and knew how to build support for a cause. She proposed an amendment to the state legislature that would prohibit the consideration of sex or race in admission to the bar.

Within a day, Stoneman had the support she needed in both houses. That same day, accompanied by the press, she took the bill to the Governor and Secretary of State, who signed the bill into law. She presented the signed bill to the Supreme Court, and was admitted to practice law by the same judges who had earlier denied her application. In 1898, Stoneman became, at age 57, the first woman to graduate from Albany Law School. She was listed as a lawyer in the Albany city directory from 1886 through 1922, with her law office at 134 South Swan Street.



MARY M. LILLY

FIRST WOMAN ATTORNEY ELECTED TO NEW YORK STATE LEGISLATURE

Ten years after Kate Stoneman successfully fought for the right of women to be admitted to practice law in New York, the graduating class of the New York University School of Law had an unusually large number of women graduates: 10 out of a class of 70 students. Graduate Mary M. Lilly would go on to become, in 1918, the first woman elected by New York City residents for any legislative position, the first woman attorney elected to the New York State Legislature, and one of the first two women attorneys in the country elected as state legislators.

In 1876, she graduated from Hunter College and taught in the New York City public schools. While working as a teacher, she attended the New York University School of Law on a scholarship, believed to be the first such scholarship awarded to a woman on the basis of a competitive exam. She earned her law degree in 1895, at age 35.

Lilly, the mother of a son, devoted her career to fighting for women's suffrage, prison reform, and children's rights. She played significant roles in many political and civic groups, including The Women Lawyers Association and The Society for the Aid to Mental Defectives. She was appointed as Superintendent for female inmates at the Workhouse on Blackwell Island; over 10 years of service, she studied female criminals and drug addiction and worked to improve methods of treatment.

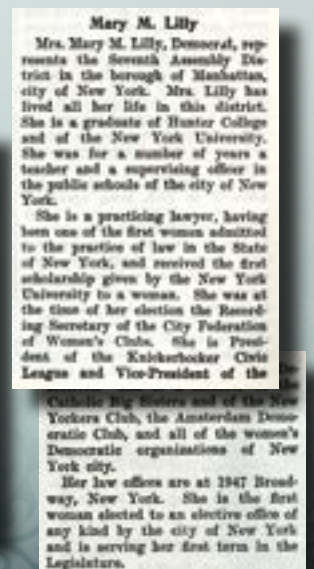
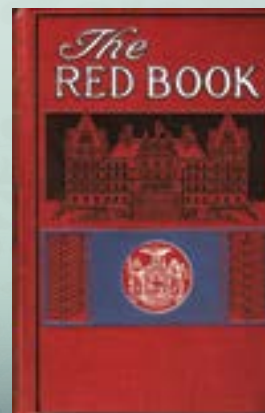
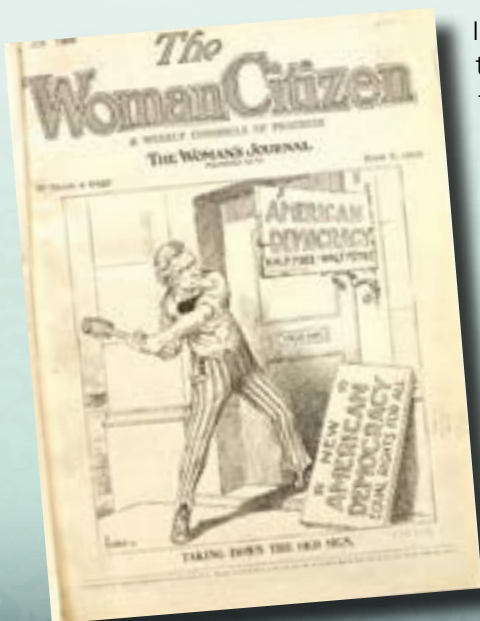
In 1918, the year after women gained the right to vote in New York State, Lilly ran for the New York State Assembly and won. As her very first act as a legislator, Lilly spoke in support of the federal ratification of the federal Women's Suffrage Act.

"Women are needed in the Legislature at all times — just as they are needed and should be represented in all departments of government, war or no war," Lilly said in a 1919 interview.



In her first year as a legislator, Lilly proposed 12 bills — four became law, including bills to abolish the death penalty for minors, to raise to 18 the age of juvenile delinquency, to make it obligatory to have a woman magistrate in the Woman's Court, and a bill giving an illegitimate child the right to bear the father's name and share in his estate.

After her defeat in a subsequent election, Lilly returned to the private practice of law, at 80 Wall Street, and continued to work as a community leader.



JANE MATILDA BOLIN

FIRST BLACK WOMAN JUDGE IN THE UNITED STATES



Throughout her legal career, Jane Matilda Bolin faced the double bind of racial and gender bias. When she entered Yale University Law School in 1928, Bolin was one of three women students, and the only black. At the time, there were only 22 black women attorneys nationwide.

Bolin was exposed to the legal profession at an early age through her father, the first black attorney in Dutchess County. She spent hours after school reading through the leather-bound law books in his Poughkeepsie law office. In her senior year at Wellesley College, however, the college advisor tried to discourage Bolin from applying to law school. As Bolin later recalled, the advisor warned her that “there was little opportunity for women in law and absolutely none for a ‘colored’ one.” At her graduation in 1928, Bolin was named a Wellesley Scholar, a distinction granted only to the top 20 students. In 1931, Bolin became the first female black graduate of Yale Law School.



John Sotomayor/
The New York Times/Redux

Bolin apprenticed in her father’s law office, and, when she was not able to get a position at local law firms, practiced law with her husband. “I was rejected on account of being a woman, but I’m sure that race also played a part,” she later told an interviewer. In 1937, Bolin was appointed Assistant Corporation Counsel of the City of New York — the first black woman attorney hired by that office.

In 1939 — in a ceremony at the World’s Fair — New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia appointed Bolin, then 31, a judge of the Domestic Relations Court (now Family Court). With the swearing in, Bolin became the first black woman in the nation to be elected as a judge. By 1941, Bolin had become a mother to a young son; within two years, she was a widow.

Reappointed by three different mayors, Bolin served for 40 years as a Family Court judge. She spearheaded many changes, including assigning probation officers without regard to race or religion and requiring that child care agencies receiving public funds accept children regardless of race or ethnic background.

Bolin retired from the bench in December 1978, after reaching the mandatory retirement age of 70, but remained active as a champion of children’s rights and education.



Image used with permission of Crisis Publishing Co., Inc., the publisher of the magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

FLORENCE PERLOW SHIENTAG

FIRST WOMAN FEDERAL PROSECUTOR IN NEW YORK

When she graduated from New York University School of Law in 1931, Florence Perlow Shientag, as a woman attorney, faced deep barriers to positions at the profession's male-controlled institutions: the courts, law firms, and bar associations. She began her law career in the government sector as a law secretary to New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia. Because women were not granted admission to most bar associations, Shientag, along with a handful of others, formed the New York Women's Bar Association (NYWBA).

After her time in the Mayor's office, Shientag worked as a law clerk to Thomas Dewey, who was a special prosecutor in New York County at that time. In 1941, La Guardia appointed her as a judge of the Domestic Relations Court, a precursor to today's Family Court. She also threw herself into bar association work. Shientag was among the first group of women lawyers admitted in 1937 to the New York City Bar Association; later she became New York County Lawyers Association's first woman board member. In 1941–1942, she served as president of the NYWBA, and, during World War II, on the executive committee of a joint bar association War Committee.

In 1943, Shientag was hired as an Assistant United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, becoming the state's first woman prosecutor and one of the first in the country. In her nine years as prosecutor, she handled a wide range of civil and criminal cases, including prosecution for illegal attempts to profiteer during the war, mail fraud cases and counterfeiting.

In 1952, Shientag opened a solo practice focusing on domestic relations, later expanding to Florida, London, Rome and Paris. In 1953, she argued, and won, a case before the Supreme Court, in which the court struck down New York's ban of a French film, thereby strengthening First Amendment rights for films.

During her lifetime, Shientag attained many awards and held numerous leadership positions. In 1984, she was appointed to serve on the New York Task Force on Women in the Courts. When its report was issued, Shientag stated, "In my 50 years that I have been practicing law, there has been a lessening of the dismissing and intolerant attitude towards women lawyers. This significant improvement is due to the performance and demonstrated ability of women in our profession. Brains have no sex."

Shientag passed away in 2009, at the age of 101.



1648

FIRST WOMAN AMERICAN LAWYER: MARGARET BRENT

1701

FIRST CO-ED JURY IN NATION: ALBANY, NY

1848

FIRST WOMAN'S RIGHTS CONVENTION HELD AT SENECA FALLS, JULY 19-20, 1848.

1879

FIRST WOMAN ADMITTED TO TRY A CASE BEFORE THE SUPREME COURT.

1873

SUPREME COURT RULES A STATE HAS THE RIGHT TO EXCLUDE A MARRIED WOMAN FROM PRACTICING LAW.



1886

NEW YORK ADMITS WOMEN TO BAR FOR FIRST TIME. KATE STONEMAN BECOMES FIRST WOMAN ADMITTED TO THE NEW YORK BAR.

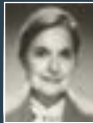


1898

KATE STONEMAN BECOMES FIRST WOMAN GRADUATE OF ALBANY LAW SCHOOL.

1901

NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION ACCEPTS WOMEN AS MEMBERS.



1959

SHIRLEY ADELSON SIEGEL APPOINTED HEAD OF NEW YORK STATE CIVIL RIGHTS BUREAU.

1963

THE EQUAL PAY ACT IS PASSED BY CONGRESS, PROMISING EQUITABLE WAGES FOR THE SAME WORK, REGARDLESS OF SEX OF WORKER.

1950

HARVARD ADMITS WOMEN LAW STUDENTS.

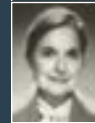


1966

CONSTANCE BAKER MOTLEY APPOINTED TO THE FEDERAL BENCH IN NEW YORK, BECOMING FIRST BLACK WOMAN FEDERAL JUDGE.

1964

TITLE VII OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT PASSES INCLUDING A PROHIBITION AGAINST EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION ON BASIS OF SEX.



1979

SHIRLEY ADELSON SIEGEL APPOINTED NEW YORK SOLICITOR GENERAL.

1977

SETTLEMENT OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION CLASS ACTION LAWSUIT AGAINST 10 MAJOR NEW YORK LAW FIRMS; FIRMS AGREE TO HIRING WOMEN ASSOCIATES AND TO STOP HOLDING FIRM EVENTS AT CLUBS THAT EXCLUDE WOMEN.

1975

SUPREME COURT DENIES STATES THE RIGHT TO EXCLUDE WOMEN FROM JURIES.

1981

FIRST WOMAN APPOINTED TO SERVE AS SUPREME COURT JUSTICE: SANDRA DAY O'CONNOR



1983

JUDITH KAYE BECOMES FIRST WOMAN APPOINTED TO SERVE ON NEW YORK'S HIGHEST COURT.

1917

WOMEN GAIN RIGHT TO VOTE IN NEW YORK STATE.

1918

FORDHAM AND YALE ADMIT WOMEN LAW STUDENTS.



1918

MARY M. LILLY WINS ELECTION TO STATE ASSEMBLY, BECOMING FIRST WOMAN ATTORNEY LEGISLATOR.

1920

NINETEENTH AMENDMENT TO U.S. CONSTITUTION GRANTS WOMEN RIGHT TO VOTE.

1926

COLUMBIA ADMITS WOMEN LAW STUDENTS.

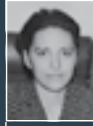
1934

FLORENCE PERLOW SHIENTAG, ALONG WITH WOMEN ATTORNEYS DENIED ADMISSION TO OTHER BAR ASSOCIATIONS, ESTABLISHES NEW YORK WOMEN'S BAR ASSOCIATION.



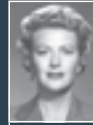
1939

JANE BOLIN APPOINTED AS DOMESTIC RELATIONS JUDGE IN NEW YORK, BECOMING FIRST BLACK WOMAN JUDGE IN UNITED STATES.



1942

FIRST WOMAN ELEVATED TO PARTNER IN A MAJOR WALL STREET LAW FIRM, CADWALADER, WICKERSHAM & TAFT: CATHERINE NOYES LEE.



1943

FLORENCE PERLOW SHIENTAG HIRED AS FIRST WOMAN FEDERAL PROSECUTOR IN NEW YORK STATE, ONE OF FIRST IN COUNTRY.



1949

CHARLOTTE SMALLWOOD ELECTED AS WYOMING COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY, BECOMING FIRST WOMAN ELECTED DISTRICT ATTORNEY IN NEW YORK STATE.



1984

CONGRESSWOMAN GERALDINE FERRARO BECOMES FIRST WOMAN NOMINATED FOR VICE PRESIDENT BY A MAJOR PARTY.

1984

SUPREME COURT RULES LAW FIRMS MAY NOT DISCRIMINATE ON THE BASIS OF SEX IN PROMOTING LAWYERS TO PARTNERSHIP POSITIONS.



1987

MARYANN SACCOMANDO FREEDMAN BECOMES FIRST WOMAN PRESIDENT OF THE NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION, FOUNDED IN 1876.

1989

THE HON. BETTY WEINBERG ELLERIN BECOMES FIRST WOMAN PRESIDING JUSTICE IN NEW YORK STATE.

1986

NEW YORK TASK FORCE ON WOMEN IN THE COURTS REPORT FINDS PERVASIVE SEX BIAS IN COURTS.

1992

FIRST HISPANIC APPOINTED FEDERAL JUDGE IN NEW YORK STATE: SONIA SOTOMAYOR.

1994

FIRST HISPANIC WOMAN APPOINTED TO NEW YORK COURT OF APPEALS: CARMEN BEAUCHAMP CIPARICK

2013

FIRST BLACK WOMAN APPOINTED TO NEW YORK COURT OF APPEALS: SHEILA ABDUS-SALAAM



1993

JUDITH KAYE BECOMES FIRST WOMAN CHIEF JUDGE OF NEW YORK STATE.

1993

FIRST WOMAN U.S. ATTORNEY GENERAL: JANET RENO

CHARLOTTE SMALLWOOD-COOK

FIRST WOMAN DISTRICT ATTORNEY IN NEW YORK



When Charlotte Smallwood ran for election in 1949 as district attorney of upstate Wyoming County, her goal was not to break a gender barrier. Rather than running as a woman, she later told an interviewer, “I ran as me.” Serving as a prosecutor sounded interesting, she explained, and she saw herself as the best qualified person for the job. Smallwood, a graduate of Cornell University and Columbia Law School, did not have her party’s backing to challenge the incumbent. Nonetheless, the 26-year-old won the Republican primary and went on to win a landslide victory in the general election, receiving 65 percent of the more than 12,000 votes cast.

As Wyoming County District Attorney, Smallwood prosecuted the county’s first capital murder case in 40 years, succeeding both at trial and in the Court of Appeals. When she took office, Smallwood had a 5-year-old son, and, the next year, her second child was born on the day before a manslaughter trial was to open. After her husband died unexpectedly in 1952, Smallwood decided not to run for re-election, returning to private practice.

In 1989, Smallwood-Cook, who had remarried, was unanimously appointed chairwoman of the Wyoming County Republican Committee – the same committee that had refused to back her 40 years earlier. At the time, she was one of five women holding county leadership posts statewide within the party. Smallwood-Cook was also among the first female fellows of the American College of Trial Lawyers. She served on the NYSBA House of Delegates and as a member of the NYSBA committee studying restructuring the state’s court system, opposing selecting judges by appointment rather than election.



Smallwood-Cook continued to practice law in Warsaw, N.Y., until shortly before her death in 2013, at the age of 90. “I have loved practicing law with the lawyers of Wyoming County. You’re the best thing you can be, and that is a country lawyer,” she said, at an event dedicating a plaque in her honor at the Wyoming County Courthouse.



Batavia Daily News
Photographer: Mark Gutman

SHIRLEY ADELSON SIEGEL

CHIEF OF NYS ATTORNEY GENERAL'S CIVIL RIGHTS BUREAU, NEW YORK SOLICITOR GENERAL

Shirley Adelson Siegel, the only woman in Yale Law School's Class of 1941, overcame longstanding resistance to women attorneys and was hired by one of Wall Street's large law firms as its first female attorney. This first job marked the beginning of a long and significant career propelled by deep interests in affordable housing and civil rights.

In 1941, Siegel, a law review editor who ranked high in her class, did not receive any job offers, after making the rounds at 40 law firms. Several professors stepped in to help; one writing, "Anyone who employs her in legal work will have reason to be thankful to us. And she needs help to get a starting job, first because she is a girl and, secondly, because she is Jewish. There is no reason for the slightest hesitation on either ground." In 1941, she was hired as the first woman attorney at Proskauer Rose Goetz & Mendelsohn; one partner wrote that hiring her would "break down a precedent of many years standing."

During World War II, Siegel volunteered at nights and on weekends for the ACLU, where she worked on the Japanese relocation and internment camps Supreme Court cases. Active in bar associations, Siegel did years of committee work on affordable housing and civil rights. She served as Executive Director of the Citizens Housing Council of New York, and then in Los Angeles, and was appointed General Counsel of New York City's Housing and Development Administration.

In 1959, Siegel, then the mother of two young children, was appointed to head the state's first Civil Rights Bureau in the Office of the NY Attorney General. Serving until 1966, she addressed discrimination in the building trade, employment agencies, on-campus recruitment by banks and insurance companies, and significantly, worked for an amendment of the state Executive Law to add "sex" to the provision forbidding discrimination in employment based on race, color, creed or national origin. In 1979, Siegel was appointed New York Solicitor General.



Siegel has argued twice before the Supreme Court, helping an airline pilot secure redress when denied a job because of his race and, secondly, in *Committee for Public Education and Religious Liberty v. NY State Officials*, where the Court held that state reimbursement of non-public schools for the cost of complying with state requirements does not constitute establishment or aid to religion. Later, Siegel served on the New York City

Conflicts of Interest Board, and taught law at several schools, including Columbia and Fordham universities. Into her 90s, Siegel, has worked, pro bono, on foreclosure cases, receiving the NYSBA Pro Bono Award for Seniors.



CONSTANCE BAKER MOTLEY

KEY CIVIL RIGHTS LAWYER, FIRST BLACK WOMAN FEDERAL JUDGE



In high school, Constance Baker decided that she wanted to become a lawyer, after facing racial discrimination and studying black history. Since her family lacked money to send her and her 11 siblings to college, Baker struggled to earn a living as a maid. At 18, she made a speech at a local community center that changed her life. A white businessman philanthropist heard her speech; impressed, he offered to finance her education.

While at Columbia University Law School, Baker volunteered on the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. After her 1946 marriage and graduation, Motley began her legal career at the NAACP, first focusing on housing cases. She would become one of the NAACP's main legal strategists, serving as the only woman on its legal team from the mid-1940s to the 1960s. She worked on briefs for the 1954 landmark desegregation case *Brown v. Board of Education* and directed the legal campaign that resulted in the admission, in 1962, of James H. Meredith to the University of Mississippi. Motley argued 10 cases before the U.S. Supreme Court. Of these, she won nine, including cases ending segregation in restaurants and at lunch counters in the South. Her only loss was *Swain v. Alabama*, in which the court refused to proscribe race-based peremptory challenges in criminal cases; the holding was later reversed in *Batson v. Kentucky*. Motley also represented blacks seeking admission to colleges and universities in the South.

In 1964, Motley was asked to run for the state senate. She agreed, provided she could continue her work with the NAACP. Motley won, becoming the first black woman elected to the New York State Senate. In 1965, she was selected to fill a one-year vacancy as Manhattan borough president, and won election to a four-year term the following year. As borough president, Motley drafted a program to revitalize Harlem and East Harlem, and secured funding for underprivileged areas of the city.

In 1966, she was appointed as a judge on the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York. Motley, now the mother of a son, became Chief Judge in 1982 and continued to serve on the court for the rest of her life. "The work I'm doing now will affect people's lives intimately," she told the *New York Times* in 1977. "It may even change them."



MARYANN SACCOMANDO FREEDMAN

FIRST WOMAN PRESIDENT OF NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

When Maryann Saccomando Freedman began practicing law in the late 1950s, women were just getting a foothold in the legal community. In her 55-year career, Freedman has blazed a path for other women as a leader in the profession, battling sexism and fighting for equal rights for women.

After graduating from the University of Buffalo Law School in 1958, she was hired by a Buffalo law firm as its first female attorney. In 1961, she started her own firm, Freedman & Freedman, with her husband. In 1975, then a mother of two children, Freedman left to become New York Attorney Assistant General. Two years later, she became the confidential law clerk to state Supreme Court Justice William Ostrowski.

In 1980, Freedman was elected, in a contested election, as the first woman president of the Erie County Bar Association, serving from 1981 to 1982. In 1982, Freedman was invited to a professional reception at The Buffalo Club, an all-male private club. She was physically stopped at the door and directed to use a side door because the main entrance was reserved for men. Freedman refused to use the side door the incident was later reported in newspapers and on radio and TV.

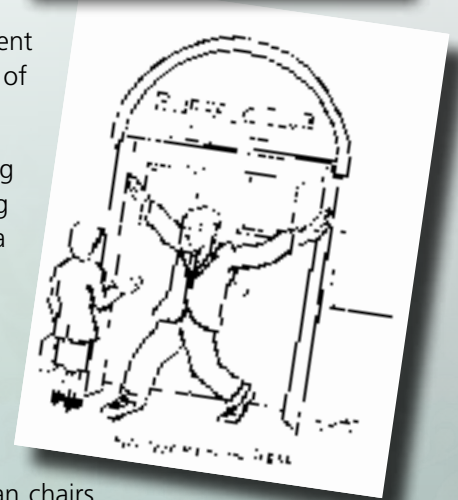
In 1987, she became President of the New York State Bar Association, the first woman to hold the position in its then 110-year history. In 1997, she became the first woman president of the New York Bar Foundation, serving until 2000. She now sits on the NYSBA House of Delegates.

Freedman has been actively involved in bar association and community organizations, including the Erie County Citizens Committee Against Rape and Sexual Assault and as a founding member of the Buffalo/Niagara Coalition on Women's Rights. For 10 years, she served as a Matrimonial Referee in the State Supreme Court.



Freedman has spoken often about her desire to help other women attorneys advance in the profession, writing in a recent *New York Law Journal* article that "successful women carry a tremendous responsibility to help other women to succeed."

Currently Of Counsel at Cohen & Lombardo, Buffalo, Freedman chairs its Matrimonial and Family Law department.



GERALDINE ANNE FERRARO

U.S. CONGRESSWOMAN, FIRST WOMAN NOMINATED FOR VICE PRESIDENT BY A MAJOR PARTY



In 1956, when Geraldine Ferraro applied to Fordham University School of Law, an admissions officer warned her that she would be taking a man's place. She applied anyway. Ferraro worked full-time as a New York City public school teacher while attending Fordham at night — one of two women in a class of 179.

After passing the bar in 1961, Ferraro delayed practicing law full-time until after her three children were older, instead doing legal work for her husband's business, pro bono work on behalf of women in Family Court, and getting involved in local politics. In 1970, she was elected president of the Queens County Women's Bar Association. In 1973, after her cousin, Nicholas Ferraro, was elected Queens district attorney, she went to work for the Queens District Attorney's office; there, she helped create a Special Victims Bureau to prosecute sex crimes, crimes against the elderly and children, and domestic violence.

In 1978, Ferraro ran for Congress on the slogan "Finally, a tough Democrat," winning by a 10% margin. She was reelected twice with larger margins — 58% in 1980 and 73% in 1982. Ferraro fought for women's rights during her time in the House, leading efforts to pass the ultimately unsuccessful Equal Rights Amendment, and also sponsoring the Women's Economic Equality Act in 1984. The same year, she was appointed chairwoman of the Democratic Platform Committee.

Responding to pressure to have a woman on the ticket, Walter Mondale selected Ferraro as his vice presidential candidate. They lost the election by a landslide.

Ferraro later served as ambassador to the United Nations Human Rights Commission, and as co-host of the CNN program "Crossfire."

She died in 2011, at age 75, of multiple myeloma. But Ferraro lived long enough to see women achieve several more major milestones in national politics, including the first woman U.S. Attorney General, the first woman Secretary of State, the first woman Speaker of the House, another woman's selection as a vice presidential candidate, and Hillary Clinton's first bid for the Democratic nomination for president.

Ferraro once told *Newsweek*, "Every time a woman runs, women win."



1984 photograph by Nancy Wong



JUDITH S. KAYE

FIRST WOMAN APPOINTED TO THE NEW YORK COURT OF APPEALS, FIRST WOMAN CHIEF JUDGE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

When Chief Judge Judith Kaye, then Judith Smith, entered law school, she did so only to gain a credential that would help her get a serious job in journalism; the daily newspaper where she had been a reporter only let her write for the society pages because she was a woman. Once in law school, she fell in love with the law. Upon her graduation from New York University Law School in 1962, as one of 10 women out of a class of 300, Kaye discovered that women faced opposition in the legal profession. After numerous rejections — “our quota of women is filled” was a common response — she was hired by Sullivan & Cromwell.

After Sullivan & Cromwell, Kaye practiced at IBM, at her alma mater, and focused on commercial litigation at Olwine, Connelly, Chase, O’Donnell & Weyher, becoming, in 1975, the firm’s first female partner. In 1983, Kaye was appointed Associate Judge of the Court of Appeals by Gov. Mario Cuomo. In 1993, Cuomo named her New York’s chief judge, a position she held for 15 years, until her mandatory retirement, at age 70, on Dec. 31, 2008.

Under Kaye’s leadership, New York gained national recognition as a leader in court reform. She worked to streamline the jury system and pushed the court system to address societal problems by creating courts or assigning judges for specific issues like drug abuse, mental health, and domestic violence — initiatives that other states followed. In addition, she created the Adoption Now program to improve procedures for children in foster care and their families. Working with the Fund for the City of New York, Kaye helped establish the Center for Court Innovation, a nonprofit think tank that serves as the judiciary’s research and development arm.

“She leaves a legacy for advancing the court system into places and dimensions where it had never been,” wrote Albert M. Rosenblatt, one of Kaye’s former colleagues on the court.

As Of Counsel to Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, Kaye focused on dispute resolution, as well as her “passion project” — finding ways to keep kids in school and out of courts. Kaye contributed significantly to shaping the legal profession, serving on several key commissions on judicial nomination, children, and the status of women in the profession. Additionally, she served on the boards of several nonprofits, including the Lincoln Center, the Museum of Jewish Heritage, and The Legal Aid Society of New York.

Kaye, who worked part-time while her three children were young, also worked actively to further the advancement of women lawyers, publishing articles and speaking openly of the reality facing women lawyers, including attorneys who juggle work and motherhood.



WOMEN ATTORNEY TRAILBLAZERS IN NEW YORK STATE

COLUMBIA COLLEGE TRUSTEE GEORGE TEMPLETON STRONG, UPON LEARNING THAT
THREE YOUNG WOMEN HAD APPLIED TO COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL IN 1869:

**“NO WOMAN SHALL DEGRADE HERSELF BY PRACTICING LAW,
IN NEW YORK ESPECIALLY, IF I CAN SAVE HER.”**

KATE STONEMAN:

“[I]T IS TO THE PIONEER WOMEN WHO NOT ONLY
OBTAINED THE [FIRST STATE] POSITIONS, BUT HAD THE
COURAGE AND ABILITY TO TAKE AND KEEP THEM, THAT
I BELIEVE WE SUFFRAGISTS OWE A GREAT DEBT OF
GRATITUDE. THEY ARE THE WOMEN WHO ACTUALLY BLAZED
A TRAIL TO THE FURTHER AND BETTER THINGS WHICH
HAVE CONSTANTLY COME TO WOMEN.”

MARY M. LILLY:

“WOMEN ARE NEEDED IN THE LEGISLATURE AT ALL
TIMES – JUST AS THEY ARE NEEDED AND SHOULD BE
REPRESENTED IN ALL DEPARTMENTS OF GOVERNMENT,
WAR OR NO WAR.”

JANE MATILDA BOLIN:

“WE [WOMEN] HAVE TO FIGHT EVERY INCH OF THE
WAY AND IN THE FACE OF SOMETIMES INSUFFERABLE
HUMILIATIONS.”

FLORENCE PERLOW SHIENTAG:

“IN THE FIFTY YEARS THAT I HAVE BEEN PRACTICING
LAW, THERE HAS BEEN A LESSENING OF THE DISMISSING
AND INTOLERANT ATTITUDE TOWARDS WOMEN LAWYERS.
THIS SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT IS DUE TO THE
PERFORMANCE AND DEMONSTRATED ABILITY OF
WOMEN IN OUR PROFESSION. BRAINS HAVE NO SEX.”

SHIRLEY ADELSON SIEGEL:

“I THOUGHT I COULD HANDLE EVERYTHING.
I HAVE THAT BELIEF ABOUT MYSELF.”

CONSTANCE BAKER MOTLEY:

“I REJECTED THE NOTION THAT MY RACE OR SEX
WOULD BAR MY SUCCESS IN LIFE.”

CHARLOTTE SMALLWOOD-COOK:

“[MY SERVING AS DISTRICT ATTORNEY] SHOWED A LOT
OF MALE ATTORNEYS THAT THEIR DAUGHTERS COULD BE
GOOD LAWYERS AND NOT TURN INTO MONSTERS.”

MARYANN SACCOMANDO FREEDMAN:

“I HAVE NEVER BEEN RELUCTANT TO USE [MY] POSITIONS
[AS BAR PRESIDENT] TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF WOMEN.
IT WASN'T A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD.”

GERALDINE ANNE FERRARO:

“EVERY TIME A WOMAN RUNS, WOMEN WIN.”

JUDITH S. KAYE:

“I CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT THE PROGRESS OF
WOMEN IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION IS NOT A NATURAL
PHENOMENON, LIKE EROSION OR ACCRETION. IT DOESN'T
JUST HAPPEN. IT NEVER WILL. IT REQUIRES
CONSPICUOUS, VOCAL VIGILANCE.”



NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION
COMMITTEE ON WOMEN IN THE LAW

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