

## THE FIRST SIX OR SEVEN

In January 2015, a story in the Christian County Headliner-News featured “The Leading Ladies of Justice.” For the first time in Christian County history, four women served county-wide in the judicial system: Circuit Judge Laura Johnson, Prosecuting Attorney Amy Fite, Circuit Clerk Barbie Barnett-Stilling, and Chief Juvenile Officer Terri Goodall. The fifth office in this group, was held by a male, Sheriff Joey Kyle. Adding County Clerk Kay Brown, County Auditor Lacy Hart, Recorder of Deeds Kelly Hall and County Treasurer Karen Matthews gave 2015 the highest percentage of women ever in county government, eight women serving in seventeen county offices.

For most of the first 125 years of Christian County, no woman was listed on the roster of county officials. When they did, a single female name appeared among the men. When I came here in 1987, only seven women had ever served in county-wide office in Christian County. Two were appointed, Recorder Della (Park) Keltner 1912 – 1915 and Prosecuting Attorney Mayte (Boylan) Hardie 1965 - 1967. Four were elected, Treasurers Loma Schupbach 1925-1927, Belle Brown 1929-1937, and Grace Anderson 1953-1955 and Public Administrator Bertha Hedgpeth 1937-1941. For a few weeks in the spring of 1933, Sarah Elizabeth “Sally” (Tucker) Jones served as acting sheriff after husband, elected sheriff Frank Jones was in an automobile accident. After his resulting death, a man, Joe Monger, was appointed to the job, later being elected to a full term on his own.

For most of this time, the lack of women on the list of officials did not indicate a lack of women in the courthouse. Women often did secretarial, filing, accounting, customer service and related duties. Rayo (Butler) Howard 24 Feb 1911 - 29 Nov 2009 enjoyed talking about her work in the 1930's as Deputy Circuit Clerk and Deputy County Clerk.

Let's begin with the two who were appointed. In some ways, they were the most unexpected. In 1910, 31 year old Charles Chris Keltner, son of John A. and Margaret Jane (Morris) Keltner, was elected to a four year

term as Christian County Recorder of Deeds. He took office in January 1911. Fifteen months later, he was dead of tubercular meningitis and was buried in Payne Cemetery. Eighteen year old at the time of his death wife Della (Park) Keltner and mother of his infant son, Bernice Keltner served the remainder of his term as Recorder. Della was a daughter of Samuel Wilson and Florence M. (Plank) Park who lived near Highlandville. I am guessing when I say that relatives, perhaps his grandparents, cared for her baby when Della worked at the courthouse. Among the surprises here, this was eight years before women were given the vote; even if women had been allowed to vote, Della didn't turn twenty-one until near the end of the term and during her term her son went from about fifteen months old to age four. In October 1916, after the election of the next county recorder, Della married Elmer Waggoner with whom she had five more children. She was widowed again in 1945. At her 1982 death, she was buried in the Ozark Cemetery by her second husband. All six of her children survived her. Her obituary does not mention her county service.

At the other end in time and in experience of the earliest women serving in county offices was Mayte (Boylan) Hardie 26 May 1910 - 8 March 1989. Bill E. Davenport 11 Oct 1917 - 23 Aug 1998 was a school teacher, coach and lawyer in Christian County. He married Sparta native Romalda Abbott, and they are buried in Sparta Cemetery. In 1958 and again in 1962, he was elected Prosecuting Attorney. In 1965, he accepted a position as Acquisition Attorney for the Corps of Engineers, continuing there until his retirement in 1990. Following his resignation, the governor appointed to complete the term an eminent qualified candidate who was nonetheless certainly atypical for Christian County office holders. She was that rare breed, a Democrat in a Christian County office. Born and raised in Manhattan in New York City, she appears there on the 1930 census with her widowed mother Adelaide and a younger brother Joseph Boylan. In 1933, she graduated in only the third Columbia University Law School class to accept, after years of resistance and hesitance for fear it would 'lessen the prestige and honor of the institution', women. Later, she was a Lieutenant in the U. S. Army. Her resume included several years at the U. S. Department of Justice in Washington D. C. and three post-World War II

years in Tokyo Japan in the general headquarters of the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers and even submitting friend of the court briefs before the Supreme Court. Perhaps because of her New York City background, her hard-earned Ivy League education or her military or legal careers, she was reputed to have not integrated well into Christian County life and society. Sometime after her time at the courthouse ended with William Anthony McConnell's first election as Prosecuting Attorney, she moved to Springfield where her husband, Robert S. Hardie, was an economics professor at one of the universities. Robert had also served in World War II. Both are buried in Springfield National Cemetery. My efforts to find an obituary for either were unsuccessful. Residents during her term recall that they had a son who attended Ozark High School.

I call this the first six or seven women in county office because it's hard to know whether to include Sarah Elizabeth "Sally" (Tucker) Jones 13 Jun 1866 - 10 Mar 1948, daughter of Andrew Jackson and Pauline (Walker) Tucker. She was never elected nor officially appointed. In 1888, the 22 year old Tennessee native had married 23 year old widower, Frank Jones who had two young children. He was the son of Isaiah and Mary Delilah (Moore) Jones and had married first Nan Estes. Frank and Sally had five more children. In 1932, Frank Jones became the only Democrat ever elected to the position of Sheriff in Christian County, taking the oath of office in January 1933. Less than three months later, he suffered critical head injuries in a wreck of the sheriff's car on a curve between Nixa and Ozark. Initially, he was unconscious and could not explain what happened. Appearing to rally after a stay in the Ozark Sanitarium, he returned home but could not remember details of the accident as his condition continued to worsen and additional medical personnel were called in on his case. No witnesses came forward. Since then, several theories/legends have spread about the accident. He may have been chasing fleeing lawbreakers who neither stopped to help nor later told the story. He may have been deliberately forced off the road for reasons that are purely speculative. He may have encountered something in the road such as wildlife or livestock and attempted to avoid it. Something may have been done to make his vehicle unsafe, or he was somehow made so sick or hurt as to be unable to

drive safely. Or, he may simply have fallen victim to the difficult stretch of road as have so many others. No one knows. He died of his injuries May 25, 1933. In the well over a month between the accident and his death, Mrs. Jones performed the duties of sheriff. The funeral was said to be one of the largest ever in Christian County, and much acclaim to Mr. Jones was printed in the Christian County Republican. Joe G. Monger was appointed sheriff and was later elected to a full term on his own. Sally Jones never remarried and at her death was buried in Payne Cemetery beside her husband.

Now to the four women actually elected to Christian County office in its first century.

A daughter of Samuel Henry and Mary M. (Carter) Hilton, Loma (Hilton) Layton Schupbach 8 Aug 1896 – 6 Feb 1992 had graduated from School of the Ozarks in Forsyth and Normal School in Springfield before becoming Postmistress as Day, Missouri and teaching in rural schools in Taney and Christian County. She married Ross Layton 14 May 1894 – 25 Sept 1922, son of John F. & Alabama (Sartin) Layton. Ross was severely burned in a gasoline explosion at his store in Reeds Spring 22 September 1922. He was brought to the Wade Clinic in Ozark where he lingered for three days before his death. Loma was left with one young daughter Hazel. A second, Imogene, was born after her father's death. Only four years after women were given the vote, the 28-year old widow ran in November 1924 on the Republican ticket for Treasurer of Christian County. In January 1925, she took office as the first woman elected to county office in Christian County. About a year later, she married Fred "Fritz" Schupbach 10 Feb 1895 - 6 Dec 1973. In time, they added two more daughters and three sons to their family. After leaving office in 1929, she and her husband operated a store in Highlandville. Ross was buried in Reeds Spring. Loma and Fritz are buried in Schupbach Cemetery.

The experience with Loma may have convinced Christian County voters that a woman could perform well as county treasurer. Immediately following her was another woman.

Laura Belle (Grant) Brown 1 Oct 1885 - 28 Dec 1971 was born in Iowa to Oscar & Anna P. (Bailey) Grant. She's often shown just as Belle. She was just a toddler when the family moved to Missouri. Her father, a cousin of General and President U. S. Grant, ran a livery stable in Ozark for more than thirty years. Belle married 8 May 1906 Robert A. Brown. One record gives Robert's birthdate as 1 April 1877. The couple is living with her parents and their year old daughter Nelle on the 1910 census. His occupation is listed as teamster. They later had a son Joe. On the 1920 census, Belle and the children are still listed with her parents and Belle's marital status is married, but Robert isn't listed. In 1930, Belle's marital status is widow. My efforts to locate a cemetery, mortuary, obituary or death certificate record for Robert were unsuccessful, leaving me with little more information. In 1928 and again in 1932, Belle ran successful campaigns and thus served as Christian County Treasurer 1929 to 1937. She and her family were always proud of Mrs. Brown's county service. She was buried in Ozark Cemetery. Seventy two years after her mother's time in the court house ended, 100 year old Nelle Jeane (Brown) Gardner 8 March 1909 – 13 August 2012 came from her home in Kansas to help celebrate the Christian County Sesquicentennial in the summer of 2009.

When Worth Caughron became county treasurer in 1937, it did not mean the end of women in county government.

Bertha L. (DeBrunner) Hedgpeth 29 Aug 1874 - 24 Sep 1966 was the daughter of Frederick L. and Mary F. (Werder) DeBrunner and wife of Dr. Donald Franklin Hedgpeth. After a successful 1936 campaign, she was elected Public Administrator on the Republican ticket. She served 1937 to 1941 administering estates and taking care of the affairs of individuals who neither could handle it on their own nor had someone to do so. A Billings native married to someone with Sparta area roots, their combined medical, real estate and banking interests centered around the middle of Christian County. She was a cashier for Ozark Bank from just a couple of years after its 1906 founding until her 1949 retirement. Her son, John Frederick Hedgpeth, daughter-in-law Chlorene (Blevins) Hedgpeth and grandchildren, John Frederick "Fred" Hedgpeth II, Laura Haseltine and

Daniel Franklin Hedgpeth spent their entire working lives right to the present in leadership of Ozark Bank.

More than a decade passed before another woman was elected to county-wide office.

In 1952, Grace B. (Caughron) Anderson 16 Sep 1913 - 24 Jun 2010 sought and won the position of County Treasurer. The third woman to hold the job, she was the daughter of another county treasurer and another of those rare Democrats in the courthouse. Born in Boaz to Rev. James Worth & Effie (Frazier) Caughron, she graduated from Clever High School and attended Draughton's Business College. She was employed by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and Farm Security Administration. In 1941, she married Charles Gratz Anderson 7 Mar 1906 – 4 Jun 1997. With her husband, she operated Anderson-Flood Hardware and raised a daughter Jeanne and son Jim. She also operated the License Bureau in Ozark. After retirement, she volunteered for more than six years at St. John's Hospital Auxiliary and Gift Shop. She was vice-chair of the Christian County Democrat Central Committee; for fifteen years chair of the Christian County Memorial Gift Fund of the American Cancer Society; was on the board of the Christian County Public Welfare Board; and for more than 60 years, she was a member of the Ozark Study Club and Eastern Star. An active member of First Baptist Church, Ozark, for most of her life. She joined Second Baptist, Springfield upon moving to Springfield in 1995. She and Gratz are buried at Selmore Cemetery.

Many women have served Christian County in many capacities in the past forty years. But these six – or seven – women were the first to be counted as county officials, and their stories deserve to be told.