

# A Celebration of Oklahoma

# Women's History Month

## Civil & Women's Rights by R. Darcy and Jennifer Paustenbaugh

During the Twentieth Century struggles with Women's Suffrage, Civil Rights and Women's Rights, Oklahoma women were there, making a powerful impact.

### Women's Suffrage

**Aloysius Larch-Miller** of Shawnee was Oklahoma's leading suffragette. Oklahoma women achieved full voting rights in 1918 but, in 1920, faced the challenge of ratifying the 19th Amendment, which would give voting rights to women in all the states. After rising from her sick bed to speak for ratification at the Pottawatomie Democratic County Convention, she caught pneumonia and died.

### Civil Rights

In 1958, Oklahoma City eating establishments were segregated. African-Americans could not eat with whites. A teacher, **Clara Luper**, with her students from the segregated public schools, began a series of sit-ins. On August 19, 1958, they began the nation's first, nationally publicized lunch counter sit-in at Katz's Drug Store. It was rough, but after two days the Katz chain integrated its 38 stores. Others followed, and by 1961, people from all over the nation were marching with Clara Luper and her students. Finally, they won. Clara Luper then turned to white-only churches and fair housing. She is considered the "Mother of the Oklahoma Civil Rights Movement" for her tireless efforts.



Carolyn Whitener & Clara Luper

### Women's Rights

In 1972, state laws routinely discriminated between males and females, sometimes advantaging one sex, sometimes the other. Oklahoma had many such laws. One allowed a store to sell 3.2 beer to a male aged 21 and a female aged 18. **Carolyn Whitener**, an Oklahoma State University student and co-owner of a small convenience store, thought the law unfair and stupid. Along with fellow students Mark Walker and Curtis Craig she sued in Federal Court to overturn the law. **Ruth Bader Ginsburg**, who lived in Lawton in 1954-1955, joined Whitener's attorney, in bringing the case to the U.S. Supreme Court. On December 20, 1976, the Supreme Court struck down Oklahoma's law as unconstitutional. In doing so, it also struck down all such discrimination in state law. Through Carolyn Whitener's case, the Supreme Court designed the Equal Rights Amendment, an amendment to the Constitution which abolished discrimination based on sex.

### Activity:

Some undocumented immigrants are welcomed (Cuban, for example), some cannot be deported (Somali and North Korean, for example), some are quietly ignored (Irish, for example) and some are deported (Mexican, for example). What rights do you think undocumented immigrants should have? Why does the United States treat people differently depending on what nation they come from?



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