



Blazing a Legal Trail **ACROSS TEXAS**

“You don’t need to be loud. You just need to be commanding.”

—Rebecca Welton in *Ted Lasso*

AS WE CELEBRATE WOMEN’S HISTORY MONTH, it is essential to recognize the remarkable contributions made by Texas women attorneys. I am the ninth woman president of the State Bar of Texas, and for the first time in history, women hold its top four leadership roles. Kennon Lily Wooten is chair of the State Bar Board of Directors. Laura Pratt is president of the Texas Young Lawyers Association, and Ashley Hymel is chair of Texas Young Lawyers Association Board of Directors.

I want to thank those that came before us and paved the way such as Harriet Miers, the first woman president of the State Bar. She was president in 1992 to 1993, breaking the glass ceiling for those now in leadership. Not only did she blaze the trail in Texas, but she also took the national stage as White House counsel to President George W. Bush.

Hortense S. Ward was one of the first three women admitted to the bar in Texas. A Houston attorney, she was a tireless worker for women’s rights regarding retaining property rights in a marriage. In 1913, she led a campaign to pass a law enlarging a married woman’s rights regarding separate property. Another trailblazer, Louise Raggio, led the charge in the passage of the 1967 Marital Property Act, which became the Texas Family Code two years later.

In 1925, Ward headed up an all-woman Supreme Court of Texas that sat for just one case. It involved the Woodmen of the World, of which the Supreme Court’s male justices were members (as were nearly all male attorneys in the state). Thus, Gov. Pat M. Neff appointed three women attorneys to the court: Ward as chief justice, along with Ruth Brazzil and Hattie L. Henenberg.

While those posts were temporary, Sarah T. Hughes became the first female judge in Texas when Gov. James Allred appointed her in 1935. She was elected the following year and then six more times. President John F. Kennedy named her the first female federal district judge in Texas in 1961, and she administered the oath of office to Lyndon B. Johnson in the aftermath of Kennedy’s assassination.

In 1953, Charlye O. Farris became the first Black woman lawyer in Texas. She practiced in Wichita Falls. In 1954, she was elected as county judge pro tem and became one of the first Black judges in the South since Reconstruction.

Edna Cisneros Carroll was one of the first Hispanic women to be licensed as a Texas attorney. In 1956, she was elected county and district attorney in Willacy County, where she served for nearly 30 years.

Throughout history, these and many other trailblazers have shattered glass ceilings, challenged societal norms, and paved the way for future generations. Their dedication, resilience, and unwavering commitment to justice have left an indelible mark on the legal profession. They didn’t have to be loud; they were commanding.

CINDY TISDALE

President, 2023-2024
State Bar of Texas