

Hattie Wyatt Caraway: A widow known for her legacy

Hatti Wyatt Caraway never expected to be a leading legacy for Arkansas. Growing up on a farm near Bakerville, Tennessee and becoming a school teacher, she could never have anticipated what the future had in store for her. (“History, Art, and Archives”) Her beliefs about her career changed when an incident took place one day, changing her life and giving her a title that is now engraved in the state of Arkansas.

Hattie Wyatt Caraway lived a simple life. She helped her father who was both a farmer and a shopkeeper. She learned the alphabet before attending primary school and entering Dickson Normal College in Tennessee at the age of fourteen where she received her Bachelor's Degree in 1896. Her time at Dickson gave her the opportunity to meet Thaddeus Horatio Caraway – her fiancé. The couple was married in 1902 around the time Thaddeus got his law degree, while Hattie worked in a school. The Caraways settled in Jonesboro, Arkansas, where they had three sons. While Thaddeus earned a political role in his career, Hattie became a housewife and managed the things of her home. (“History, Art, and Archives”)

Thaddeus rose through the political ranks, winning the race to become an attorney in Arkansas in 1908. Thaddeus made a name for himself and won many titles throughout his political life. He was reelected in 1910, and because of his efforts as an attorney, it gave him the advantage to beat his opponent R. Bruce Macon in the Democratic party in 1912. However, since nobody participated in the Republican election, Thaddeus took this seat instead. In 1920, Thaddeus ran for Senate and won the election. He served on the Agriculture and Forestry Committee, the Education and Health Committee, the Judiciary Committee, and he helped with many projects and acts in Arkansas. He served at the house of representatives of Arkansas

from March 4, 1913, until March 3, 1921, and in 1920 became a Senate of Arkansas.

("Thaddeus Encyclopedia of Arkansas")

Thaddeus became an attorney and went on to be an Arkansas senate, making a reputation for himself as a leader in the political world. He did not, however, accomplish these feats alone; Hattie helped her husband from the sidelines. In 1920, when Thaddeus was running for Senate, Hattie became his campaign manager. She worked throughout his campaign, speaking on his behalf to reporters, and was credited for all of her work. ("Social Welfares VCU Libraries") When Thaddeus died unexpectedly due to a blood clot, Arkansas was in shock.

Being in a state of grief and confusion, Arkansas didn't know exactly what to do. Since Theaddeus Caraway didn't fully complete his full term as a U.S senate, they needed to find a replacement as quickly as possible. As a result, the governor of Arkansas, (Harvey Parnell), sought it would be best to appoint Caraway to complete her late husband's term. On November 13, 1931, Caraway was appointed to senate and was officially in office on December 8, 1931. She later was elected to be a senator on January 12, 1932, and continued to be reelected throughout her time. Her term as senator ended on January 2, 1945, when she was defeated by J. William Fulbright in 1944. ("Hattie Encyclopedia of Arkansas")

Caraway's election to office in 1932 was a groundbreaking step for women. No other woman ever before has been elected to become senator for the U.S; therefore, the fact that Caraway took on this full time position in the political world was of tremendous consequence. When she was running for the special election in 1932, people thought that she should be home taking care of her children. Receiving criticism for wanting to run in the election didn't seem to bother her at all. ("zocalo public square") Although receiving sexism and having a hard time to be elected, she wrote in her journal "have a wonderful time running for office". As long as Caraway followed her political aspirations and kept her dignity, she wouldn't let the hate comments get to her head. On May 10, Caraway shocked Arkansas and her male contenders

about her re-election, telling reporters “The time has passed when a woman should be placed in a position and kept there only while someone else is being groomed for the job.” Caraway fought for women's rights, and tested her own ability as to what she could do as a female senator. (“zocalo public square”)

Nicknamed “Silent Hattie,” Caraway only spoke fifteen times as senator. (“National Constitution Center”) Although this being the case, she was a strong political leader. She was a supporter of Roosevelt's New Deal legislation because she believed that everyone should be granted equal rights. The New Deal legislation was a method to get Americans out of the Great Depression. It consisted of programs to help Americans with financial troubles and to support those who needed help getting back on their feet when the stock market crashed in 1929. (“Library of Congress”) On May 25, 1938, Caraway stated, “My philosophy of legislation, and really on life, is to be broad-minded enough to consider human relationships and the well-being of all the people as worthy of consideration, to realize that all human beings are entitled to earn, so far as possible, their daily bread, and to try to prevent the exploitation of the underprivileged.” In the same year, Caraway and other senators joined a poll and voted against anti-poll tax and anti-lynching legislation. With that being said, she was the first woman to address the 19th amendment (the equal rights amendment) on the Senate floor. (“National Constitution Center”)

At this time, men were viewed as the “real candidates” because women were confined to the domestic roles of homemakers and caregivers. (“zocalo public square”) Although receiving backlash, Caraway pushed through the political landscape and became the first U.S senate to be **elected** rather than appointed. When she left the office in 1945, she left a legacy that will shape the future of our country.

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