

Madames Mayor: Susanna Madora Salter was the first woman ever elected mayor in any American city. The city was Argonia, Kansas a little Quaker village of less than 500. The year was 1887, the same year Kansas allowed women to vote. Some in Argonia deemed politics was the exclusive domain of men and resented the inclusion of women. A back-room caucus was convened and a scheme put in place to, "teach these women a lesson." But women leaned of the scheme navigated it as best they could and Salter won with two-thirds of the vote. She made Argonia famous and women proud, nationally and internationally.

Alice Kerr was the first woman to serve as mayor of Edmonds, WA having beaten the incumbent, whose victory had been a foregone conclusion in the 1924 election, with a final tally of 163-159. Kerr had moved from Chicago to Edmonds in 1920. At the time of her death in 1949, she was the first and only woman to have served as mayor of Edmonds.

Bertha Knight Landes became the first woman mayor of a major American city after her election as mayor of Seattle in 1926. Her campaign platform of "municipal housekeeping," aimed to clean up city government. Landes had not voted until just 6 years previous when passage of the 19th amendment to the Constitution allowed her to exercise her right to vote. In her 1928 bid for re-election, Landes received endorsements from all of Seattle's major newspapers, the Central Labor Council, the Prohibition Party, and women's organizations, but lost to a political male unknown. Landes attributed her defeat in great measure to "sex prejudice." Landes was the last female mayor of Seattle.

Unita Blackwell in 1976 became the first African American woman to be elected mayor in Mississippi. In 1964, Blackwell, a daughter of sharecroppers, and seven other blacks went to the Mayersville courthouse to register to vote and encountered vehement treatment by white farmers. The racism the group experienced that day was the turning point" of Blackwell's life and she began organizing voter drives across Mississippi. She joined Fannie Lou Hamer's delegation at the 1964 Democratic National Convention in an attempt to get blacks seated as delegates. In the late 1960s she worked with the National Council of Negro Women and was jailed over 70 times. As mayor, Blackwell became a voice for rural housing and development. She oversaw the construction of federal public housing, the first to be built in Issaquena County. In 1982 at age 49, Blackwell received a master's degree in Regional Planning.

Diane Feinstein as president of the Board of Supervisors of San Francisco succeeded to the city's mayoralty in 1978, when Dan White assassinated San Francisco Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk at city hall. Feinstein was elected in her own right in 1979 and re-elected to a second full term in 1983. Feinstein, a centrist, angered the city's large gay community by refusing to march in a gay rights parade and by vetoing domestic partner legislation in 1983. In 1984, Feinstein proposed banning handguns in San Francisco and became subject to a recall attempt. She won the recall election and completed her second mayoral term. In 1987, *City and State* magazine named Feinstein the nation's "Most Effective Mayor."

Jane Margaret Byrne in 1979 became the first and to date the only female mayor of the largest city in the United States to have had a female mayor, Chicago. As mayor, Byrne hired the first black school superintendent and moved into the crime-ridden public housing development of Cabrini-Green for a short but highly publicized period to bring attention and resources to the high crime rate there. Cabrini-Green was permanently shuttered and scheduled for demolition in 2010. Byrne was the first Chicago mayor to recognize the gay community and she effectively banned handgun possession for guns unregistered or purchased after the enactment of an ordinance. On July 4, 1980, mayor Byrne blocked off Michigan Avenue for the first Taste of Chicago. Taste moved to Grant Park the next year and every year hence.

Jessie Menifield Rattley was the first woman to be elected mayor of Newport News, Virginia in 1986. Her previous 1970 election as the first African American elected to the Newport News City Council was a major turning point in the civil rights movement for residents of the city's Southeast community (mostly African Americans) who witnessed funding for their schools and city services increased. During her tenure as mayor she received some criticism from residents due to her controversial plan to expand HUD and federally subsidized low-income housing into what was the more upscale sections of the city. Still, in 2005, the Newport News City Hall and the government buildings immediately surrounding it were rededicated the Jessie Menifield Rattley Municipal Center in her honor.

Carrie Saxon Perry, elected mayor of Hartford, CT, in 1987, was the first black woman to head a large U.S. city. Political parity has always been the focus and the force of Perry's political career. She believes in political parity at all levels of government to provide a voice for blacks and women.

This sampling of women mayors elected in the one hundred years from 1887 to 1987 represents a century, plus a quarter century more post 1987, of political progress past with political parity still futuristic.

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