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Nellie Ross

Lead: In 1924 Wyoming became the first state to elect a woman to the office of Governor. Nellie Tayloe Ross served for two years and went on to distinguished national service.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: With the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution in August 1920, the right to vote became a national right for women. The question remained whether women, now able to vote, would also attain full parity in political participation. When would

women be elected to local office or congress in numbers comparable to their percentage in the population? The answer was not too soon. Decades would pass before women would step forward to assume a leadership role anything close to that of men in commerce, social life and politics. Progress was slow. One exception was Nellie Ross.

Nellie Tayloe grew up in St. Joseph, Missouri and Omaha, Nebraska where she attended public and private schools. She did not go to college, although some accounts indicate that she went to a training school for kindergarten teachers and then briefly taught at that level prior to her marriage to William Bradford

Ross in 1902. The couple moved to Cheyenne, Wyoming where he established a successful legal practice and served as county attorney.

In 1922 Ross ran for Governor as a Democrat and in a Republican state won by 723 votes. After his untimely death following surgery two years later, party leaders asked Nellie to run for the open seat. She won in a landslide and became the first woman inaugurated Governor in United States history, just preceding Ma (Miriam Amanda Wallace) Ferguson of Texas.

After losing a close re-election bid in 1926 Ross served as vice-Chairman of the Democratic National

Committee and was appointed in 1933 by FDR the first woman Director of the Mint. She served for twenty years, earning acclaim as an efficient administrator, negotiating wartime currency stresses, building new mints in Denver and San Francisco and gold depositories at West Point and Fort Knox, Kentucky. Nellie Ross lived until 1977 and saw 101 years of change in the status of women.

Research assistance by Mary Brydon, at the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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