

## Justice Ginsburg to be Honored at NAWL Annual Meeting

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L-R] NAWL President-Elect Ellen Pansky and President Liz Bransdorfer flank the midyear meeting honorees: NAWL member Stephanie Scharf Judge Margerie O. Rendell, 3rd Circuit Court

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**A View from the Bench -  
*How tough women lawyers  
lose a "natural" advantage***



Justice Sandra Day O'Connor (right) and Planning Committee member Selma Moidel Smith

# *Honoring California's*

## *First Woman*

### *Lawyer:*

# Clara Shortridge Foltz

by Selma Moidel Smith

On February 8, 2002, the women lawyers' event of the year—if not the decade—took place in Los Angeles. Seven hundred men and women of the bench and bar gathered for a gala luncheon to celebrate the renaming of the Criminal Courts Building in honor of California's first woman lawyer, Clara Shortridge Foltz.

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman member of the Supreme Court of the United States, headed the list of speakers who presented a lively tribute to Foltz and also to leading women lawyers of today.

Speaking first were leaders of the sponsoring bar associations. Roland Coleman, president of the L.A. County Bar Association, welcomed the large audience, and Assistant U.S. Attorney Miriam Aroni Krinsky, president-elect, introduced the special guests. Melissa Widdifield, president of the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles, presented the woman lawyer who had made the day's events possible, County Supervisor Yvonne Brathwaite Burke. She related that Burke had won the Board's unanimous approval for renaming the courthouse in honor of Foltz.

Supervisor Burke gave further honor to women lawyers by recognizing a distinguished group of "firsts" who were present at the luncheon. Turning to the Honorees named in the printed program, she described each woman's unique "first" in practice, the judiciary, government, academia or the organized bar.

Central to the day's events were the two keynote speakers who concluded the luncheon program and then opened the renaming ceremony at the nearby courthouse.

Ronald M. George, Chief Justice of California,

recounted Foltz's struggles to become a lawyer, saying, "She was truly a woman of courage, dedication and foresight who viewed the profession that she expended so much effort to become a part of as a means of serving the public." He then introduced Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

Justice O'Connor recalled Foltz's courage and determination in overcoming prejudice. "When she saw a wrong, she worked to correct it." She praised Foltz for opening the doors for all the women lawyers who followed her. (See listing of achievements in sidebar.) "This is the single most appropriate name that could be put on this building," she said.

The modern building now known as the Clara Shortridge Foltz Criminal Justice Center stands on the site of the courthouse where Foltz once worked as the county's first woman deputy district attorney. It houses the nation's largest district attorney's office and public

### Highlights of Foltz's Career (1849-1934)

- First woman lawyer in California (after writing and promoting the bill to remove "white male" restriction from the law)
- First woman student at Hastings College of Law (after suing to gain admission)
- First woman lawyer to appear before California Supreme Court
- First woman to prosecute a murder case in California
- First woman to serve as a deputy district attorney in L.A. County
- First woman notary public in California (after drafting the law to permit women notaries public)
- First woman appointed to the State Board of Charities and Corrections
- First nationwide promoter of public defender idea—author of model bill adopted by majority of states, after which the nation's first public defender's office was opened in Los Angeles
- Author of California's first parole law
- Promoter of humane penal laws—forced removal of iron cages for prisoners in San Francisco courts
- Secured passage of California law permitting married women to serve as executors and administrators
- Secured passage of California constitutional amendment permitting women to engage in any lawful career
- Suffrage leader, chosen for first place on the California Honor Roll of the League of Women Voters

defender's office. The renaming is a tribute to this pioneering woman prosecutor who was also known as the "Mother of the Public Defender Movement."

Appropriately, the county officials who spoke at the courthouse ceremony included Presiding Judge James A. Bascue of the Los Angeles Superior Court, District Attorney Steve Cooley and Public Defender Michael P. Judge. Cooley's memorable salute was, "Welcome back, Clara. Thank you for inspiring us all."

One of those so inspired was Arthur Alarcon, Senior Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, who was an early promoter of the renaming. It was Alarcon who invited Justice O'Connor to speak at the day's events, and who conceived the idea of honoring "firsts" among present-day women lawyers. Judge Alarcon introduced Stanford Law Professor Barbara Allen Babcock to make a special presentation.

Professor Babcock was the first woman director of the Public Defender's Office in the District of Columbia. She is currently writing a biography of Foltz, due for publication in 2003. She related highlights of Foltz's life. "In 1878, when Clara Foltz became the first woman admitted to the California Bar, she was an obscure housewife in San Jose, deserted by her husband, determined to find a way to support her five young children. When she died in 1934, she was the famous First Woman Lawyer..." Babcock turned to the portrait of Foltz that was on display during the proceedings and announced that it was her gift to the County of Los Angeles. The portrait will hang in the newly-renamed building (see photo).

Present among the guests were a number of Foltz's descendants, including her great-grandson, Truman Toland, who painted the portrait in 1992. (He commented in private conversation that not even her family knew the full extent of her achievements). The family members were recognized and asked to stand by Supervisor Burke as part of her concluding remarks. Smiling warmly, Justice O'Connor noted that a young girl in the family had been omitted and Burke presented her as well. Then, with words of praise for all the participants, Burke brought the day's historic events to a close.

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We should also note that Foltz was an active member of the National Association of Women Lawyers, having joined in 1914. She chaired the committee on Jurisprudence and Law Reform in 1926. She was unani-



mously elected Vice President for California, serving from 1927 to 1930. She was appointed to represent NAWL at the 1928 annual meeting of the American Bar Association, but was prevented from attending by the illness of her brother, U.S. Sen. Samuel Shortridge. She served as a member of NAWL's Executive Committee in 1930-31, and of its Advisory Committee from 1931 until her death in 1934.

The regard in which she was held may be seen in the names of those who served as her honorary pallbearers. They included Gov. Frank Merriam, California Chief Justice William Waste and five associate justices, four federal judges, prominent lawyers, and four leading women judges—Ida May Adams, Georgia Bullock, Oda Faulconer and Orfa Jean Shontz, all of whom were members of NAWL.

And yet to come: As a celebration of Foltz's life and work, the Los Angeles Superior Court and the County of Los Angeles have commissioned a work of commemorative art to be displayed at the Foltz Criminal Justice Center. The County Arts Commission is serving as artistic advisor. At this writing, three artists have been chosen as finalists and are scheduled to tour the site and gather more information about our subject. When the new work of art is installed, the rededication of the courthouse in honor of this extraordinary woman lawyer will be complete.