

Rock Hill native was state's first female lawyer

In 1890, William Blackburn Wilson II, a Rock Hill lawyer of prominence, boarded a train for California. With him were his wife, sister-in-law, seven children and a nanny. The family went as far as Oakland, Calif.

"Black" Wilson was entranced by the wide streets and beauty of Oakland.

When he returned, he formed The Land and Town Site Co. to develop Rock Hill's first suburb, Oakland. The Oakland site played a prominent role in Rock Hill acquiring Winthrop College.

The Wilsons had six daughters.

**Louise
Pettus**



NEARBY
HISTORY

Four of them graduated from Winthrop.

According to a family history, Black Wilson talked with his daughter Fanny about her career. They agreed that Fanny had too soft a voice to become a classroom

teacher and that she had little aptitude or interest in the domestic or industrial arts.

Fanny graduated from Winthrop and then entered the University of Pennsylvania Law School.

Fanny Wilson was admitted to the Pennsylvania bar in 1903, 15 years before South Carolina's progressive governor, Richard I. Manning, managed to get through legislation allowing women to practice law in South Carolina.

Fanny came back to Rock Hill and joined the law office of her father and brother, W. Blackburn Wilson III, from 1903 to 1920.

Although she was not permitted to appear in court, Fanny did everything else a lawyer did - interviewed clients, prepared papers, abstracted titles, wrote briefs, etc. She is believed to have been the first woman in South Carolina to work in a law office on this level.

She took a leave of absence in 1907-08 to work on a book known as Scott and Beaman's Digest of

Federal Statutes. During World War I, she worked for the U. S. Employment Service in Columbia.

After her father's death in 1920, Fanny worked for three years as law clerk and secretary to Judge Charles A. Woods of Marion, S.C. Woods headed the 4th U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals

In 1934 Fanny went to Washington and worked for the Claims Division of the Justice Department, reviewing the work of attorneys in the field.

Fanny's mother joined her in an apartment next to the National Zoo. Fanny loved Washington society. She was frequently seen at cultural events and was active in the University Women's Club and the National Democratic Women's Club.

When various ones of her 36 nieces and nephews visited their aunt and grandmother in Washington, Fanny saw to it that they visited the public buildings and enjoyed the life of the city. She arranged employment for them, including several nieces who became Washington lawyers.

Fanny was known about Washington for her intelligence and high energy level.

She was allowed to set her own work hours and was said to never appear at Justice until 11 a.m. But, if need be, she would work late into the night. Her work was always completed and done well.

She retired at 72 and went to live with her brother in Statesburg, S.C. Life on a farm was too calm for the energetic Fanny. She soon moved to McLean, Va., where her niece Minerva Wilson Andrews and husband lived.

Fanny Wilson, described as one who was "endowed with a keen mind, an iron constitution, a zest for living, a sense of humor and an intense interest in people," died in November 1974 at age 94, and is buried in Ebenezer Cemetery, Rock Hill.

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