

The First 50 Women in Idaho Law

CLARA LOUISE KEEFER BLACKBIRD

February 12, 1940
(1895 – 1974)



Clara Louise Keefer Blackbird (known as “Louise”) was born on December 6, 1895, in Idaho Falls to Eldora V. and William Walker Keefer. Her father moved to Eagle Rock (later Idaho Falls) in 1880 from Omaha as a contractor for the Utah and Northern railroad and became one of Idaho Falls’ pioneer residents, helping to literally build the town. For instance, in 1890, the Village Board hired W. W. Keefer to build masonry piers alongside of the Taylor Bridge for a steel bridge replacement (the steel bridge was in place until 1907 when it was dismantled and taken to Woodville for use there, but the abutments are still visible today) and in 1895 he was awarded the first contract for sidewalk, street and alley crossings. Clara had three brothers, Fred, Frank and Clyde, and two sisters, Ruby and Irene. Fred had a cabin on a small island in the Snake River in the middle of Idaho Falls, which is now known as “Keefer Island.” Today, the Bonneville Museum has a display called “Fred Keefer’s room” which contains a number of artifacts from his estate.

Blackbird attended school in Idaho Falls, graduating from Idaho Falls High School in 1914. After high school, Blackbird took business courses at Gem State Business College in Idaho Falls from 1915-16, and then worked for a year at the L.O. Naylor Company, an automobile company. Thereafter, Blackbird moved to Salt Lake City, Utah and worked for Utah Power & Light Company for about nine months, before returning to Idaho Falls to work at the Sims Company.

Like many of the early women attorneys in Idaho, Blackbird did not attend law school. Instead, she studied law while working as a secretary for Idaho Falls attorney Otto E. McCutcheon, long time counsel for irrigation interests in the area. She began work in McCutcheon’s office in 1921 as a stenographer and immediately became assistant secretary and treasurer of the Progressive Irrigation District in Bonneville County, a long time client of McCutcheon’s. In 1926, she asked McCutcheon about studying the law under his direction, but did not begin until 1933.

On February 12, 1940, Blackbird’s studies paid off and she was admitted as the twelfth woman to practice law in Idaho. She practiced out of her office in the Salisbury Building in downtown Idaho Falls, several doors down from senior Idaho Falls attorney Ed Pike, who reports:

Louise had a restrictive practice, mostly dealing with divorces, adoption, children and family law, and she referred a number of cases and clients to me, as long as she continued to practice. She would take the time to write me a factual summary, and her idea of the legal area involved to assist me in my endeavor of representing people she sent to me. All of this was of great help to me as a practicing attorney.

Like Mary Smith Oldham (no. 10 on this list), Blackbird married relatively late in life at the age of 59. In March 1954, Blackbird married Jack Blackbird.

Blackbird was active in the Idaho Falls community, serving as a member the Soroptimist Club, Lily Rebekah Lodge No. 33 (a sisterhood established in 1897 to support youth in the community), the American Legion Auxiliary, where, in 1934, it was reported that she “has for four years served as district secretary,” and as one of the founders of the Idaho Falls Humane Society. Blackbird was also active in the First Baptist Church in Idaho Falls, working as its church clerk for many years.

Blackbird died on December 23, 1974, in Idaho Falls at the age of 79.