

## The First 50 Women in Idaho Law

### BERNICE BACHARACH

September 22, 1942



**Bernice Bacharach** was born in Cheney, Washington, on November 29, 1918, as the sixth of seven children of Selig “Sam” Bacharach and Florence Smith Bacharach. The family moved to Lewiston, Idaho and Bernice attended school there, graduating from Lewiston High School in 1936.

In the fall of 1936 Bacharach entered the University of Idaho majoring in law. She was always interested in economics and political science, and was also a fine athlete who played basketball and tennis. In 1939, she entered law school at Idaho. And, in 1942, she became the third woman to graduate with a law degree from the University of Idaho College of Law.

On September 22, 1942, Bacharach was admitted as the fifteenth woman to practice law in Idaho and immediately went to work as a clerk for Idaho Supreme Court Chief Justice Edwin Holden. When her clerkship ended in 1943, Bacharach decided to return to Washington and took a position as the Deputy Supervisor of the Inheritance Tax Division of the Washington State Tax Commission in Olympia. Her admission to the Washington State Bar, however, was and is unique. Bacharach took the Washington bar exam twice, passing both times. Her first testing was ruled invalid because she had not been a resident of Washington for the requisite six months. She is the only person to pass the Washington bar exam twice, finally being admitted on August 15, 1944.

In 1945, Bacharach moved to Wenatchee, Washington, to serve as the Deputy Prosecuting Attorney for Chelan County with a starting salary of \$187.50 per month. In this position she developed her skills as a trial lawyer and began a private law practice in Wenatchee that continued for nearly forty years. For most of those years she was the only woman lawyer within a one hundred mile radius. In 1949, Bacharach left the prosecutor’s office for full-time private practice. She did a lot of criminal defense work and was known as a great cross-examiner. In fact, she claims that she won more cases on cross than on direct. In her view lawyers today over prepare for trial. She would speak extemporaneously. Bacharach’s major clients included fruit companies and other business people in the Wenatchee area.

Bacharach was sought after as legal counsel and handled the full array of private law practice matters including, real estate, wills and probate, contracts, family law, civil litigation, and criminal practice. Even so, she always maintained a portion of her law practice as pro bono. Near the end of her career Bacharach served as defense counsel in one of the most famous criminal cases ever tried in Wenatchee, the *State of Washington v. James E. Eyre*. Eyre was the treasurer of a prominent Christian church founded by a charismatic preacher named Larry Titus. Titus’ church, Bethesda Christian Center, ran into serious financial difficulties involving millions of dollars. At Titus’ urging, Eyre was charged with 12 counts of theft and one count of unlawful issuance of a check in connection with misappropriation of church funds. In a jury trial that

lasted several weeks and involved dozens of witnesses, including Titus and Eyre, Bacharach succeeded in convincing the jury to acquit Eyre of all charges.

Bacharach has served her profession and her community in a variety of capacities including as President of the Chelan-Douglas Counties Bar Association and as a Director of the Salvation Army Board. She was active with Catholic Charities and the American Association of University Women. While she never had any children of her own, she often served as a foster parent to children in distressed circumstances. In recognition of her contributions to our legal system, the University of Idaho College of Law presented Bacharach with its Award of Legal Merit in 1997.

In addition to her successful law practice, Bacharach also operated her own commercial fruit orchard and was a successful investor in real estate and other property. She has been an active outdoorswoman all her adult life who hunted, fished and played golf and she was also a competitive bridge player. For many years Bacharach has kept lake front property on Lake Chelan. Several times she raced her Chris-Craft runabout in the hundred-mile boat race from the town of Lake Chelan to the town of Stehekin and back again, finishing first or second in the race on at least five occasions. Bacharach also loves to travel. She has visited Mexico, Germany, Belgium, England, Russia, Austria, Turkey, the Balkans, Ukraine, Japan, China, and the Philippines among others.

Despite hip and knee injuries and a serious bout with Crohn's disease, Bacharach has lived on her own into her mid-eighties and continues to oversee her investments and real properties. Her friend and former University of Idaho law dean, Jack Miller, had the following remarks to offer concerning Bacharach:

Bernice has a clear sighted and fearless intelligence that is apparent in all aspects of her life. I think it is the key to her remarkable success as a lawyer. More than anyone I have ever known, she knows how to face facts and address any situation in a competent realistic manner. She is an eminently practical person who enjoys helping others but who also understands that the best things in life are those things one achieves for oneself. Bernice is a person of the soil. She enjoys working in the earth with her own hands rather than merely supervising others. She planted, watered, pruned, and harvested her pear orchard herself. She built the deck on her Lake Chelan cabin. She always has an array of tools on hand to rival that of a professional builder. She likes building things, seeing things grow, and making things happen.

Bacharach currently lives in Wenatchee, Washington and holds the distinction of the most senior surviving Idaho woman attorney.