

The First 50 Women in Idaho Law

KATHRYN CLAIRE JUSTUS DRONG AHRENS

June 3, 1949
(1913 – 1994)



Kathryn Claire Justus Drong Ahrens (known as “Claire”) was born on November 8, 1913 in Lead Hill, Arkansas, to James Oce and Ina Pearl Justus. Her father was a bookkeeper and her mother was a teacher.

Ahrens lived and went to school in Arkansas until 1922, when her family moved to Seattle, Washington. The family stayed in Washington until 1927, when they briefly returned to Arkansas, before Ahrens returned to Seattle to attend Broadway High School from 1928-1932. Upon graduation, Ahrens went to work as a saleswoman at the Bon Marche in downtown Seattle.

On June 17, 1939, Ahrens married Frank Joseph Drong in Colfax, Washington and together they had a daughter, Jane Drong (Gallucci). The couple moved to Pullman, Washington, where Ahrens worked as a saleswoman for retailer Wymax Cox until 1938.

In 1939, the family moved to Moscow, Idaho. Ahrens attended the University of Idaho from 1940-42, and earned her Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of Idaho College of Law in 1945. During her last year of law school, Ahrens’ husband was sent to Seattle to do “war work on the coast temporarily.” Thus, when Ahrens graduated law school, she applied for the Idaho Bar but did not immediately sit for it. Instead, she chose to move to Seattle to join her husband and go to work as a law clerk for a woman attorney, Bernice Johnson. In 1946, she applied for admission to the Washington bar, but did not pass, as she later described it, because she “did not apply Washington law specifically.”

By 1947, with the war ended, Ahrens and her husband were ready to return to Idaho and moved to Lewiston. Ahrens’ husband started the Credit Adjustment Company, a credit rating bureau and collection agency, in Lewiston, and Ahrens worked in his office. On June 3, 1949, Ahrens was admitted as the twenty-first woman to practice law in Idaho. She practiced law in Lewiston from 1949 to 1962 and upon the death of her husband; Ahrens took over management of his credit bureaus.

Years later, Ahrens married Frederick J. Ahrens. In 1989, Ahrens retired and moved to Eatonville, Washington, where most of her family lived.

Ahrens died at the age of 80 on February 22, 1994, in Eatonville, Washington.