1999

Memorial: Elizabeth Roe Wilkins (1915-1999)

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Recommended Citation
Viola A. Bird, Memorial: Elizabeth Roe Wilkins (1915-1999), 91 LAW LIBR. J. 647 (1999), https://digitalcommons.law.uw.edu/librarians-articles/31
Memorial: Elizabeth Roe Wilkins
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Betty Wilkins’s recent death brought great shock and deep sorrow to her family, the University of Washington Law Library, and to her wide circle of friends. She passed away quietly on April 26, 1999, at her home in Redmond, Washington, with her family present.

Betty was born in Montana and attended the University of Montana for her undergraduate years. Wishing so much to leave Montana, this beautiful young co-ed rode a motorcycle to Seattle to enter the University of Washington Law School. She was one of 17 in the graduating class of 1938 and was admitted to the Washington State Bar in 1939, the only woman along with 14 men. Later Betty worked at the University of Washington Law Library while attending the University’s library school. She was one of the first two graduates of the University of Washington Law Librarianship program, receiving her degree in 1940.1

In 1939 she married a member of her law school graduating class, Les Wilkins, and together they raised three daughters. It was a marriage that lasted more than 60 years. Betty practiced law from 1957 until 1965 when Marian Gallagher convinced her that the University of Washington Law Library Technical Services Department needed her. She filled that position as assistant law librarian until 1973 when she became associate librarian in the library’s Reader Services Department. In 1982, when Bob Berring resigned as the law librarian, Betty was appointed to fill the vacancy. She held that position until her retirement in 1985 when she was named law librarian and professor emeritus of law.

Betty made significant contributions to the profession of law librarianship and to the American Association of Law Libraries. During her 20 years of service, she edited the Current Comments column of the Law Library Journal and Current Publications in Legal and Related Fields (a standard selection tool), and served as chair of AALL’s Publications and Joseph Andrews Bibliographic Award committees. Members of AALL who attended the 1973 Annual Meeting in Seattle will remember the superior job Betty did as local arrangements chair, including “engineering” the magnificent evening on Puget Sound.

The world and all who were touched by Betty were enriched. There will ever be just one Betty Wilkins.—Viola A. Bird2

1. See Interview with Betty Wilkins, in MARIAN GOULD GALLAGHER LAW LIBRARY: AN ORAL HISTORY 213, 215–17 (Mary Ann Andersen ed., 1988). The other graduate was Dr. Edgar Bodenheimer who held a German law degree. Id. at 215.
