



Gladys Pyle

Dakota Images

Gladys Pyle, often described as the "Grand Old Lady of the Republican Party," was born 4 October 1890 in Huron, South Dakota, the youngest of John and Mamie Pyle's four children. After graduating from Huron College in 1911, she attended the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago and taught Latin for eight years in the Miller, Huron, and Wessington high schools. Beginning in 1920, she taught citizenship at South Dakota teachers' institutes and lectured for the League of Women Voters. Crediting her Quaker ancestors for her devotion to humanitarian causes, she volunteered as a nurse during the 1918 influenza epidemic, lived in a claim shanty in Butte County in 1920 to care for her sick sister-in-law, and cared for her mother until the latter's death in 1949.

Pyle entered politics in 1922, when she was elected to the South Dakota House of Representatives. In 1926, she won election to the office of secretary of state, in which she served two terms. She sought her party's nomination for governor in 1930 but narrowly lost to Warren Green, who later appointed her to serve as secretary of the State Securities Commission. In 1938, following the death of Peter Norbeck, she won a short term in the United States Senate, becoming the first South Dakota woman to do so. As a delegate to the National Republican Convention in 1940, Pyle became the first woman to nominate a presidential candidate. In that same year, she made an unsuccessful bid for the office of mayor in Huron. She served on the State Board of Charities and Corrections from 1941 to 1955 and in 1947 was foreman of the first jury in South Dakota on which women were permitted to serve. A long-time insurance agent, she was also a guardian for two orphaned boys and managed a 640-acre farm near Huron.

A pioneer in education, politics, civic responsibility, and business, Pyle attained many "firsts" and received many honors and awards. She was a lifelong resident of Huron and lived in the home her father had built in 1893, which is now on the National Register of Historic Places. Gladys Pyle died on 14 March 1989.

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