

Imogene “Jean” Evelyn Young Ford

At A Glance:

Born: December 28, 1929, Miami,
Oklahoma (raised in Joplin, Missouri)

Died: August 26, 1998, Carson City, Nevada

Maiden Name: Imogene Evelyn Young

Race/Nationality/Ethnic Background:
Caucasian

Married: Sam Ford, April 5, 1955; divorced
1977.

Children: Janet Lynn and Carla Marie.

**Primary City and County of Residence
and Work:**

Clark County, Las Vegas; Washoe
County, Reno; Carson City.

Major Fields of Work: Community Activism, Government (legislator), Business (tour
travel), Education, Research and Preservation (Nevada Women’s History
Project).

Other Role Identities: Mentor, Role model



Jean Ford, 1978
NWHP Photo Collection

NWHP founder promoted women’s interests as legislator, organizer

Jean Ford was a wife, mother, and homemaker when she arrived in Nevada without fanfare in 1962. Raised to fill a traditional woman’s role, Jean expected nothing more than to find a home where her husband could work as a dermatologist, her daughters could attend school, and she could enjoy a community of friends and neighbors. Fortunately for Nevada, Jean adopted her new state with open arms. First, she explored it from the Strip in Las Vegas to the backroads of ghost towns, ranches, mines, and wilderness areas.

She camped and hiked with her family, and she grew to love everything about Nevada from its scenic desert vistas to its wildflowers.

Next Jean became involved. In discovering Nevada, she saw things that needed to be improved, so she volunteered to help with projects such as preserving Red Rock Canyon as a park and creating the Clark County Library. From volunteer and citizen activist, Jean quickly moved into the Nevada legislature, serving first in the Nevada State Assembly (R-Clark, 1972-1976) and then in the Nevada State Senate (D-Clark, 1978-1982). (Between those two legislative terms, she earned a master's degree in public administration from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.) Improving the legislative system intrigued Jean, and she fought for openness in government. She supported the Equal Rights Amendment, and after that was defeated, she helped introduce a variety of bills to eliminate discrimination based on sex and to create services for women. Those were just a few of the issues she addressed while serving in the legislature, and her interest in Nevada did not end with her final senate term.

Following her days in the legislature, Jean continued traveling throughout the state and serving Nevada in many capacities from public servant and private entrepreneur to educator. Her list of accomplishments includes:

- Director of community relations for the Clark County Library, 1979-1980
- Owner of a consulting business and co-owner of Nevada Discovery Tours, 1981-1986
- Appointed by Governor Richard Bryan to the first Nevada Commission on Tourism and Economic Development in 1983
- Director of Nevada Office of Community Services, 1985-1989.

In 1991 Jean temporarily filled the position of Director of the Women's Studies Program at the University of Nevada, Reno. When she discovered a lack of information on Nevada women, Jean proposed a statewide campaign to create the Nevada Women's Archives, at the Special Collections Department of the University of Nevada, Reno library. She completed [*Nevada Women's History: A Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in Nevada Repositories*](#) before she died.

Members of the Nevada Women's History Project completed the second book, [*Women in Nevada History: An Annotated Bibliography of Published Sources*](#) in 2000. It now has a second edition in 2018.

Through this work, she became immersed in recovering Nevada women's history, and she discovered many with like interests. By February 1996, Jean had co-founded the Nevada Women's History Project (NWHP), a private, non-profit organization under the umbrella of the Nevada Women's Fund. NWHP was designed to gather and disseminate information about the roles, accomplishments, and activities of Nevada women from every race, class, and ethnic background who contributed to shaping the state's destiny.

Jean started her life in Nevada as a wife, mother, and homemaker. Over the years she expanded her roles to include citizen activist, legislator, businesswoman, public figure, educator, mentor, and role model. Her oral history recounts her developing leadership skills and is part of her legacy to Nevada. It is available at the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) in Reno, the University libraries in Reno and Las Vegas, and in all Nevada libraries.

There is a memorial stone at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Northern Nevada in Reno, Nevada.



Biographical sketch by Victoria Ford.

Updated in 2023.

Sources of Information:

Jean Ford: A Nevada Woman Leads the Way (University of Nevada Oral History Program, Reno, Nevada, 1998)