

**FRY, HAMILTON,  
SHIPLEY,  
RINGOLD, MISH  
1977 to 2018**



**POET  
LAUREATES  
FROM 1970s  
AND BEYOND**

Oklahoma's poet laureates are representative of the state's population and culture. A law from 1994 specifies that the governor's nomination serves for two-year terms beginning in odd-numbered years. Nominees must have a published body of work that includes at least one original book. Since 1977, the poet laureates have included Maggie Fry, Carol Hamilton, Betty Shipley, Francine Ringold and Jeanetta Mish.

**Maggie Ann Culver Fry** (1977-95), tenth poet laureate, was appointed in 1977 by Governor David Boren. Born in Vian in 1900, Fry wrote her first poem at age ten. Her maternal grandfather George Deerskin Waters traveled the Trail of Tears and was a member of the Cherokee Senate. She published over 800 articles, stories, and poems, many attracting national attention. Her second book of poetry, *The Umbilical Cord* (1971), was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.

Though interested in writing since childhood, Fry didn't pursue a writing career until after World War II. Although Fry lacked a high school education, she nevertheless published three books of poetry, along with fiction and magazine articles. In 1954 she published her first book of poetry "The Witch Deer". Fry's writings reflected pride in her Cherokee heritage. She died in 1998.

**Carol Jean Hamilton** (1995-97), eleventh poet laureate, was born in 1935 in Enid, earning a bachelor's degree from Phillips University in 1956 and a master's from the University of Central Oklahoma. She taught at Midwest Del City Schools, Rose State College, and the University of Central Oklahoma. Her book, *Once the Dust*, was a 1992 Oklahoma Book Award winner. She was nominated five times for a Pushcart Prize. Hamilton helped found the Woody Guthrie Poets in 2004.

**Betty Lou Shipley** (1997-98), twelfth poet laureate, was born in 1931 in Edmond and grew up in Duncan. She earned a bachelor's degree in secondary education from the University of Central Oklahoma and a master's in creative studies from the University of Oklahoma. Along with authoring three poetry books, she was the poetry editor for *Byline Magazine* and operated a small press promoting new talent called *Bronco Press*. After her 1997 appointment by Governor Frank Keating, Shipley's book of poetry, *Someone Say Amen*, was awarded the 1998 Oklahoma Book Award. Her editor accepted the award for her as she was dying as the award was announced.

**Francine Leffler Johnson Ringold** (2003-07), fifteenth poet laureate, was born in 1934 in New York City. In 1966 she became editor of *Nimrod*, the University of Tulsa's literary magazine, where she earned her Ph.D. and taught literature and theatre for 47 years. Ringold served two terms as poet laureate. She also was the 2003 winner of the "Writer Who Makes a Difference Award" from *The Writer Magazine*. Ringold also taught at the Oklahoma School for the Deaf, Tulsa Center for the Physically Challenged, and Gatesway Foundation for Persons with Developmental Disabilities.

**Jeanetta Calhoun Mish** (2017-18), twenty-first poet laureate, was born in 1961 in Hobart and earned a bachelors and masters of Fine Arts in English at the University of Texas – Permian Basin, and a Ph.D. in English at the University of Oklahoma in 2009. She teaches creative writing at Oklahoma City University and is the editor of *Mongrel Empire Press* in Norman. Her books include "What I Learned at the War" (2015) and "Work Is Love Made Visible" (2009), winner of the 2010 Oklahoma Book Award for Poetry. In 2019, she was named an Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellow.

Like many other writers, Mish believes that to be a good writer, you must be a good reader. That is why her students read literature that struggles with ethical dilemmas and works for social justice.