

**ABIGAIL  
RICH  
HILLERMAN  
1856-1945**



**MOTHER  
OF  
OKLAHOMA  
PROHIBITION**

Prior to statehood, many territorial towns had a number of saloons lining the town's main streets but prohibition talk was becoming prevalent in Oklahoma due to the actions of Abbie Hillerman, known as the "Mother of Prohibition". The state was a strong base for prohibition groups, including the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the Anti-Saloon League, helped by the appearances of Kansas' hatchet-swinging activist Carrie Nation.

Abbie Rich was in November 1856 in New London, Indiana. Her Quaker parents moved to Kansas in 1873. She earned an education degree at Kansas State University and trained at the Kansas Normal College in Emporia. Following graduation, she taught at local schools while beginning her first temperance work in Seward County as WCTU county president. She married attorney Phineas Parker Hillerman in September 1878 and moved to Chandler, Oklahoma Territory in 1890 before settling in Stillwater a decade later, where she organized the first local union and became its president.

The territorial WCTU elected Hillerman corresponding secretary in 1900 and president in 1903. During the 1906 Constitutional Convention, she and her "white ribboners" circulated thousands of signature petitions to local unions, churches, schools and colleges across the Twin Territories. Hillerman personally carried 5,000 petitions to the convention and delivered a hundred speeches, in 84 days before the general committees. When the petitions were returned to her, she hand-delivered them every morning to the convention, laying them on the desk of every delegate before the day's session began. Her efforts helped contribute to Oklahoma's becoming the only state admitted to the Union with prohibition in its constitution.

After attending the September 1908 Oklahoma WCTU meeting and the national convention in Denver, Hillerman was sent to Panama by the national WCTU as representative to the Canal Zone. She later represented Oklahoma at world conventions in Glasgow, Scotland and London, England. She served as state president until 1920. Hillerman recommended state legislation such as an anti-cigarette bill and a bill raising the age of consent. In 1915 she helped pass a law that required that the effects of alcohol on the human body be taught in state schools and institutions.

Temperance women knew that their chance to change the laws would require them to have a vote and voice in politics. Therefore, many WCTU workers joined the ranks of the suffragists. After hearing Carrie Chapman Catt, national leader of the suffrage movement, speak at the December 1917 WCTU national convention in Washington DC, Hillerman came home and gave lectures about suffrage. In November 1918, Oklahoma voters approved a state constitutional amendment by a vote of 106,909 to 81,481. They became the 21<sup>st</sup> state to grant women the right to vote.

Although declining re-election to the presidency in 1920, Hillerman continued her fieldwork. Having attended all 45 territorial and state WCTU conventions, she published her 1925 book "History of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Indian Territory, Oklahoma Territory, and State of Oklahoma: 1888-1925", highlighting every woman who was active in the organization during these years.

Hillerman moved to Tulsa, where she was elected local chapter president in 1932. In 1938 she was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. She remained president until her death in July 1945 at age 88.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment of 1933 repealed the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, passed in 1919, ending the increasingly unpopular nationwide prohibition of alcohol. In April 1959 Oklahoma voters finally repealed prohibition.