

**PATIENCE  
FRANCELIA SEWELL  
LATTING  
1918-2012**



**FIRST  
FEMALE  
OKLAHOMA CITY  
MAYOR**

Patience Latting led a life of superlatives. She was the first female mayor of a major American city of more than 350,000 when she became the 31<sup>st</sup> Mayor of Oklahoma City in 1971, after being the first female elected to the City Council. Her election was no fluke. Although she looked a bit like Claudette Colbert, she handled politics like Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Patience Francelia Sewell was born in August 1918 in Texhoma. She graduated from Classen High School in 1934 and received a bachelor's degree in mathematics with honors from the University of Oklahoma in 1938, where she earned the Phi Beta Kappa Key as a junior, and was elected Outstanding Senior Woman. She earned a master's degree in economics and statistics from Columbia University in New York City, where she worked as a researcher for Chase Manhattan Bank. Homesick for Oklahoma, she returned home and married lawyer and oilman Trimble Latting in August 1941.

In the early 1960s, Latting began her political career through volunteering. As a member of the Parent Teacher Association and the League of Women Voters, she often visited the state capital, and soon realized that the way state legislative districts were drawn was antiquated. Rural areas enjoyed more representation in the Oklahoma Legislature than urban areas. The districts had not been reformed since statehood. In 1964, Latting testified before a United States Federal Court, which was investigating the legality of the state elections. With a background in statistics, she was appointed to help reapportion and redistrict the new House and Senate districts.

In 1967 she won election to the Oklahoma City Council, nominated by a reform group. As the first woman on the council, she called for stricter housing and building codes and for more African American participation in government. She quickly gained a reputation as one who did her homework. No detail of a tedious zoning case or complex public contract escaped her scrutiny.

In 1971, she decided to run for mayor because entrenched city officials were using public funds for political gain and there were questionable City Hall hirings. She was a Democrat, but campaigned without party affiliation. She defeated fellow council member Bill Bishop with 60% of the vote in a runoff, and became Oklahoma City's first – and only – woman mayor and the first female mayor of a city over 350,000.

During her first year, Latting's efforts to reform city government were opposed by the council's anti-reform majority. Once when she was out of town, the anti-Latting bloc threw out all her nominations to city boards and commissions – and reappointed incumbents. The overreach by her council opponents proved to be unpopular with city residents. Her allies won a majority of seats in the next municipal election as a result.

In 1977 Latting adopted a new master development plan for Oklahoma City revitalization. It called for the demolition of hundreds of low-rise antiquated downtown structures in favor of skyscrapers and other modern structures. Public resentment developed when multiple historic structures were destroyed but improvements included the Myriad Botanical Gardens, Myriad Convention Center, Liberty Bank Tower, Fidelity Plaza, and Kerr-McGee Tower. New businesses and manufacturers like General Motors and Xerox moved in.

In 1978, Oklahoma City was named an "All-American City". The city did see its share of troubles as well. The end of her tenure as mayor saw the collapse of Penn Square Bank. Latting served three 4-year terms as Mayor. She declined to run for re-election to a fourth term and retired from office in 1983. Latting was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1980 and was the 1995 recipient of the Constitution Award from Rogers State College for her dedication to public service and devotion to constitutional ideals. A bust of Latting was placed at the entrance to the Oklahoma City Mayor's office in 2005 and the Patience Latting Library was opened in 2011.

Patience Latting died in December 2012 at age 94 in Oklahoma City. She laid in state at City Hall, becoming the first former mayor to receive this honor. Smart, sharp, savvy, spirited and service-oriented. These words describe the woman behind the legacy of Patience Latting.