

**CORA
VICTORIA
DIEHL
1869-?**



**REFORM
AND
RETALIATION**

During the 1889 Land Run, many Populist-movement Kansans settled in Oklahoma Territory, after suffering widespread family farm foreclosures. One of those progressive families included Hiram Diehl and his daughter Cora.

Born in 1869 in Laurelton, Pennsylvania, Cora moved at eleven to Great Bend, Kansas. Her father, having no son, shaped his daughter's education to become a reformer. At sixteen, she appeared at many public meetings of the Greenback Party. Cora worked as deputy register of deeds in Great Bend for two years until she joined her parents in Oklahoma Territory in January 1890.

Guthrie was the Logan County seat – and Territorial Capital. Settled predominately by Kansas Republicans, county officials were Republican appointees of Territorial Governor George Steele, who was appointed by President Benjamin Harrison. The People's Party, established in the summer of 1890, was causing some noise. At 21, Cora joined the Farmer's Alliance of the Populist-based People's Party, and became a leader and speaker.

Democrats and People's Party nominated one slate of candidates, called the 'fusion ticket' for the February 1891 elections, the first to elect county officials. Diehl was the unanimous selection for Register of Deeds. She campaigned with her father, but received little coverage. The focus was on Henry Bockfinger, a Republican turncoat running for County Clerk.

All ten People's Party candidates swept into office. Diehl won with 53 percent of the vote, becoming the first – and youngest – woman to hold elective office in Oklahoma Territory. Louis Laws, the defeated County Clerk and Register of Deeds, locked all records in the Territorial National Bank vault! The elected officials forcibly used dynamite to gain access to the county's records and county seal. Mob violence broke out until Federal Marshal William Grimes intervened.

Diehl's election provoked controversy, betrayal, violent confrontation, and legal action. Louis Laws claimed a woman couldn't hold office. The new county commissioners, afraid to sacrifice their own victories, invalidated her election and appointed Edward Duvall. Laws had also claimed that Register of Deeds was not separate from County Clerk – so the office belonged to him. Bockfinger agreed with Laws – except the office belonged to him. Three men – including two from her own party – challenged Diehl for her newly-elected position!

The Territorial Supreme Court decided *Duvall v. Diehl* in January 1892 in her favor. "The rights of Louis Laws to exercise the duties of the office expired when Cora Diehl was elected." Duvall was ordered to pay the court costs!

In November 1892, Diehl ran for re-election but lost by 141 out of 4205 votes cast, and retired from politics. In July 1893 she married J. N. Harvey in Kansas City and faded into obscurity. No record of her death has been found.

In 1893 Diehl received recognition in Francis E. Willard and Mary Livermore's book "A Woman of the Century: Leading American Women from All Walks of Life". With great courage, Cora Diehl confronted a legal, economic, and political system that attempted to lock her out. Diehl won – then lost – then won again.