

**KATHRINE
BENTON GALT
ZANEIS
1887-1973**



**FIRST
LADY
OF
EDUCATION**

On March 18, 1937, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt visited Durant at the request of Kate Zaneis, president of Southeastern Teacher's College (STC). Zaneis was the first American woman to head a state college or university.

Kathrine Benton Galt was born in February 1887 in Springplace, Georgia. Her family moved to Ardmore before statehood. Kate was a top student, serving as newspaper editor. Upon graduation in 1907, Superintendent Dr. Charles Evans immediately hired her to teach – even though she didn't have a college degree. Friends described her as a “tall, statuesque blonde with model looks”.

In 1910, she met Hiram Prince Zaneis, a fireman on the Rock Island Railroad in Ardmore. They married in 1913 while living in Knoxville, Tennessee. They moved back to Wirt, Oklahoma where Hiram worked in the oil fields, but they divorced two years later.

Zaneis returned to Ardmore as principal of Lincoln Ward School. In 1915 she became Lone Grove High School superintendent and taught at STC during the summers. In 1920, while getting her bachelor's degree, Zaneis was elected Carter County Superintendent of Public Instruction. She recognized the disadvantages of one-room schools and campaigned in favor of school consolidation to improve education. She also fought for equal educational rights for minorities. She graduated from STC in 1926.

Newly-elected governor E. W. Marland appointed Zaneis to the State Board of Education in 1934. She successfully achieved approval of sabbatical leaves for college faculty members and raised the qualifications for Oklahoma teachers. Zaneis resigned four days before receiving her master's degree from A&M College in 1935. On graduation day, Marland named her president of STC. It was only a political appointment but it was the challenge 41-year-old Zaneis wanted.

Her tenure was controversial from the start. She appointed her favorite instructor, Dr. Everett Fixley as dean, fired faculty members without master's degrees, and cut salaries of higher-paid men to adjust the pay scale of female faculty. There were successes too. She secured WPA funds to improve campus buildings and athletic fields, ended mandatory faculty political donations, increased enrollment by 30%, and funded student work programs.

At the height of her popularity, Zaneis brought First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt to speak at Senior Day but she still lost her job. With faculty men upset, the New Deal under criticism, and the governor under attack for deficit spending, Marland couldn't help her. The State Board of Education fired her in May 1937.

No clear reason was ever given, but it was widely believed she was removed because of her gender. “We want a real man to head the college.” Another woman would not head an Oklahoma college until Joe Anna Hibler in 1991. Zaneis returned to Ardmore where she died in September 1973 at age 86.

Zaneis received much criticism at STC yet she was a trailblazer in its many advances and accomplishments. Many critics also acknowledged she was a good school administrator. Co-workers said men were either jealous of her or not ready to be led by a woman.