



Alli Gerkman || Monica Rosenbluth



## 2015 Mary Lathrop Award Winner CWBA Professional Advancement Committee

There are many reasons the highest honor the CWBA gives each year is named after Mary Florence Lathrop. She excelled at everything she attempted and accomplished a series of “firsts”—she was the first woman to open a law office in Colorado, the first woman to argue before the Colorado Supreme Court, the first woman to be admitted to the U.S. Supreme Court, and the first woman to join the Colorado and Denver Bar Associations.

Our honoree this year shares all of these strengths, but perhaps she is most like Lathrop in her unrelenting drive to do what she believed was right in the face of powerful foes. A male lawyer once referred to Lathrop in exasperation as “that damn[ed] woman.” And this year, we honor another “damned woman” – a damned inspiring one.

We are delighted to introduce to you the 2015 CWBA Mary Lathrop award-winner, **Judge Sandra Rothenberg**. Rothenberg received her undergraduate degree in English from the University of Miami in 1965, and she decided to attend the University of Miami law school after meeting a female law student that she respected and admired. Rothenberg obtained her juris doctor from the University of Miami in 1968. She also obtained an LL.M. from Georgetown University Law Center, where she was the first female Prettyman Fellow, a prestigious two-year fellowship focused on representing adults and adolescents accused of crimes.

After school, Rothenberg applied to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which was then under the leadership of J. Edgar Hoover.

Her application was rejected and, over the course of several exchanges with Hoover, the FBI rejected her application again and again. Hoover claimed the job was too dangerous for her. Rothenberg responded by suing the FBI as the lead plaintiff in a lawsuit alleging sexual discrimination on behalf of hundreds of women, prompting this headline from *The New York Times*: “To Her ‘It’s the FBI or Nothing’ and So Far It’s Been Nothing.” The case was the first time a woman had ever sued a law enforcement agency

for sexual discrimination in hiring, and it paved the way for women nationally to get employment with police and fire departments across the country. The case settled in 1972, and the FBI began hiring women. When interviewed about the outcome of the case on national media, Rothenberg said, “I’m glad the FBI will now follow the law.”



After the case, Rothenberg headed west and relocated to Colorado. After associating with a firm for a few months, she opened a storefront office on South Pearl Street as a poverty lawyer. Among her many clients was Janet Bonnema, a female engineer denied the right to work on the construction of the Eisenhower Memorial Tunnel because it was considered “bad luck” to have women in tunnels, which was at the time an arcane but perpetual wives’ tale. In a 1972 article on the case, *Life* magazine called Rothenberg “one of a new breed of lawyers handling sex-discrimination cases.”

Rothenberg’s legacy is memorialized in ink in many of the nation’s top news publications, but it is also etched in the hearts and minds of those who worked with her and knew her personally.

### *Lathrop Award continued*

She served as a trial judge in the Denver District Court from 1979 until 1990, when she was appointed to the Colorado Court of Appeals, where she served until she retired in 2009. Retired Chief Judge Janice Davidson called her brilliant and said she left a deep and lasting mark on the development of law. Karen Mathis, Past President of the American Bar Association, called Rothenberg as her first mentor. "Her mentoring keeps



marinating for me. And I am just one of a legion of women who have benefited from her," Mathis said.

Rothenberg was a Founding Mother of the Colorado Women's Bar Association, as well as its first secretary and its second president. She focused her career on using the legal system to fight for rights of women and inspiring friends and colleagues—particularly women—to fight for their own careers. We are privileged to honor Judge Sandra Rothenberg with the 2015 CWBA Mary Lathrop award, and we know that her story will continue to inspire "legions of [damned!] women" for years to come.

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