

Female Feds

Jane Mason, March 1, 2021

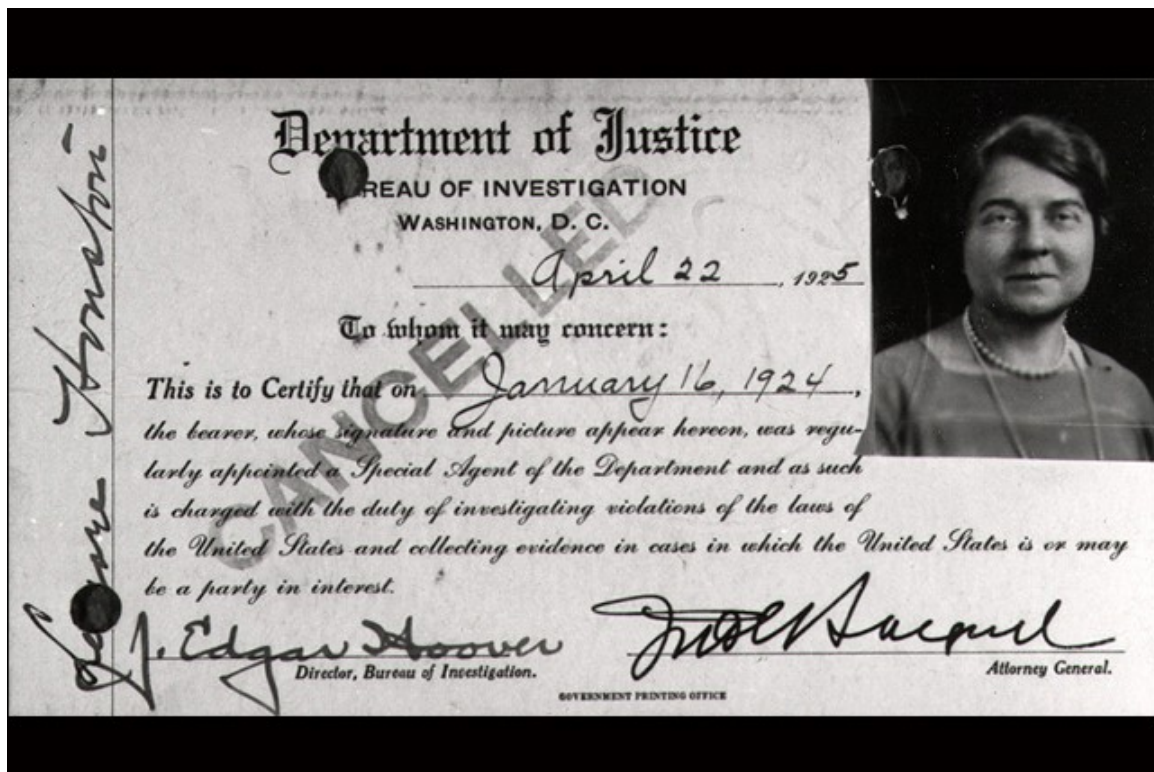
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In honor of Women's History Month, I am posting this article about the first female FBI Special Agents. I think it's fascinating and I hope you enjoy reading it.

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LENORE Houston is the first, last, and only female Special Agent hired by famed FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover in 1924. If you find that hard to believe, look at the signature on her credentials that I got through an FBI FOIA request. (Most of the information for this document is from FOIA.)



Credentials of Lenore Houston – signed by J. Edgar Hoover
Courtesy of fbi.gov

The first female Special Agents of the FBI are true trailblazers in the world of federal law enforcement. I stopped at three; they were the only female FBI

Special Agents in the 1920's. J. Edgar Hoover created the leading federal law enforcement agency in the country, but he was resolute in his views on females as Special Agents.

The first two female Special Agents of the FBI, Alaska Donovan and Jesse Duckstein, were hired by Hoover's predecessor, Director William Burns, in the early 1920's. They both retired two weeks after Hoover was appointed FBI Director in 1924.

A mystery occurred in late 1924, when Hoover appointed Lenore Houston as a Special Agent. She was the first, last, and only female Special Agent Hoover ever hired.

I say this is a mystery because my research has not revealed any actual reasons for Hoover to make this single appointment. As with Donovan and Duckstein, Hoover asked for Houston's resignation. Houston resigned on November 7, 1928.

In 1971, Hoover received a letter from Colorado State University which accused the FBI of violating equal employment opportunity laws in excluding females from the ranks of FBI agents. Due to this, Colorado State University said it would ban all future FBI recruitment on their campus.

Hoover's response includes a vigorous explanation of his "inalterable" policy prohibiting females as agents.

62-92201-

March 11, 1971

Dr. Adrian R. Chamberlain
President
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado 80521

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED 278308
DATE 1-88 BY [signature]

Dear Dr. Chamberlain:

I have the copy designated for me of the letter of March 4, 1971, to Mr. Scott J. Werner, Special Agent in Charge of our Denver, Colorado, field office, from Keith H. Asplin, Ph. D., Director of the Placement Office at your university, in which he alleged that this Bureau is violating the Government's equal employment opportunity regulations by restricting our Special Agent position to males and advised that in the future the FBI will not be granted the privilege of recruiting on the campus of Colorado State University. We take serious exception to his branding our policy as a violation and the purpose of this letter is to set the record straight.

In supporting his contention, Dr. Asplin referred to Section 1604.1, Chapter XIV, Title 29, Code of Federal Regulations. That citation represents regulations issued by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission pursuant to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U. S. Code 2000e--12). Under that statute the term "employer" does not include the United States. Equal employment opportunity for Federal employees and applicants stems from Executive Order 11478. Accordingly, the citation to which Dr. Asplin referred is not governing insofar as Federal employees and applicants are concerned.

The United States Civil Service Commission has basic responsibility for implementation of equal employment opportunity throughout the Federal service. This Bureau's policy of limiting our Special Agent position to males is in concert with Civil Service

- 1 - SAC, Denver (Personal Attention) *[Signature]*
- 1 - Mr. Bishop (Direct)
- 1 - Mr. D. J. Brennan, Jr. (Direct)
- 1 - Mr. Dalbey (Direct)
- 1 - Mr. Feeney (Direct)
- 1 - Mr. Adams (Direct)
- Based on memo Adams to Callahan, 3-10-71, RGH:mjb.

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- Sullivan _____
- Mohr _____
- Bishop _____
- DeLoach _____
- Casper _____
- Callahan _____
- Conrad _____
- Dalbey _____
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Dr. Adrian R. Chamberlain

Commission regulations on this subject appearing in the Federal Personnel Manual, Chapter 332, Subchapter 4, Item 5, which state that law enforcement positions requiring the bearing of firearms are exceptions to the basic policy that consideration of applicants for appointment shall not be restricted to one sex. The FBI is in full accord with the Commission's regulations.

Further, our policy is based on a careful, objective evaluation of all pertinent factors germane to the operations and effectiveness of the FBI, particularly those inherent in the broad range of challenges which Special Agents must satisfactorily meet to enable this Bureau to properly discharge the responsibilities entrusted to it and to do so with optimum return to the public trust. Our force of Special Agents is comparatively small considering the sparse deployment of it throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. Therefore, we must insist that each Special Agent be capable of performing all duties of his position whenever and wherever necessary. This means it is imperative that each Special Agent be qualified for the strenuous physical exertion required to effectively participate in arrests and raids which involve the use of firearms, physical subduing of dangerous criminals, and self-defense. Performance of these duties frequently requires work during any time of day or night and exposure to all kinds of adverse environmental conditions. Experience has demonstrated very clearly to us that our Special Agent position must be limited to males and our stand on this point is inalterable.

May I say, also, that a policy forbidding the FBI to recruit employees from the members of your graduating classes would be unfortunate for all concerned. The FBI needs, for public purposes, to continue recruiting well-educated employees. We have in the past hired many fine young people from Colorado and neighboring states and we should like to continue looking for their equal in all logical places. It is to the interest of the university to encourage opportunities for employment which the student finds

Dr. Adrian W. Chamberlain

suitable The students who might want to work for the FBI must surely have some right to be informed of such opportunities in the manner usual to placement activities.

Would you kindly advise me whether Dr. Asplin is, as he states, speaking for your university and whether it is truly the policy of your university that we may no longer recruit on campus?

Sincerely yours,

J. Edgar Hoover

The next female FBI agent to be sworn in took place forty-eight years later, in 1972, shortly after Hoover's death.

Although Hoover slowed the hiring of female FBI agents, he created the premiere federal law enforcement agency in the world. Like Yogi Berra, many

quotes are attributed to Hoover. One of my favorite Hoover quotes is: “The cure for crime is not the electric chair, but the highchair.”

Alaska Packard Davidson (1869-1934)

FBI Special Agent
October 11, 1922 to June 10, 1924



Photo courtesy of fbi.gov

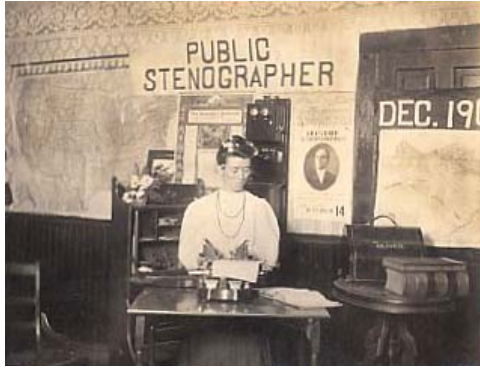
Alaska, a native of Ohio, was well-educated, married with one child, and 54 years old when she became an FBI agent. She was appointed a Special Agent by Director William Burns on October 11, 1922.

After training in New York City, Alaska was assigned as a Special Agent in the Washington FBI Office. She was assigned to prohibition matters and to white-slave traffic cases which involved crossing state lines for the purpose of prostitution.

She retired two weeks after Hoover was appointed FBI Director in 1924.

Jessie B. Duckstein (born circa 1886)

FBI Special Agent
November 20, 1923 to May 26, 1924



Stenographer in the 1920s –Photo of Jessie unavailable
Photo courtesy of fbi.gov

Jessie started working at the FBI on August 11, 1921 as a stenographer and typist. She was a high school graduate in her early thirties at the time. Jessie was appointed a Special Agent by Director William Burns on November 20, 1923.

She and Alaska Packard Davidson had similar career tracks. Jessie also trained for the job in New York City. She was then assigned as a Special Agent in the Washington FBI Office working prohibition matters and white-slave traffic cases.

She retired two weeks after Hoover was appointed FBI Director in 1924.

Lenore Houston (born August 12, 1878)

FBI Special Agent

November 6, 1924 to November 7, 1928

What was it about Lenore Houston that caused Hoover to hire her as a Special Agent?

Houston was born on August 12, 1878 in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, to Joseph and Esther (nee Rakemore) Houston. Joseph was a doctor and Esther was a housewife from a large German family that had been settled in the area since the early 1700's. Lenore was one of four children and was well-educated having spent three years studying at Swarthmore College. Although Lenore came from some degree of privilege, the amount of land her eldest brother inherited was not enough to entice him to stay in Pennsylvania. There is not much information about her middle brother and her youngest brother died when he was a toddler.

Perhaps the source of her recommendations to the position of Special Agent of the FBI holds a clue.

In June of 1922, at the age of 44, Lenore applied for the position of Special Agent. Both Pennsylvania Governor William Cameron Sproul and Beaver County, Pennsylvania District Attorney Louis E. Graham recommended her for this position on several occasions. She was initially hired as a Special Employee of the FBI hired by Director Burns on January 14th of 1924. She was assigned to investigate Mann Act (white slave trafficking) violations in the Philadelphia FBI office.

William Cameron Sproul served as the 27th Governor of Pennsylvania from January 21, 1919 to January 16, 1923. Governor Sproul was born and spent much of his life in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. In addition to the geographical connection, Governor Sproul also attended Swarthmore College, Lenore's alma mater.

Louis E. Graham was the District Attorney of Beaver County from 1912 through 1924. Although District Attorney Graham's connection to Lenore is unknown, Graham seemed to be the more ardent advocate for Lenore later in her career. Graham continued to recommend Lenore to Hoover until, finally, on November 6, 1924, Hoover changed Lenore's designation to Special Agent.

The next female FBI agent to be sworn in took place forty-eight years later, in 1972, shortly after Hoover's death.

AFTER the demise of Jessie B. Duckstein, Alaska Packard Davidson, and Lenore Houston, Hoover ended the possibility of hiring female FBI agents for the next several decades. But, there is no doubt that he created the premier law enforcement agency in the world. Like Yogi Berra, many quotes are attributed to Hoover. In an endearing moment of self-deprecation during a speech for the American Newspaper Women's Club Dinner in Honor of Mrs. Martha Mitchell on May 24, 1971, Hoover wrote, "As you know, it has been alleged that I sleep with a night-light....This is absolute nonsense.... The fact of the matter is, I have been sitting up night after night waiting for one of those famed late-evening telephone calls from the lovely cabinet wife whom you are honoring tonight."¹

¹ <https://vault.fbi.gov/j.-edgar-hoover-official-and-confidential-o-c-files/J.%20Edgar%20Hoover%20Official%20and%20Confidential%20%28OC%29%20Files%20Part%2007%20of%2009/view> See below for copy of the remarks/



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20535

REMARKS OF J. EDGAR HOOVER, DIRECTOR
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
AMERICAN NEWSPAPER WOMEN'S
CLUB DINNER IN HONOR OF
MRS. MARTHA MITCHELL
SHOREHAM HOTEL
WASHINGTON, D. C.
MAY 24, 1971

I know that those of you who regularly subscribe to an alleged National picture magazine may have had difficulty recognizing me in the conventional clothes I am wearing this evening; but, like ordinary people, we "Emperors" do have our problems, and I regret to say that my toga did not get back from the cleaners on time.

While I am delighted to be with you to pay tribute to a lovely lady whom I consider it a privilege to number among my dearest friends, I must say that I am a little envious of her. I personally thought that I might have fared better than I did in your balloting for "Headliner of the Year." The good Lord knows I've gotten more than my share of headlines in recent weeks.

Numbered among my most vigorous and vociferous publicists has been a syndicated columnist who has managed to set up

a full-time garbage-sorting concession on the sidewalk outside my house....If you happen to be in the neighborhood, be careful; the fallout from the banana peels and grapefruit rinds gets extremely heavy on occasion.

As an eligible bachelor of long standing, it is always a happy experience to dine with such charming members of the female set; and despite what those who scavenge through my garbage say, I want you to know that I don't suffer from either heartburn or gastric acidity, *except when I read that* There is another matter which I feel compelled to mention at this time, one which has been of increasing concern to me and my associates in the FBI....As you know, it has been alleged that I sleep with a night-light....This is absolute nonsense....The fact of the matter is, I have been sitting up night after night waiting for one of those famed late-evening telephone calls from the lovely cabinet wife whom you are honoring tonight.

A year or so ago, Mrs. Mitchell and several cabinet wives dropped by my office following a tour of the FBI. To commemorate

the occasion, we decided to have a photograph made together. Unfortunately, the picture didn't come out. . . . I would like to take this opportunity to report to Mrs. Mitchell that the photographer is doing much better work now. He has recently sent me several very excellent snapshots. . . from his new office of assignment in Anchorage, Alaska.

To be serious for a moment, I want to thank you for inviting me to participate in this festive occasion, and, on behalf of all of us in the FBI, I would also like to take this opportunity to express heartfelt appreciation for the splendid cooperation afforded us by the members of the American Newspaper Women's Club over the years. The effectiveness of our operations depends to a large extent on your assistance in getting the word to the public regarding our responsibilities, jurisdiction, and accomplishments. Your ^{generous and kind} literary efforts have been instrumental in attracting the kind of men and women to careers in the Bureau whom we need to fulfill our obligations to the American people.

I think too few of us stop to consider the enormous value ~~of~~ the newspaper. But it is truly one of the great bulwarks of our freedom. It is an instrument which has nurtured, prodded,

enticed, coaxed, pushed and hounded this Nation almost since its birth to its current status of world leadership. You and your male counterparts have an enormous responsibility. Newspaper reporting, to properly serve the public, must serve the truth and this demands great integrity, keen insight, ^{objectivity} and persistent diligence. With some few individual exceptions no group of Americans deserves greater credit than the press in sustaining the freedoms we all cherish.

It is for this reason that I am doubly delighted to be able to pay my respects to the remarkable wife of our distinguished Attorney General this evening.

I consider myself privileged to be associated with the Mitchells. The Attorney General is a man of consummate ability, integrity, and fortitude. ^{While certain sick caricatures always portray him with} In all my years of service to the country, I have never met a finer gentleman ^{or} a greater ^{nor a more friendly & compassionate a man -} American. . . ^{and I would indeed be the last person to describe his} lovely and vivacious wife as an "apathetic American." ^{See how could he get along with her}

Her courage, candor, and enthusiasm in speaking out on a variety of issues ^{and passions} have endeared her to the overwhelming majority of us who have grown weary of rhetoric, ^{to platitudinous} are bored with deceit, and fed up

with people who are forever telling us what they think we want to hear. Martha Mitchell, bless her heart, calls them the way she

sees them and lets the chips fall where they may. *above everything else she is no hypocrite and that is rare to find today*
The American Newspaper Women's Club is to be

congratulated on the wisdom of its selection. Mrs. Mitchell is a
"Headliner" in every ^{respect} sense of the word. You may be sure she will
wear her crown with grace, forthrightness, and good humor.