

Hattie Ophelia Wyatt Caraway

(1878–1950)

Hattie Ophelia Wyatt Caraway, born in Bakerville, Tennessee, was the first woman elected to a full term in the U.S. Senate. Following her marriage to Thaddeus H. Caraway in 1902, she settled in Jonesboro, Arkansas, where her husband became a U.S. congressman and later a U.S. senator. Upon her husband's death in 1931, Hattie Caraway was appointed to take his place in the Senate as a Democrat from Arkansas. She subsequently won a January 1932 special election to finish her late husband's term. She ran for reelection to a full term later that same year, with Louisiana Senator Huey Long stumping Arkansas on her behalf. The 1932 campaign was one of the most colorful in modern American history. Long's effort worked: Caraway became the first woman ever to be elected to a six-year term in the U.S. Senate.

Caraway initially spoke so infrequently in the Senate that she became known as "Silent Hattie." As she grew more comfortable in her role, Caraway emerged as a fiercely partisan supporter of New Deal legislation, seconding the nomination of President Franklin Roosevelt for reelection at the 1936 Democratic National Convention. She was the first woman to preside over the Senate—on May 9, 1932—and the first to chair a Senate committee (Committee on Enrolled Bills, 1933–44). Although she was reelected in 1938, she failed to win renomination in 1944. After leaving the Senate, Caraway served on the United States Employees' Compensation Commission from 1945 to 1946 and on the Employees' Compensation Appeals Board from 1946 until her death in 1950 in Virginia.

In August 1993, Senators Dale Bumpers and David Pryor of Arkansas proposed to the Senate Commission on Art that a portrait of Hattie Caraway be considered for the Senate wing of the Capitol. The request met the acquisition policy guidelines established by the commission in 1976: Caraway had been out of office for more than 21 years, and historians who studied the senator's political career agreed that she would be an appropriate subject for the Senate's collection of commemorative portraits.

The Hattie Caraway Portrait Committee was subsequently formed in Arkansas, with the wives of Senators Bumpers and Pryor serving as honorary cochairs. This committee selected four Arkansas artists for consideration. The Senate Commission on Art—on the recommendation of a three-member advisory panel comprising museum curators from the Smithsonian Institution and the White House, and a professional artist—

chose Arkansas painter John O. Buckley for the commission. The Caraway portrait was initially unveiled at ceremonies in April 1996 at the Arkansas Statehouse in Little Rock and also in Jonesboro, Arkansas. The portrait was then unveiled at the U.S. Capitol on June 24, 1996.

Buckley, who is from Little Rock, holds a master's degree in fine arts from the University of Texas at Austin and has taught studio courses in painting and drawing at the University of Arkansas.



This photograph was one of several images that artist John O. Buckley consulted for the Senate's painting of Hattie Caraway.

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Hattie Caraway

John Oliver Buckley (born 1941)

Oil on canvas, 1996

39½ x 29¾ inches (100.3 x 75.6 cm)

Signed (lower right corner): J O Buckley

Gift of the Hattie Caraway Portrait Committee, 1996

Accepted by the U.S. Senate Commission on Art, 1996

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