

when stopped by plain-clothes officers. To rectify this problem, she brought the men together again and issued them uniforms, which they had to pay for themselves, and sent them back out on the roads.

She got results. Between 1933 and 1934, deaths decreased by 69, accidents by 3,372 and injuries by 3,731, which was almost at 15% decline. At the same time, the nation's death and accident toll increased 17%. Miller then used her influence and contacts at the Iowa Legislature, and in 1935 she was able to get legislation passed for her cause. On January 31, 1935, the Iowa Legislature passed House File 67, establishing the Iowa State Highway Safety Patrol of 53 men and a training camp for recruits.

Miller continued her campaign for highway safety to the end. Although she was suffering from influenza and running a temperature, she continued to give speeches at numerous events until illness forced her into the hospital. By then it was too late. She caught pneumonia and died at Iowa Methodist Hospital on January 25, 1937 at the age of 65. Governor Nelson Kraschel and the Executive Council ordered the Statehouse closed for her funeral. One thousand five hundred people attended her funeral at the Washington Methodist Church, among them the 55 men of the Iowa Highway Patrol who served as pallbearers at the ceremony.



Ola Babcock Miller

1872 - 1937

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*To recognize and honor the many outstanding women who helped shape Iowa and the many strong female leaders who continue to contribute their talents and skills to improve the quality of life in this state, the Iowa Commission on the Status of Women established the Iowa Women's Hall of Fame. In 1975, Ola Babcock Miller was one of the first four inductees.*

The Old Historical Building, which houses the State Library of Iowa, was renamed for Ola Babcock Miller at a dedication ceremony on January 31, 2002. Not many Iowans recognize her name, but her contributions to the state were significant and play an important role in our lives yet today.

*Ola Babcock Miller served as Iowa's first female Secretary of State from 1933-1937, and is perhaps better known as the "mother" of the Iowa Highway Patrol.*

Ola Babcock was born on a Washington County farm in 1871 and moved with her parents to Washington, Ia. at age five. She attended public schools, the Washington Academy and Iowa Wesleyan College in Mt. Pleasant. After college, Ola taught in Washington County rural schools, and in 1895 married Alex Miller, editor of the "Washington Democrat" who was very active in state politics. He was an unsuccessful candidate for governor on the Democratic ticket in 1926. He died of a heart attack in 1927.

During the 1920's, Ola was active in the women's suffrage movement and in many women's organizations, serving as Iowa and national president of the P.E.O. She also traveled the state as a representative of the Iowa Democratic Party speaking out for social reform. While president of the P.E.O., she was criticized for endorsing the 1928 Democratic presidential candidacy of Al Smith, the first Catholic to run for the office. In 1932, she secured an interview with Democratic presidential candidate Franklin Roosevelt in New York City for "The Des Moines Register" and became convinced he was the man to elect.

In the 1932 election, Miller's name was placed on the ballot as the Democratic candidate for Iowa Secretary of State. This was done by her party to show appreciation for her work on the platform and other issues. She called her candidacy "a martyrdom for the cause" and consented to run because she thought it would "please Alex."

No one expected her to win, not even Miller herself. But Roosevelt won the presidency by a land-slide and swept many Democrats

into office with him, and Iowa had its first female Secretary of State. Re-election came easily in 1934 with a vote tally second only to that of popular Governor Clyde Herring. Two years later in 1936, she drew more votes than any previous candidate for elective office in Iowa's history.

Interestingly, her daughter Ophelia married Jefferson, Ia. native George Gallup of the Gallup Poll and American Institute of Public Opinion fame. It is said that Gallup got his idea for the political poll by helping his mother-in-law with state elections.

Just before she took office, one of her best friends had a young son killed in an automobile accident. Miller took the news hard and vowed to do something about highway safety. The young man's death, along with the ever increasing number of accidents on the State's highways made her feel the need to establish well-defined safety codes and traditions for motorists.

Shortly after assuming office, Miller turned to the Motor Vehicle Department - which was part of the Secretary of State's office in 1933 - for her campaign. The Motor Vehicle Department consisted of 15 motor license inspectors who enforced the complex regulations of Iowa and license reciprocities between Iowa and other states. They were, in fact, basically tax collectors.

Miller, without money, authorization or blessing of the legislature added to the duties of these 15 inspectors that of enforcing road safety regulations. She called them together and instructed them "from now on, save lives first, money afterwards." Each man was assigned six or seven counties and were to look for unsafe vehicles and unsafe drivers, and to either warn them about their driving habits or ticket them when necessary. Above all, they were to be courteous and spread the word about highway safety.

She and her "inspectors" also gave numerous speeches to high schools, clubs and other organizations around the state. The response from the public was positive, although many were frightened