

DOROTHY CHAFIN

- A Renaissance Woman -

By Elisabeth Ruffner

A woman may truly renew herself when she finds challenges in life to which she rises without hesitation, time after time. Such a woman was Dorothy Chafin, born on a ranch, but calling Prescott her home town (she deplored calling it "everyone's") from the time she returned from college during the Great Depression. In junior college she had found the only courses open to her were sewing, political science, costume design and art, and she asserted that these introductions to new pursuits determined her interests throughout the rest of her life.

Dorothy Crozier was born near Peach Springs, Arizona in 1914. She was four when her family moved to Colorado and was in college when they moved to Prescott. Leaving college, Dorothy applied at the foremost accounting firm in Prescott, although she had only minimal typing and shorthand skills. Bookkeeping seemed to elude her, bright as she was. Just when she was about to call it quits, the numbers before her became her allies instead of her enemies, and she was on her way.

With a young husband, a professor at The University of Arizona, Dorothy lived for some time overseas in Baghdad, Iraq, leaving only when revolution threatened the college with closing. Returning to Prescott, she found that many of the ranchers who were former clients of the accounting firm became her clients when she set up her own firm in an office off the lobby of the Hassayampa Hotel.

In her memoirs, Chafin mentioned a number of these cattle people who ended up becoming fast friends of this glamorous and talented woman.

"...(they) were the 'real thing', were also interesting, fun, attractive, and

wonderful to know."

Her office became a popular meeting place for clients, ranchers and friends, and as she related, "it became a clearing house for cowboys looking for work and for ranchers looking for cowboys to hire."

Dorothy eventually worked as bookkeeper for several businesses, including for some of her closest friends: Lester Lee and Lester Ward (Budge) Ruffner, of the Ruffner Funeral Home. At the urging of Lester Ruffner, she accepted a position as a state officer of the Business and Professional Women of Arizona. She called these Prescott business people her "city clients" and realized early on that in order to make a business thrive she needed to "excel in smarts."

Excel she did, and she went on to become an integral participant in the social and arts life of Prescott from the 1940s on. At the urging of other admirers, Dorothy Chafin once ran for Governor of Arizona, and when she became active in the Prescott Chamber of Commerce, she was not only a productive board member, she was the first woman president, elected in 1956.

Dorothy had an inimitable style, and made her signature garb the "squaw" dress, a western woman's modernized version of Indian women's dress, with beautiful fabrics and the ubiquitous rick-rac tape decoration. She wore Indian jewelry to complement these clothes and made the style her own.

Chafin led movements in the arts, as

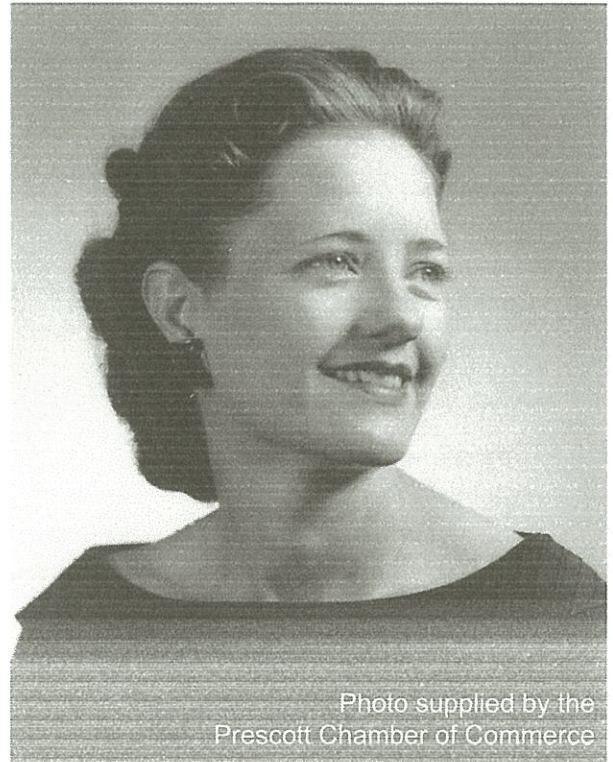


Photo supplied by the Prescott Chamber of Commerce

Dorothy Chafin, First Woman President of Prescott Chamber of Commerce, 1956

a member of the distinguished Smoki People, was a founding member of the Prescott Docents of the Phoenix Art Museum, and of the Phippen Museum, and was a member of the county fair and rodeo committees. She was also one of the first female members of the Prescott Corral of Westerners, serving as sheriff as well. As a patron of the arts, Chafin gave generously of her time, talents and material goods until the end of her charmed and charming life as an innovator, entrepreneur and a woman who met all challenges with equanimity and great panache.

Dorothy Chafin died in Prescott in 2006 and was survived by one sister, Jean McElliott of Prescott. Mary Baker, Prescott Chamber of Commerce CEO from 1976-1996 called Dorothy Chafin "one of the grand ladies of Prescott."

That she was.