

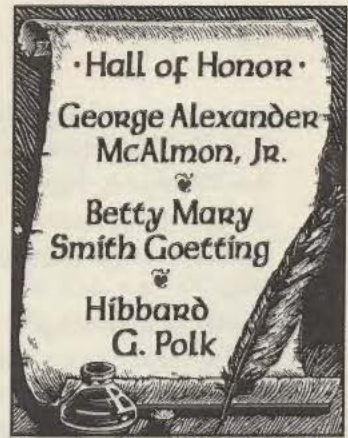


*Betty Mary Smith Goetting
Hall of Honor 2009*

• Hall of Honor •
2009

Betty Mary Smith Goetting

By Abbie Weiser



Thank you for the honor of presenting for induction tonight Betty Mary Smith Goetting, who fought for women's social, economic, and reproductive rights in the El Paso community. It is particularly special that she is being honored by the El Paso County Historical Society, as she was not only one of its founding members but also served as the Society's very first curator.

Mrs. Goetting was born in Jefferson, Texas in 1897. Her family moved to El Paso in 1910 and lived at 1009 Florence Street. Mrs. Goetting attended Lamar Grade School and graduated from El Paso High School in 1915, where she wrote for the school annual, *The Tatler*. In 1913 she began working at the El Paso Public Library and became the protégé and close friend of lead librarian, Maud Durlin Sullivan, who noticed Mrs. Goetting's love for books and history. In the 1915 edition of *The Tatler*, next to Mrs. Goetting's senior picture, her future occupation was listed as "librarian" with the quote, "Who hath not heard Betty Mary?"

Mrs. Goetting left El Paso in 1917 to attend the Riverside Library Service School in California. She also volunteered as a nurse with the Red Cross during WWI while in school. In 1918 she was appointed as an assistant at the New York Reference Library and became involved in the women's suffrage movement. After returning to El Paso in 1919, she married Charles A. Goetting, who had volunteered and served with Major Richard Burges during World War I. The Goettings had two sons, Charles A. Goetting, Jr. and Kurt E. Goetting.

During the 1920s Mrs. Goetting, along with several other young El Paso women, started a book club and later a history club under the guidance of Maud Sullivan. These clubs created and deepened lifelong friendships as well as inspired scholarly inqui-

ries into world art, history, and literature.

Deeply interested in the birth control movement and women's health issues, Mrs. Goetting began corresponding with Margaret Sanger and others in 1918 about birth control education and medical services for women. Mrs. Goetting developed a close friendship with Sanger and the two frequently corresponded. In 1937 Mrs. Goetting and Sanger, along with fifteen other women, six doctors, and several clergymen, opened the El Paso Mothers' Health Center (later called the Planned Parenthood Center of El Paso), and Mrs. Goetting was named its first president.

The Center faced much opposition from several individuals and groups. Despite this opposition, the Center served over 1100 patients during its first year. Mrs. Goetting's involvement in the birth control movement continued after her term as president of the El Paso clinic. In 1938 she retired as the Center's president, but was quickly named honorary president, and in 1950 and 1951 she worked as a member of the National Planned Parenthood Board.

Mrs. Goetting was also involved in and served the El Paso community in many other ways. In 1932 she was commended as chairman of the Women's Division of the El Paso Community Chest Council for her fundraising efforts, and during the early 1930s she acted in several local community theater productions. In 1939 Mrs. Goetting and Mrs. J. Mott Rawling helped organize a special showing of "Gone With the Wind" for African-Americans, since El Paso movie theaters were segregated.

Mrs. Goetting also served in leadership positions in many of El Paso's civic and social organizations, such as the Woman's Club of El Paso and the El Paso Women's Chamber of Commerce. In recognition of her many civic endeavors, women's rights activism, and participation in the birth control movement, Mrs. Goetting received the Margaret Sanger Award in 1966. Other honors include the Planned Parenthood Center of El Paso Leadership Award in 1968, the Presidential Award in 1970, the Pasaña Valerosa (Courageous Woman) Award for 1974 from the El Paso County Historical Society, and recognition by the El Paso Women's Political Caucus as a Pioneer in Women's Rights in 1977.

Thank you to the El Paso County Historical Society and to the Selection Committee for selecting Mrs. Goetting for entry into the El Paso County Historical Society's Hall of Honor.