

NARRATIVE TEXTS

Ann Richards, 1933-2006, Texas Governor

Astute, witty, feisty, and self-assured, Ann Richards represents the quintessential Texas woman. She was the second woman governor of the state. Her predecessor in that regard, “Ma” Ferguson, had been elected as surrogate in her husband’s stead. Ann Richards, in contrast, championed her own brand of politics.



Born in Waco to a family of modest means, Ann attended Baylor on a debate scholarship. She married her high school sweetheart, taught junior school for one year, bore four children, and for a long period served as homemaker and part-time political volunteer. In 1972 she successfully managed Sarah Weddington’s legislative campaign. Three years later she won her own race for county commissioner. As her political star was rising, her marriage was unraveling. Following an intervention, Ann entered an alcohol treatment program in 1980 and never drank again. She and her husband separated in December 1980; they would legally divorce in 1984.

In 1982 she ran for state treasurer, winning handily. She was invited as keynote speaker at the 1988 Democratic National Convention, where she famously mocked George H.W. Bush, nominee of the Republican Party: “Poor George, he can’t help it; he was born with a silver foot in his mouth.” That speech drew guffaws of delight and catapulted her into the national spotlight.

In 1990 Ann set her sights on the governorship of Texas. She won her party’s nomination in a run-off to the primary. Her Republican opponent alienated many voters with a joke about rape, and Ann won largely on the strength of the women’s vote.

She proceeded to appoint women and persons of color to positions in state government. She broadened insurance and treatment options for people suffering from substance abuse. On many issues Ann governed conservatively, such as expanding the prison system and wooing corporations to Texas. However, in a contentious stand, she vetoed a bill permitting citizens to carry concealed handguns.

Opposing her 1994 re-election bid was Republican George W. Bush, son of the man whom she had ridiculed six years earlier. Bush carefully avoided a personality contest. He won the governorship, surprising many analysts and forcing Ann Richards into political retirement.

In later years Ann worked as a lobbyist. She died six months after being diagnosed with esophageal cancer.

Quotations

Neither snow nor rain can move my hair.—Ann Richards, referring to her signature bouffant

Ginger Rogers did everything Fred Astaire did. She just did it backwards and in high heels.—From her keynote address at the 1988 Democratic National Convention

You always think Washington and New York are going to be so much harder. . . . Actually, if you can do it in Texas, you can do it anywhere.—Ann Richards discussing women in politics with columnist Molly Ivins

It is absolutely joyous to get up in the morning and feel good, to see the beauty of things around you, to live a life that isn't anesthetized, that's open to all feelings.—Ann Richards on recovery from alcoholism

Photo

ITC *San Antonio Light* Collection L-7272-14 Frame #22. Caption: “Ann Richards opens campaign headquarters in San Antonio, November 1989.”