

# Women in leadership: An untold story

*And it is the story of one woman's leadership in particular — Barbara Hackman Franklin.*

**BY LEE STOUT**

*Ed. Note:* In 1971 President Richard Nixon named Barbara Franklin to be a special assistant and charged her with the responsibility of recruiting women for executive service and leadership in government. “This was an extraordinary milestone; there had never been a person specifically tasked with such a role in the entire history of American government,” observes Lee Stout, author of *A Matter*

*of Simple Justice: The Untold Story of Barbara Hackman Franklin and A Few Good Women*, published in March 2012 by Penn State University Press. Stout, librarian emeritus of the Penn State University Libraries, chronicles how the Nixon administration expanded the role of women in the American workforce. He traces how Franklin nearly quadrupled the number of women in high-level government jobs — many of which were never before held by women, such as a member of the President’s Council of Economic Advisors and commissioner of the Atomic Energy Commission. The book also collects oral histories of many of these prominent women who describe their experiences during this “gender revolution.”

Barbara Hackman Franklin is a familiar name to *DIRECTORS & BOARDS* readers. She has written a number of thought-leadership articles for the journal over the past 20 years. Following her government service she was eagerly sought out for corporate board positions and has had a distinguished career as a corporate director and consultant on global business issues. (She returned to government service in 1992 as President George W. Bush’s Secretary of Commerce, the highest-ranking woman to serve in the Bush administration.) She currently is serving as chairman of the National Association of Corporate Directors.

Longtime *DIRECTORS & BOARDS* readers will recall her important contribution to another oral history project — the “Oral History of Corporate Governance,” a special compilation of leaders in corporate governance reflecting on the evolution of U.S. corporate boards. Published in the 25th anniversary edition of *DIRECTORS & BOARDS*, issued in 2001, Franklin recounted what it was like to be in the early wave of women joining corporate boards in the late 1970s and early ’80s, as more boardrooms were beginning to open up to female executives — an untold story in its own right (see



**President Richard Nixon** greets Barbara Franklin in the Oval Office as she joins the White House staff in April 1971.



**Barbara Franklin** (far right) gathers a number of high-ranking women on the White House lawn for this historic first photo of women appointees, April 28, 1972: (left to right) Sallyanne Payton, Ethel Walsh, Elizabeth Hanford, Jeanne Holm, Georgiana Sheldon, Rose Mary Woods, Virginia Allan, Virginia Knauer, Carol Khosrovi, Helen Delich Bentley, Paula Tennant, Jayne Spain, Brereton Sturtevant, Evelyn Eppley, and Gloria Toote.

excerpt on page 42).

What follows here are edited passages from *A Matter of Simple Justice* ([www.amatterofsimplejustice.com](http://www.amatterofsimplejustice.com)), copyright ©2012 The Pennsylvania State University Libraries, reprinted with permission of the publisher.

— *James Kristie*

**A**T HIS FEBRUARY 6, 1969, news conference, President Richard M. Nixon announced details of his upcoming European trip and then proceeded to take questions. Near the end of the news conference, which was dominated largely by foreign and defense issues, Vera Glaser, of the North American Newspaper Alliance, rose and asked, “Mr. President, in staffing your administration, you have so far made about 200 high-level Cabinet and other policy position appointments, and of these

only three have gone to women. Can you tell us, sir, whether we can expect a more equitable recognition of women’s abilities, or are we going to remain a lost sex?”

The president, in only his second formal press conference, 17 days after the inauguration, “rolled his eyes upward for a moment in a kind of sighing chagrin,” as one reporter put it. He then smiled at Vera Glaser and quipped, “Would you be interested in coming into the government?” There was some laughter, but apparently realizing that the issue, and the television audience, deserved more, he quickly added, “Very seriously, I had not known that only three had gone to women, and I shall see that we correct that imbalance very promptly.”

On April 9, 1971, Vera Glaser announced the news: “The White House is borrowing a pint-sized junior official from a New York bank to bolster

the Administration's sagging image on the female front. Barbara Ann Hackman Franklin will begin work Monday (April 12) as a recruiter of female talent for high-level administration jobs.... She is apparently expected to succeed where others have failed, in breaking down the 'women's place is in the home' philosophy of presidential advisers, which appears to have held down the number of female policy-level appointments."

Glaser did not seem to have a lot of hope for Barbara Franklin in the beginning. While discussing



**Barbara Franklin** at her desk in the White House Personnel Office.

her background and qualifications, Glaser reported that several older, more experienced women had been passed over for the job. She added that Franklin was 31 years old, about five feet tall, and, [quoting a] leading New York City woman Republican, a "very pale, delicate-looking little thing, but an excellent worker and a very bright girl."

Despite the disparaging comments, Barbara Franklin would quickly prove she had tougher mettle than Glaser's report suggested.

### Carefully crafted strategy

Barbara Hackman Franklin, who had earned a master of business administration in 1964 from Harvard, had worked first for Singer Co. and then for First National City Bank as an assistant vice presi-

dent for corporate planning. She had volunteered on the 1968 Nixon campaign in New York and in fall 1970 had been contacted by recruiter Richard Ferry to help identify women for potential appointments to the administration.

Even before Barbara Franklin's appointment, the strategy that she would implement had been carefully crafted. The initial goals were explicit:

- Double the number of women in policy-making jobs, GS-16 and above on the government pay scale, from 26 to 52.

- Appoint women to 25 percent of posts on presidential and departmental advisory boards and commissions.

- Significantly increase the number of women in midlevel positions (GS-13-15) in departments and agencies.

- Require each department and agency to come up with a plan for increasing women's roles through civil service.

On April 21, the president announced the women's initiative at a cabinet meeting and issued the directive to the departments and independent agencies to create action plans for appointing more women to top-level positions. The directive was released to the press, but the plans remained confidential while they were being finalized. Franklin spent a great deal of time working with the departments to bring them to a suitable and productive form.

Franklin's position was unique from the beginning. Although her specific mission was recruiting, it was also thought necessary that she become "visible" as a way of demonstrating the administration's commitment to women. Franklin often traveled the country, speaking to large groups and giving print and television interviews, not only about the program to recruit women, but also about the Nixon administration's larger initiatives to address women's issues. She met frequently with women's organizations and often had to respond to questions about the administration's positions on the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), child care policy, and other women's issues. Franklin increasingly, by default, found herself functioning as an advocate within the White House, as well as a spokesperson outside, on women's concerns. As she put it, "the heat is off for everybody else," and it seemed that many in the White House were relieved to have her play this role for the public. She maintained the delicate balance of presenting the administration's accomplishments without appearing to be pressuring the White House to go beyond existing policies. Actually, she would have to be successful in both aspects of her job, inside and out, to be truly effective and have an impact on the situation.

## Building the talent bank

Central to all the work that Barbara Franklin needed to accomplish was the development of the talent bank. Here she was able to take advantage of the efforts of external organizations, like the National Federation of Business and Professional Women, supplemented by a continuous flow of suggestions from others, along with unsolicited letters and resumes coming in over the transom. Her recruiting plan also listed her sources for possible names. It included women already in high-level federal positions; female White House fellows past and present; governors, senators, congresswomen, and other Capitol Hill contacts; department and agency contacts; the Citizen's Advisory Council on the State of Women and similar entities; Republican National Committeewomen; women's professional groups; and personal contacts in national search firms. There were also lists of selected women from a Civil Service Commission computer search of women holding GS-16 positions and above as well as other existing lists. Considering the huge pool of women to draw from, the plan concluded, "This effort will be continuous."

Franklin's external responsibilities not only provided publicity for the effort but also helped generate more names for the talent bank. Franklin divided the country into 10 regions, making sure to visit a "hub state" in each region and then fanning out to create a "source network" of organizations and individuals across the region to provide names.

## The vetting

All of these names needed to be vetted, biographies created, political checks done, and evaluations recorded. Those who seemed promising would be interviewed. E. Pendleton James, head of recruiting in the White House, recalled, "She had a parade of women come in and out of that office every day. And I was just astounded at this parade that I would see coming down the hall for an appointment with this Barbara Franklin. She really did a very large outreach, I think with a minimum of staff, really did develop a huge talent bank."

As always, work in the White House was pressurized, with long hours in the evening and on weekends. In that kind of environment, adding the women's issues to the mix brought fireworks on occasion.

## A forgotten chapter of progress

**M**y experience in the White House nearly 40 years ago left a deep and lasting impression. I saw firsthand the results of inequality in the workplace. I received so many letters and resumes from women who really needed a job. They were divorced or widowed, not financially secure, and simply did not have the training or skills needed for the workplace. Then, too, there were the stereotypes about what women should and should not do. Women in leadership positions were rare, and American society had not fully accepted the idea of women having both families and careers.

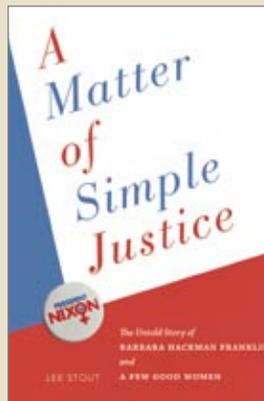
When I left my White House position two years later, I had mixed emotions. I felt good about what we had accomplished for women but knew there was still so much more to do. But I believed our society would change to make things fairer for women, though it

would take longer than we might wish.

As the years went by change did come, faster than I had originally thought. In the late 1980s, nearly two decades later, I, along with Margita White, who had also served in the Nixon White House, and Jean Rainey, began to look at what had been accomplished in the early 1970s to push women toward fuller participation in the federal government. We believed those actions opened new doors for women and prompted a ripple through

our society. This chapter of progress had been forgotten, overwhelmed by such things as President Nixon's opening to China and the Watergate scandal. We believed there was importance in telling the story of those times and the difficulties that were faced and overcome.

— **Barbara Hackman Franklin**, writing in *A Matter of Simple Justice*



Pen James reflected on the challenge Barbara Franklin faced in her responsibilities: "The government is full of male chauvinists, as we all were at that time. Barbara had to be an advocate. She had to go up against us and fight against us, because we would have candidates of the male gender for these posts.... She's undaunted. She has the courage of her convictions. And it took somebody like that to take on this charge against all types of male chauvinist opposition, overt or subtle, and really battle her way against us. I mean, we weren't against this, we just hadn't given it that much thought. And so I think whatever success the women's movement had in identifying and bringing women into the government in that time really was due to not only obviously Barbara Franklin's capability but her personality and her doggedness to get the job done."

## Needing to be 'overqualified'

The action plans of the departments and agencies, as required under the president's directive of April 21, 1971, were one of the key tools for the recruitment and placement of women into high-level positions. Barbara Franklin recalled, "These plans were not the greatest because no one had ever done this

## First foray into the corporate boardroom

*Ed. Note:* Barbara Hackman Franklin joined her first corporate board in 1979, following six years as a commissioner of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and two years, from 1971-73, as a special assistant in the Nixon administration heading a leadership effort to recruit women into senior policy and decision-making positions, the subject of the new book *A Matter of Simple Justice* (see main article). In “An Oral History of Corporate Governance,” published in 2001 by *Directors & Boards*, she talked about the early days in the 1970s when women began advancing in greater numbers into corporate boardrooms. Following is an excerpt.

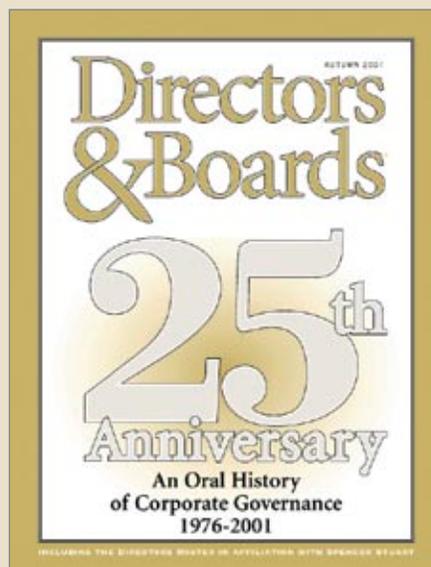
**I** was vice chair of the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) at the time when Harold Williams was chairing the Securities and Exchange Commission. I remember having lunch with him one day, and he was telling me about his interest in independent directors on boards. There wasn’t anything regulatory on this at the time, so it was all bully pulpit on his part. That was probably my first real awareness of the role of corporate boards.

I certainly don’t recall corporate governance included in any studies at Harvard, although I still find it amusing today to remember that a course taught by one of the most esteemed members of the faculty, General Georges Doriot, was closed to women. We were warned by our counseling professors not to try to sign up for that course because he didn’t take women. [*Ed. Note:* She was one of the first women to graduate from Harvard Business School, which she did in 1964.] When I ran into him many years later, I told him I had wanted to take his course and what did he think about not allowing women in his class. He looked right at me and said, “I’m damn proud of that!” [*Laughter*]

When I got into the business world with the Singer Co. and then with Citibank, I was doing financial analysis work so I would be aware of the board meetings coming up. But it was a much different world in the 1960s. It was much simpler. We did not have the pressures of a global economy. There wasn’t much board governance in evidence. The CEO was perceived as running everything.

When I stepped down from the CPSC

in 1979, there was a provision at the time that limited the commissioners from being involved for one year in the industries we regulated. Because of this conflict provision, I could not accept the first board offer I received, which was from Westinghouse. I went onto the Aetna board first since insurance and finance was not in my proscribed area. Both from my work on the Commission and from my earlier work in the government, I knew some of the people on the Aetna board.



One individual in particular was the late Hobart Taylor. He was quite an accomplished African-American gentleman who had been active in the civil rights area with the Johnson administration. He was very helpful because he would “decode” for me how the white male culture worked — something women needed to know as well.

He was also on the Westinghouse board, but with Westinghouse I think it was my visibility as a regulator that was the factor there. Bob Kirby, the chairman and CEO, was the guy who quite masterfully saved the company from the uranium debacle it got itself into. We were both graduates of Penn State University and Harvard Business School. We became friends and that’s how that association started.

Companies were beginning to look for a slightly different kind of woman director. Until that time, most of the women on boards had come from the philanthropic sector. There

just weren’t that many women around who would have fit into the board context, and I knew where they all were because I had been pounding the pavement looking for women when I was recruiting at the White House.

As I look back on these days, it was not particularly easy. But I didn’t much think about it then. You just did it. You would tread lightly as you tried hard to get up to speed quickly on the company’s businesses. I always asked to go visit plants and talk to people in the field, which I still do and which makes a big difference.

There are things that you need to have somebody tell you if you are not part of the culture. Here is one situation: If you have a concern about something, do you raise it first with the CEO or can you just bring it up in a board meeting? Well, back then the way to do it was to first raise it with the CEO. That’s the way everybody did it, although that’s not altogether true today. These are the kinds of things you learn as you go along. I’m sure that I made my share of mistakes, but at least I had the good sense to ask questions and I had friends — including some of the older men on the board who turned out to be quite helpful — to call upon to help figure out what was the appropriate behavior.

I will tell you about one incident from those early days. This was on the Westinghouse board. I raised a question about something at the very end of a meeting. One guy looked at me and said, “Barbara, why don’t you leave these things to more experienced directors.” I was real unhappy about that! I collared him afterwards and told him I didn’t think that was an appropriate comment for him to make. He apologized. I also told Bob Kirby what I had done, and he said, “You were exactly right. He was out of line.” There were some scenes like that. But with time and performance, the acceptance gradually came.

The environment and expectations are so different now. When you walk into the board, there isn’t this sort of “trial” — “Is she going to be okay?” I’m not just talking about me, but about anyone. The barriers have really fallen away in terms of gender distinction and color distinction. The expectation is that you’re there because you’ve accomplished, you’ve performed.

before. It took us a couple of iterations with most departments to get the plans to make sense, but once we had them, my office monitored progress.”

The plans opened up the opportunities for women candidates. There was never a doubt that there were qualified and capable women available. Unfortunately, as Franklin found, the reality was that “women were expected to be overqualified to be considered qualified for a given job... [to have] more qualifications than a man would have had before people were willing to risk putting him in this job.” At Franklin’s first meeting with representatives of the group Federally Employed Women, one woman gave an example of this: a male lawyer, 34, with limited relevant experience, had been named to the No. 2 spot in a new regulatory agency. What were the chances that a woman with those qualifications would have gotten that job? None, she said; any woman would have to be twice as qualified to even be considered. Franklin recalled that women “were generally undertitled and underpaid and were doing more than they were recognized for. So the women who were appointed were really good. They had already overachieved.”

### Summary of achievements

On May 14, 1973, Barbara Franklin was sworn in as a commissioner of the new Consumer Product Safety Commission and soon thereafter was named its vice chair. Before leaving the White House, however, she prepared a memo, dated May 9, 1973, on the “White House Women Recruiting Function.” In it she summarized her achievements over the previous two years. These included creating a network of sources and a talent bank of women, as well as shaping and monitoring the action plans, all of which had resulted in more than tripling the number of women in high-level jobs paying more than \$28,000 per year, from 36 to 130. In addition, she had created a public relations function to communicate these achievements and had provided “substantive input to the Domestic Council on a number of issues of concern to women,” preparing fact sheets, briefing books, and related materials.

Almost 15 months later, on August 9, 1974, President Nixon resigned from office. Yet the “genie was out of the bottle.” A fundamental change had oc-



Barbara Hackman Franklin

curred in not only the work of the government but also the attitudes of those who practiced those skills of both public administration and politics. The women’s movement continued to push for equality, and both the “din” of the crowd outside and quiet work by women like Barbara Franklin inside were necessary to move forward.

In the Ford administration, 14 percent of all new appointments were women, and the activism persisted. The Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974 was a landmark law that prohibited discrimination by sex in the granting of consumer credit. New legislation admitting women to the military service academies passed in 1975. That year was also designated by the United Nations as International Women’s Year, and the United States sent a delegation to the first World Women’s Conference in Mexico City. Both President and Mrs. Ford remained strong supporters of ratification of the ERA, as did President and Mrs. Carter. The Pregnancy Discrimination Act, passed in 1978, banned employment discrimination against pregnant women. In January 1981, at the request of women’s organizations, President Carter proclaimed the first National Women’s History Week, incorporating March 8 as International Women’s Day.

### She opened the door

The listing of achievements could continue indefinitely. What is most significant here is that many of the women leaders who played instrumental roles in effecting these changes first came on the stage during the Nixon administration, and many owe that initial opportunity to the work that Franklin began.

Although there was still resistance and many battles to fight for equality for women, a *Newsweek* magazine article could say without sarcasm, “The person in Washington who has done the most for the women’s movement may be Richard Nixon.” It was largely due to Barbara Franklin’s hard work that such a proposition could even be advanced. ■

*‘The government is full of male chauvinists. Barbara had to be undaunted. She had to go up against us and fight us.’*