Rhoda Fox Graves

First woman elected to the NYS Senate

A New York Assemblymember and suffragist, in 1934 Rhoda Fox Graves became the first woman elected to the New York Senate. Later tapped to head the powerful Agriculture Committee, Graves, who had grown up on a farm, fought hard for North Country agriculture and dairy farmers, sponsoring legislation to help farmers attain better prices for their milk.

Graves spent 14 years in the Senate as its first and only woman Senator and became the first woman to preside over the Senate. Graves sponsored legislation so that women could serve on juries and founded and led the "Owls," or Organized Women Legislators of New York.

During her time in the Assembly, Graves made headlines when she surprised a lobbyist passing out cigars to Assembly members by accepting one herself: "Mrs. Graves Takes Cigar - Woman Legislator Accepts Offer at Capitol Out of Curiosity," reported The New York Times.