

Gertrude Jensen (1903-1986)

By Katrine Barber

Gertrude Glutsch Jensen was a civic leader in the protection of the Columbia River Gorge, from the 1940s until her death in 1986. She operated as a lobbyist at the state level and eventually on the national stage through her involvement in organizations such as the Portland Women's Forum and the Oregon Roadside Council, whose board she sat on for more than twenty-five years. In 1953, Oregon Governor Paul Patterson appointed Jensen chair of the state's Columbia River Gorge Commission. During her tenure, the organization oversaw the protection of more than three thousand acres of scenic land.

Gertrude Glutsch was born into a prominent Portland family. Her maternal grandparents, William and Sophia Druck, were German immigrants who had arrived in the United States shortly after the end of the Civil War. Her parents divorced early in her childhood, and her mother and grandparents raised her. William Druck made his money, which he passed on to his three daughters, in iron working and real estate investments. The family's affluence allowed Jensen to eventually give much of her time to conservation efforts, although she also operated her own real estate brokerage during the 1930s-1950s.

Glutsch attended Reed College in 1922-1923, studying political science, but she left before completing a degree. In 1929, she married Frederic Charles Jensen, who was the deputy city attorney for Portland. The couple had a son, Frederic Charles Jensen, Jr., in 1931, but divorced a few years later. For fourteen years, Jensen freelanced as a reporter for the *Oregonian* and the *Oregon Journal*. By the late 1930s, she worked as a real estate broker.

Jensen left paid work to care for her mother, who was seriously ill. She bought a car, determined to take her mother out each day, including trips in the Columbia River Gorge. It was during these trips that Jensen saw the impact of logging on the gorge's scenic views, and she became devoted to preserving the area.

A member of the Portland Women's Forum, Jensen took her concerns to the organization, which in 1951 formed the Save the Columbia Gorge committee, with Jensen as its chair. The Forum established a Gorge initiative to promote the preservation of the scenic area and to purchase land for that purpose, including Chanticleer Point, located on the Oregon side of the Columbia River overlooking Rooster Rock State Park. The organization turned the deed over to the state, which now maintains the site as the Portland Women's Forum State Scenic Viewpoint.

Jensen's Save the Columbia Gorge committee attracted the attention of civic leaders and politicians; and in 1952, the legislature approved the creation of an advisory commission to "preserve and develop the recreational areas [of the Gorge] and its beauty." Jensen chaired the Oregon Columbia River Gorge Commission for sixteen years. During her tenure, she spearheaded the exchange of privately owned timbered lands for timbered Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management lands in less scenic regions of the state—arrangements that required cooperation among timber interests, state and federal agencies, and private landowners.

Jensen received the Conservation Service Award from the Department of the Interior in 1961 and the Distinguished Service Award from Oregon Governor Tom McCall in 1964. The Portland Women's Forum named her Woman of the Year in 1967. Toward the end of her life, she opposed the federal Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Act, which became law in 1986. She was concerned that the act would hinder locally directed preservation strategies that respected small, private interests in the Gorge.

Gertrude Jensen died in 1986. Her life's work laid the groundwork for continuing protection of the Columbia River Gorge, and the congressional act represents part of her legacy in Oregon and Washington.

Sources

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