

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

There were only a few women FBI Agents in 1972. Today, more than a thousand women are Special Agents and their numbers continue to grow. During the early years, there were approximately two women per new agents' training class. In 1991, one in five trainees were women, which increased the ranks 47 percent from 780 in 1988 to 1148 in September 1991. Eleven percent of the total agent work force are women, and 98 women occupy mid-level management positions in the GM 14/15 grade range. Women occupy managerial positions including Assistant Special Agent in Charge, Assistant Legal Attache and Squad Supervisor. The majority of women agents in management positions are supervisory agents at FBI Headquarters.

In an effort to ensure that women and minorities receive fair and impartial consideration for advancement, a professional consulting firm was hired to review the FBI Career Development Program, make recommendations, and report its findings to management.

The FBI is taking an aggressive approach toward recruitment and retention of women special agents. New programs under consideration include part-time employment opportunities for special agents and a more flexible transfer policy.

Worklife issues of concern to FBI employees, are also of concern to FBI management. Initiatives are underway to address these issues. The FBI is honored to be the host agency for the 1992 Interagency Committee's Conference for Women in Federal Law Enforcement. The year 1992 marks the 20th anniversary of legislation opening the door to women as federal law enforcement officers.

The First Female Agents

By Lynn Vines

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When two women entered on duty on July 17, 1972, in New Agents' Training Class, the media repeatedly referred to them as the "first female FBI Agents." Although that term is technically correct, there were three female agents in the Bureau of Investigation in the 1920s. When J. Edgar Hoover took over the Bureau of Investigation in 1924 (later to be renamed the Federal Bureau of Investigation), there were two women special agents on duty. They resigned shortly thereafter, but another woman agent, appointed November 1924, served until 1928.

On August 11, 1921, Attorney General H. M. Daugherty appointed Mrs. Jessie B. Duckstein for temporary service as a stenographer/typist at Bureau of Investigation headquarters in Washington, DC. Her salary was set at \$1,200 per annum payable from the appropriation for "Detection and Prosecution of Crimes." Her work was quite satisfactory, and in December of that year her salary was increased to \$1,400 per annum.

By July 1923, she had become confidential secretary to Director William J. Burns. Her salary was raised to \$2,200 per year in accordance with her job classification.

On November 6, 1923, Special Assistant to the Attorney General Martin sent a memo to Burns requesting a discussion of Duckstein's desire to be an agent. Fourteen days later the Director ordered that Duckstein's designation be changed from stenographer to special agent. Her salary as an agent was to be \$7 per day plus \$4 per diem in lieu of subsistence and expenses when absent from her office. Letters from Director Burns and Attorney General Daugherty

informed her of the promotion. She was instructed to report to the Department of Justice for the oath of office.

Mrs. Duckstein was 37 years old when she became an agent. She was a high school graduate. Her work at the Bureau, especially as secretary to the Director, was thought to be a tremendous asset for a field agent.

She was sent to New York City on December 3 to begin training. The Special Agent in Charge had no doubt that she would "develop into one of the best operatives of any investigative bureau." It was suggested that "this agent be especially assigned to study and analyze anything and everything pertaining to the so-called white slave traffic."

After completing this training Mrs. Duckstein was assigned to the Washington Field Office. In May 1924 Special Agent E.R. Bohner sent a memo to Acting Director J. Edgar Hoover saying that it was not advisable to have a woman agent assigned to that office.

On May 26, 1924, Hoover requested Duckstein's resignation with regard to a reduction of the force under the appropriation for "Detection and Prosecution of Crimes." Duckstein wrote a letter on May 27 resigning at the close of business on May 26. Her resignation was accepted by Attorney General Daugherty on May 31.

On October 11, 1922, Mrs. Alaska P. Davidson was appointed a special investigator of the Bureau of Investigation. Her starting salary was \$7 per day plus \$4 per day in lieu of subsistence when absent from her office. Salary, expenses, and per diem were paid from the appropriation for "Detection and Prosecution of Crimes."

When she entered on duty, Mrs. Davidson was 54 years old. Her education consisted of three years in

public school. Her work experience was not in the law enforcement field.

She took the required oath of office, then reported to New York City for training. The Special Agent in Charge remarked that "This lady is very refined and could not work on every investigation where a woman could be used." He advised that she be assigned only to open investigations of a class that would not be rough."

She was assigned to the Washington Field Office. There is no indication that her work was unsatisfactory. However, in May, 1924, Special Agent in Charge E.R. Bohner advised that there was "no particular work for a woman agent" in his office.

On May 26, 1924, Acting Director J. Edgar Hoover requested Davidson's resignation because of a reduction in the work force. Her resignation, effective at the close of business June 10, 1924, was accepted by Attorney General Harlan Stone.

Lenore Houston applied for the position of special agent of the

Bureau of Investigation in June 1922. She was recommended for the job in letters to Director Burns from Governor Sproul and Congressman Graham of Pennsylvania.

On October 1, 1923, Burns advised that an investigation of Miss Houston be conducted. She received glowing recommendations and on January 14, 1924, Burns appointed her a special employee. Her salary was to be \$7 per day plus \$4 a day in lieu of subsistence when absent from office of assignment, which was fixed at Philadelphia.

After taking the oath, she reported to New York City for training. The Special Agent in Charge remarked that she seemed "very anxious to learn and do everything that could be asked of a woman special agent." He suggested that she handle white slave law violations.

At the time she entered on duty she was 45 years old and single. She was high school graduate, had 3 years of college, and had completed a business course.

Congressman Graham wrote to

Director Burns on several occasions to urge that Special Employee Houston be designated a special agent. On November 6, 1924, Hoover took his advice and notified the appointment clerk to make the change.

On August 29, 1927, Miss Houston was transferred to the Washington Field Office. There her work got steadily worse. Her last performance rating said, "This agent has performed satisfactory investigative work, but her attitude in connection with her position impairs her efficiency." Her rating at that time had dropped to 76.7 percent.

Special Agent Houston submitted her resignation on October 20, 1928. She then was put on leave without pay through November 7, at which time her resignation was effective.

A report dated December 30, 1930, indicates that Miss Houston was confined to a hospital. She was suffering from hallucinations and had threatened to shoot Hoover as soon as she was released.