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SHIRLEY ABRAHAMSON

1933-2020

City: Madison

County: Dane

Shirley S. Abrahamson was the first woman justice on the Wisconsin Supreme Court and the first female chief justice in state history.

Shirley Abrahamson was born Shirley Schlanger in New York City. She earned an A.B. magna cum laude from New York University in 1953 and a J.D. with high distinction from Indiana University's School of Law in 1956. She then moved to Madison and in 1962 earned her doctor of juridical science (S.J.D.) degree in American legal history from the University of Wisconsin Law School. She practiced law in Wisconsin for 14 years and taught at the law schools of both the UW-Madison and Marquette University.

In 1976, Abrahamson was appointed to Wisconsin Supreme Court by then-governor Patrick Lucey, and she has won re-election every ten years since. From 1976 to 1993 she was the only woman on the court. In 1996, she became chief justice, a position awarded to the justice on the court who has served the longest. Abrahamson has been involved in deciding more than 10,000 petitions for review, bypasses, certifications, and lawyer and judicial discipline cases. In 2013, she became the longest-serving Wisconsin Supreme Court justice ever, breaking Orasmus Cole's previous record of 36 years and seven months (1855-1892).

Shirley Abrahamson died on December 19, 2020, after a battle with pancreatic cancer. She was 87 years old.

To learn more, visit womeninwisconsin.org/profile/shirley-abrahamson