

Two women with roots in our community have been honored as “Kentucky Women Remembered” in a ceremony held Tuesday in Frankfort, and as a part of the honor their portraits are now displayed in the Capitol Rotunda.

Lois Howard Gray was one of Kentucky’s first and most successful female entrepreneurs. She was the co-founder with her late husband of one of the country’s highly regarded construction companies, Gray Construction.

During World War II, she served as a lieutenant in WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) from 1943 to 1946. In 1960, Gray and her husband founded the James N. Gray Construction Company, a commercial construction company based in Glasgow. The company grew quickly in its early years, but the untimely death of her husband left the company without its leader.

Al Smith, renowned Kentucky political commentator and friend to Lois Gray, nominated her for the honor. Smith cited Mrs. Gray’s perseverance in the face of extraordinary challenges, as the untimely death of her husband left her to raise six children alone, and a construction company to run.

Despite being advised by auditors and business associates that a construction company was not a business for a woman, she decided to continue the family business. She and her sons took over the business and grew it into one of the top design-build contractors in the nation. Gray was honored as the 2002 National Business Woman Owner of the Year by the National Association of Women Business Owners. In addition to her successful business career, Gray was a tireless community advocate.

At age 15, Hart County native Thelma Stovall went to work at the Brown & Williamson Tobacco Co. in Louisville to help the family’s finances. Her single mother was raising two children during the Great Depression. At Brown & Williamson, Stovall began her active involvement in organized labor and remained a strong friend of the Kentucky labor unions throughout her long

career in public service.

Beginning in 1950, she advanced the status of women in Kentucky politics as the first woman to hold elective political office from Jefferson County in the Kentucky House of Representatives. She served three terms in the state House before being elected Kentucky's secretary of state for three terms: 1956-60, 1964-68 and 1972-75.

The third honoree is Mary Eugenia Wharton of Jessamine County