



# **Doris Fleeson: Incomparably the First Political Journalist of Her Time**

*Carolyn Saylor*

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"She was my idol," said columnist Mary McGrory. McGrory, in writing of women, referred to Doris Fleeson as "incomparably the first political journalist of her time." Fleeson was, in fact, the first woman in the United States to become a nationally syndicated political columnist. In 1945, with the encouragement of Henry Mencken, she launched her column. In her career she would write some 5,500 columns during the next twenty-two years. Fleeson's appearance could be disarming. Once at a party Lady Bird Johnson exclaimed, "What a gorgeous dress, Doris. It makes you look just like a sweet, old-fashioned girl." The wife of Senator Stuart Symington interjected, "Yes, just a sweet old-fashioned girl with a shiv in her hand." CAROLYN SAYLER lives in Lyons, Kansas, ten miles from the town of Sterling where Doris Fleeson was born in 1901. Knowing members of the Fleeson family, she began researching the life of the columnist whose straightforward take on Washington became a daily fix for newspaper readers across the nation. Saylor has a background in journalism as a member of a Kansas newspaper family. She is the author of a history of Manhattan, Kansas, which tells of the town's founding during the Free State struggle, its strong connections with New England, and its abolitionist college, now Kansas State University.

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