

RINCÓN DE GAUTIER, FELISA (1897–1994)

Known affectionately as “Doña Fela,” to most Puerto Ricans, the first woman mayor of San Juan, was known throughout the Americas and the world as an astute politician. Felisa Rincón de Gautier came from a political family. She lived in New York during the 1930s and worked as a seamstress, skills which she later utilized when she opened a dress shop in Puerto Rico. Active in the island’s Liberal party, Rincón de Gautier supported the vote for women in 1932. Among the founding members of the Popular Democratic party with Muñoz Marin, she served as president of the San Juan branch from 1940-1970. Selected mayor of the city, Rincón de Gautier held that position continuously from 1946 until 1968, when she retired from public office. While in office she focused on street cleaning, hygiene, historic restoration, and social services for children and the needy. She stressed open access and held extensive open houses for the city’s residents every Wednesday. An advocate of the Commonwealth status, she was also involved in New York Puerto Rican politics campaigning for politicians who ran for public office, and in U.S. Democratic party politics. At the age of ninety-five, she attended her last Democratic party nominating convention (1992), the oldest delegate at the meeting.