Roosevelt dominates survey of century’s top women

By JOHN OMICINSKI
Gannett News Service

WASHINGTON — Eleanor Roosevelt — diplomat, humanitarian, and first lady longer than anyone else — is the American woman of the century, experts and academics agree.

By a wide margin, Roosevelt (1884-1962) finished first in a survey of 319 American historians and women’s studies experts. Results are to be released Sunday by the Senia College Research Institute and the National Women’s Hall of Fame.

Chicago social worker and Nobel Peace Prize winner Jane Addams was second in the balloting for the century’s most influential woman.

Rosa Parks, who started the 1955 Montgomery, Ala., bus boycott that triggered the civil rights movement, finished third.

Christian Science founder Margaret Sanger was fourth.

Anthropologist Margaret Mead ranked fifth, and early feminist economist Charlotte Perkins Gilman was sixth.

Parks, “The Feminine Mystique” author Betty Friedan (seventh), and former Texas Rep. Barbara Jordan (eighth) were the only living women in the top 10.

“As my grandson would say, this is awesome,” said Friedan, 71, who was on hand for a briefing at the National Press Club.

Siena history professor Thomas Kelly said there was an astonishing consistency in the results, tabulated from surveys of more academics, who included 187 women.

Some of the choices weren’t familiar names, notably Gilman, who finished sixth on the list of most significant women of the century.

New Yorker Gilman founded the Women’s Peace Party in 1915 and wrote some ground-breaking books on women and economic equality. These included “Women and Economics,” “The Home” and “Man-Made World.”

Highlights: Various categories

ART: Georgia O’Keeffe; Mary Cassatt; Margaret Bourke-White; Dorothea Lange; Judy Chicago; Louise Nevelson; Diane Arbus; Helen Frankenthaler; Ann Mary Robertson.

FILM: Katharine Hepburn; Bette Davis; Meryl Streep; Marilyn Monroe; Mae West; Mary Pickford; Lillian Gish; Jane Fonda; Elizabeth Taylor; Dorothy Arzner.

LAW: Sandra Day O’Connor; Barbara Jordan; Eleanor Holmes Norton; Anita Hill; Mary Frances Berry; Catherine McKinnon; Crystal Eastman; Constance Baker Motley; Florence E. Allen; Dorothy Kenyon.

LITERATURE: Willa Cather; Edith Wharton; Pearl S. Buck; Toni Morrison; Gertrude Stein; Franney O’Connor; Eudora Welty; Zora Neale Hurston; Adrienne Rich.

TELEVISION: Lucille Ball; Mary Tyler Moore; Barbara Walters; Carol Burnett; Oprah Winfrey; Jane Pauley; Joan Ganz Cooney; Julia Child; Diane Sawyer; Debbie Allen.

SPORTS: Babe Didrikson Zaharias; Billie Jean King; Wilma Rudolph; Althea Gibson; Marti Navratilova; Florence Griffith Joyner; Jackie Joyner Kersee; Chris Evert; Gertrude Ederle; Helen Wills Moody.

WOMEN’S MOVEMENT: Susan B. Anthony; Betty Friedan; Gloria Steinem; Margaret Sanger; Carrie Chapman Catt; Alice Paul; Charlotte Perkins Gilman; Mary Church Terrell; Kate Millett; Bella Abzug.

POLITICS: Eleanor Roosevelt; Barbara Jordan; Carrie Chapman Catt; Frances Perkins; Margaret Chase Smith; Jeannette Rankin; Shirley Chisholm; Geraldine Ferraro; Patricia Schroeder; Bella Abzug.

MUSIC: Marian Anderson; Bette Davis; Ella Fitzgerald; Joan Baez; Billie Holiday;CONTREY PRICE; Bessie Smith; Sarah Caldwell; Aretha Franklin; Barbara Streisand.