

HERstory
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VOLUME III
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Anne Hutchinson

1591-1643

Considered one of the earliest American feminists, Anne Hutchinson was a spiritual leader in colonial Massachusetts who challenged male authority—and, indirectly, acceptable gender roles—by preaching to both women and men and by questioning Puritan teachings about salvation. She was tried on charges of slander against the Puritan ministers and told the court that it had "no power over my body." She was banished to Rhode Island as someone deemed "not fit for our society."



Mary Dyer

1611-1660

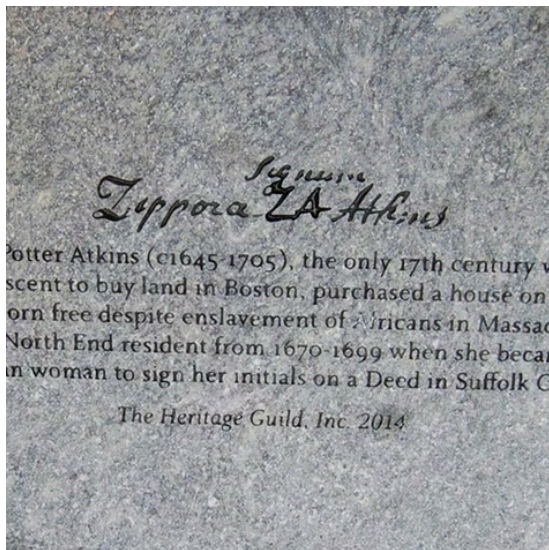
Mary Dyer was an English and colonial American Puritan-turned-Quaker who was hanged in Boston, Massachusetts Bay Colony, for repeatedly defying a law banning Quakers from the colony based on their beliefs around the indwelling of the Spirit or the "Light of Christ," which the Puritans deemed to be dangerous heresy.



Weetamoo

1635-1676

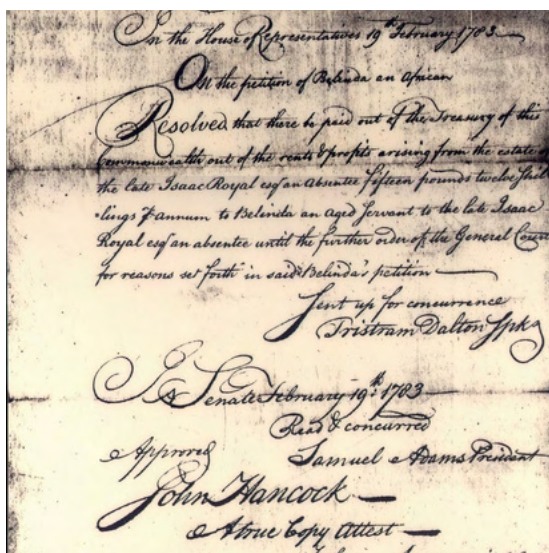
A sachem of the Wampanoag peoples in Plymouth, Weetamoo commanded an army of over 300 warriors to drive out European settlers who had begun seizing Wampanoag land. She was beloved by her people and incredibly feared by the English. She died crossing a river in battle but her story became a rallying cry for the surviving Native warriors.



Zipporah Potter Atkins

1645-1705

In 1670, Zipporah Potter Atkins purchased a home on Salem Street in Boston's North End and became the city's first African American woman landowner. She owned her property while a single woman and maintained control of her land during the course of her marriage before selling it in 1699 as the first African American woman to initiate a real estate deed in Suffolk County. The site of Atkins' house is commemorated today with a granite marker along the Greenway.



Belinda Sutton

1712-1799

Slavery was ruled unconstitutional in Massachusetts in 1783 as the Revolution ended. This gave Belinda Sutton the opportunity to petition the Legislature for reparations for the close to 50 years of unpaid labor she endured while enslaved by the Royall family in Medford. She was granted a yearly sum that she petitioned for each year. Her petition provided strong rhetoric to be used by antislavery advocates and established precedent for future reparations cases. Belinda's petition is one of the earliest narratives of an African woman in the United States.



Sarah Langley Hersey Derby

1714-1790

Sarah Derby, daughter of a local innkeeper, founded Derby Academy in Hingham in 1784 as one of the earliest coeducational schools in the country and the oldest co-educational independent school in New England. The school was established through an act of the Legislature (Chapter 32 of the Acts of 1784) which noted "the education of youth has ever been considered, by the wise and good, as an object of the highest consequence to the safety and happiness of a free people."



Margaret “Peggy” Tulip

1718–1794

Margaret "Peggy" Tulip of Lexington sued the courts to regain her freedom after she was re-enslaved despite being previously emancipated. After three trials, Margaret won back her status as a free woman in 1770 although, unlike the later Elizabeth Freeman lawsuit, Tulip's trials were not a referendum on the legality of slavery. Possibly a Charlestown native, she had also lived in Woburn before arriving in Lexington where she married an enslaved person from a neighboring farm. She was a wife, mother, and grandmother who demonstrated the challenges Black women confronted in attaining liberty.



Mercy Otis Warren

1728–1814

Mercy Otis Warren was a published poet, political playwright, and satirist during the age of the American Revolution, a time when women were encouraged and expected to keep silent on political matters. A Barnstable native and Plymouth resident, Warren engaged with the leading figures of the day such as John, Abigail, and Samuel Adams, and became an outspoken commentator and historian, as well as the leading female intellectual of the Revolution and early days of the new republic.



Judith Sargent Murray

1751–1820

A prominent essayist of the American republic, Judith Sargent Murray of Gloucester was an early advocate of women's equality, access to education, and the right to control their earnings. Judith began publishing her writing to earn her own income after her ship captain husband fell into debt during the Revolution. She authored the noted work "On the Equality of the Sexes."



Phillis Wheatley

1753-1784

Phillis Wheatley was an enslaved poet from West Africa who became the first African American author of a published book of poetry. Wheatley was a strong supporter of America's fight for independence and penned several poems in honor of the Continental Army's commander, George Washington, and for revolutionary causes in the United States. Wheatley sent one of her works, written in 1775, to the future president, eventually inspiring an invitation to visit him at his wartime headquarters in Cambridge.



Hannah Adams

1755-1831

Hannah Adams is believed to have been the first woman in the U.S. to work as a professional writer. Adams was the first professional author to be a member of the Boston Athenæum, where some of her letters, early editions of her books and her portrait are kept. Her works included a book on the diverse religions of the world and an early history of New England. Born in Medfield, she became popular in Boston high society circles and died in Brookline.



Sarah Josepha Hale

1788-1879

Poet and author Sarah Josepha Hale wrote letters to many presidents, including Abraham Lincoln, whom she persuaded to make Thanksgiving a national holiday. Starting in 1837, the Boston resident was the editor of the influential Godey's Lady's Book, the most widely circulated magazine prior to the Civil War. She was an advocate for women, campaigned for the completion of the Bunker Hill Monument, and was also the author of the nursery rhyme "Mary Had a Little Lamb."



Lucretia Coffin Mott

1793–1880

At a time when she was criticized for speaking as a woman, Lucretia Coffin Mott was an early feminist activist and strong advocate for ending slavery. A powerful orator, the Nantucket native dedicated her life to speaking out against racial and gender injustice. She was a participant in the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, the first public women's rights gathering.



Mary Lyon

1796–1849

Mary Lyon, a native of Franklin County, assisted in the founding of the Wheaton Female Seminary in Norton (now named Wheaton College) in 1834. She then established Mount Holyoke Female Seminary (now Mount Holyoke College) in South Hadley in 1837 and served as its first president or "principal" for 12 years. She prioritized low tuition rates and emphasized the importance of physical exercise for students.



Lydia Maria Child

1802–1880

Lydia Maria Child was an abolitionist, women's rights activist, Native American rights activist, novelist, journalist, and opponent of American expansionism. Originally from Medford, Child later founded a private school in Watertown and moved to Boston and Wayland. She served on the executive committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society and argued for immediate emancipation in her 1833 publication, "An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans."



Dorothea Dix

1802–1887

Dorothea Dix was an activist who drastically changed the medical field during her lifetime. She championed causes for both the mentally ill and indigenous populations. By doing this work, she openly challenged 19th century notions of reform and illness. She also served as a Superintendent of Army Nurses during the Civil War. Dix was born in Hampden, Maine, when it was still part of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and was raised in Worcester and ran a school in Boston.



Maria W. Stewart

1803–1879

An early Black feminist, Maria W. Stewart launched her public speaking career with the 1831 publication of "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality." She spoke to mixed audiences that included both women and men, Black and white, about women's rights and abolition. A writer, teacher, and activist, she received no formal education during her time as an indentured servant in Connecticut, but later attended Sunday School after moving to Boston to work as a domestic servant. Her final lectures in Boston were at the African Meeting House on Beacon Hill.



Dr. Harriot Kezia Hunt

1805–1875

Dr. Harriot Kezia Hunt was an American physician and women's rights activist who spoke at the first National Women's Rights Convention held in 1850 in Worcester. Hunt also became the first woman to apply to Harvard Medical School and, although asked to withdraw her application and then denied, she later received an honorary Doctor of Medicine from the Female Medical College of Pennsylvania. At the 25th anniversary of her medical practice, she reportedly said, "I have been so happy in my work; every moment occupied; how I long to whisper it in the ear of every listless woman, 'do something, if you would be happy.'"



Martha Coffin Wright

1806–1875

A Boston native, Martha Coffin Wright was an American feminist, abolitionist, and signatory of the 1848 Declaration of Sentiments at the first women's rights convention held in Seneca Falls, N.Y. She was 2 years old when her family moved to Philadelphia, soon joined by sister Lucretia Coffin Mott, the noted Quaker abolitionist. Wright later moved to upstate New York.



Abby Kelley Foster

1811–1887

Abby Kelley Foster was an abolitionist and radical social reformer who helped develop plans for the first National Woman's Rights Convention held in Worcester. She was also an organizer of the founding convention of the New England Woman Suffrage Association, and under the auspices of the American Anti-Slavery Society undertook the effort of organizing and financing passage of the 15th Amendment. Born in Pelham, she belonged to the Quaker Meeting in Uxbridge and later moved to Lynn and Worcester.



Harriet Jacobs

1813–1897

Harriet Jacobs was a former slave, abolitionist, and preeminent author of "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl" (1861), a major work that is featured regularly in courses on 19th century American literature. Jacobs lived in Cambridge where she ran a boardinghouse and she is buried in Mount Auburn Cemetery. Jacobs was born into slavery in North Carolina and was sexually harassed by her enslaver. After escaping to the North, she returned south during the Civil War to establish schools for former slaves.



Frances Drake

1814–1900

Born in Leominster, Frances Drake was a tireless worker in the anti-slavery movement and maintained a prominent stop on the Underground Railroad at her Leominster home. Her work furthering the cause of women set her apart from most of the abolitionists of her day. She participated in one of the most famous slave rescues in the nation during February 1851, when she helped rescue Shadrach Minkins, who was New England's first test case under the new Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. The law was supposed to appease Southern slave holders but ultimately drove a larger wedge between the North and South. Minkins' rescue brought a direct rebuke from President Millard Fillmore.



Charlotte Cushman

1816–1876

Actor Charlotte Cushman's voice was noted for its full contralto register and she was able to play both male and female parts on stage. Born in Boston, she made her first professional appearance at the Tremont Theatre across from the Granary Burying Ground downtown. Cushman made her dramatic debut as Lady Macbeth, a role that President Abraham Lincoln later watched her play in Washington, D.C. Her final performance was at the Globe Theatre on Boston's Washington Street in 1875.



Harriet Bell Hayden

1816–1893

Harriet Bell Hayden was an African American antislavery activist in Boston. She and her husband, Lewis Hayden, escaped slavery in Kentucky and became the primary operators of the Underground Railroad in Boston. Harriet and her husband owned the North Slope Boarding House at 66 Phillips St. on Beacon Hill, which was the main Underground Railroad safehouse in the city.



Maria Mitchell

1818–1889

The first female astronomer in the United States, Maria Mitchell was also the first American scientist to discover a comet, which brought her international acclaim including a gold medal from King Christian VIII of Denmark in 1848. Originally named "1847 VI," the comet was later known as Miss Mitchell's Comet. Additionally, Mitchell was an early advocate for science and math education for girls and the first female astronomy professor. Originally from Nantucket and later a Lynn resident, Mitchell is memorialized by a natural science museum, aquarium, and observatory on Nantucket.



Dr. Lydia Folger Fowler

1822–1879

Dr. Lydia Folger Fowler was the first U.S.-born woman to receive a medical degree and the first female professor at an American medical college. Born on Nantucket, she attended Wheaton Female Seminary in Norton before earning her M.D. at Central Medical College in Syracuse, N.Y. Her publications included "The Brain and Nervous System: How to Secure their Healthy Action" and "How to Secure a Healthy Spine and Vigorous Muscles." She moved to London and became active in the British Women's Temperance Association.



Charlotte Nichols Saunders Horner

1823–1906

Charlotte Horner, a Boxford native who settled in Georgetown, was one of the highly accomplished American botanists of her time. She was the first woman to give a scientific talk to the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, which had then been active for more than 50 years, and was the first person to be awarded a silver medal by MassHort for her collection of native plants. More than 1,300 botanical specimens collected by Horner remain in scientific collections generations later.



Eliza Ostinelli Biscaccianti

1824–1896

Nicknamed "The American Thrush," operatic soprano Eliza Ostinelli Biscaccianti was born in Boston as the daughter of a child prodigy musician and an Italian immigrant. She studied abroad in Italy, made her performing debut at the Astor Opera House in New York City, then returned to Boston in 1849 to rave reviews. She was credited as the first American to sing opera in Europe and also toured in California and South America. She retired to France.



Ellen Cheney Johnson

1829–1899

Ellen Cheney Johnson was a prison reformer who founded the New England Women's Auxiliary Association to the United States Sanitary Commission. She worked with homeless and vagrant women after the Civil War through the Dedham Asylum for Discharged Female Prisoners, and served as superintendent of the Massachusetts Reformatory Prison for Women at Framingham. Born in Athol, she was raised in New Hampshire before moving to Boston.



Dr. Marie Zakrzewska

1829–1902

Dr. Marie Zakrzewska founded the New England Hospital for Women and Children (later renamed the Dimock Community Health Center) in Roxbury in 1862. Until 1950, all of the hospital's staff and doctors were women. Born in Berlin, Germany, Zakrzewska was chief midwife at a hospital there before immigrating to the United States in the 1850s with her sister, Anna. She later moved to Jamaica Plain and is credited with introducing the German concept of playground sandboxes to Boston.



Emily Dickinson

1830-1886

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson was an American poet born in Amherst, Massachusetts to a prominent family. Dickinson's work is known for challenging societal norms and departing from literary conventions. She experimented with expression to free it from traditional constraints, and her writing created an elliptical language to express the possible but unrealized.



Louisa May Alcott

1832-1888

Louisa May Alcott was an author, poet, and short story writer, best known for "Little Women" and its sequels. Eager to participate in the Civil War on behalf of the Union, she sewed uniforms until reaching the minimum age for army nurses (30) and taking an assignment at a hospital in D.C. After the war, Alcott served as editor of a Boston children's magazine to help her financially strained family members pay their debts, and wrote her semi-autobiographical novel, "Little Women." She was also a dedicated abolitionist and suffragist.



Henrietta "Hetty" Howland Robinson Green

1834-1916

Businesswoman and financier Henrietta "Hetty" Howland Robinson Green was known as the "richest woman in America" during the Gilded Age. She began by contrary investing, buying when stock was low and selling when stock was high. She researched, questioned and read constantly before deciding what to invest in and what to avoid. She invested in railroads, real estate and government bonds



Anita E. Tyng

1834-1916

Anita E. Tyng, a medical doctor and surgeon, was the first woman in the U.S. to ever be listed by a hospital as specializing in surgery. Tyng was an assistant surgeon at the New England Hospital for Women and Children in Boston from around 1865 to 1866. Later practicing in Rhode Island, she was also the first woman member of the Rhode Island Medical Society, after the society initially rejected her.



Isabella Stewart Gardner

1840-1924

Philanthropist and patron of the arts Isabella Stewart Gardner travelled the world with her husband Jack exploring different cultures and collecting fine artworks and antiques. After her husband's death, Gardner purchased land in Boston's Fenway area and commissioned a grand palace-like building where she arranged a museum and also resided for the rest of her life. Besides her devotion to the arts, Gardner gave financial support to children's and animals' causes.



Ellen Henrietta Swallow Richards

1842-1911

Ellen Henrietta Swallow Richards, a native of Dunstable, was the first woman admitted to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. An industrial and safety engineer, environmental chemist, and university faculty member, her pioneering work in sanitary engineering and experimental research laid a foundation for the new science of home economics. She was the founder of the home economics movement characterized by the application of science to the home, and the first to apply chemistry to the study of nutrition.



Amanda Melvina Lougee

1842–1922

Inventor Amanda Lougee earned many patents including for electrical conduits, fireproof fabric, fireproof wire, and fireproof conductors. Her most widely used invention was for a method of covering buttons with cloth over metal; this became the precursor of political and all other kinds of advertising buttons. She worked at the Clifton Manufacturing Company in Hyde Park being one of the few women at the time in charge of such a large enterprise.



Anna Harris Smith

1843–1929

Anna Harris Smith, a Dorchester social worker, founded the Animal Rescue League of Boston in 1899 after penning an opinion piece for the Boston Evening Transcript about the need for a shelter for homeless cats and dogs. She later purchased ARL's Dedham campus to serve as a sanctuary for working horses and homeless animals.



Susan Dimock

1847–1875

One out of two women who received permission to study at Mass General in the 1860s, Susan Dimock took a three-year job as resident physician at the New England Hospital for Women and Children in Boston, where she made a powerful impression as a talented and compassionate clinician and surgeon.



Lelia Josephine Robinson

1850–1891

Lelia Josephine Robinson was the first woman graduate of Boston University School of Law. After being denied entrance to the bar, Robinson lobbied Massachusetts lawmakers and stated her case that the word "citizen" in the Massachusetts Bar statute was a gender-neutral term. She drafted a bill which was enacted by the Legislature and earned her admission to the bar in 1882. She had earlier worked as a journalist for the Boston Globe and other local newspapers.



Stefania Berlinerblau (Fanny Berlin)

1852–1921

Fanny Berlin was an American anatomist and physician. She was one of the first Jewish women who practiced surgery in the U.S. and was a co-founder of the New England Women's Medical Society, seven years before women were accepted into the Massachusetts Medical Society. She was born in Kherson in modern-day Ukraine. After studying medicine in Switzerland and Germany, Berlin moved to Roxbury and worked at the New England Hospital for Women and Children.



Helen Magill White

1853–1944

Helen Magill White, a classicist and academic, was the first woman to earn a Ph.D. in the United States. She attended Boston Latin School as the only female student at the time, was part of Swarthmore College's first graduating class, then earned a Ph.D. in Greek from Boston University in 1877.



Fannie Merritt Farmer

1857-1915

Culinary teacher Fannie Farmer is best known for her 1896 "Boston Cooking-School Cookbook." Farmer discovered her love for cooking after experiencing a paralytic stroke while a student at Medford High School and overcoming her physical condition by cooking. Her book was the first cookbook to use standardized measurements in recipes. She also had passion in teaching people the importance of diet, nutrition, and the chemical processes in food as principal of the Boston Cooking School.



Lucy Wheelock

1857-1946

Lucy Wheelock was an early childhood education pioneer within the American kindergarten movement. Wheelock was the founder and head of Wheelock Kindergarten Training School, which later became Wheelock College in Boston and is now the namesake of Boston University's college of education.



Harriet Lawrence Hemenway

1858-1960

Harriet Lawrence Hemenway cofounded the Massachusetts Audubon Society in 1896 in an effort to stop the killing of wild birds, whose feathers were used in fashion accessories. Hundreds of women joined with Hemenway and the new organization lobbied for a new state law outlawing trade in wild bird feathers. As a vice president of Mass Audubon, Hemenway provided funding for the nascent society then served on its board for 16 years.



Florida Ruffin Ridley

1861–1943

African-American civil rights activist, suffragist, teacher, writer, and editor Florida Ruffin Ridley was one of the first black public schoolteachers in Boston. She edited The Woman's Era, the country's first newspaper published by and for African-American women.



Josephine Wright Chapman

1867–1943

Pioneering architect Josephine Wright Chapman was one of fewer than 100 women architects practicing nationally in the first half of the 20th century. She was also the first woman architect in the U.S. to start her own firm, which she did in Boston in 1897. Her membership applications to the American Institute of Architects and the Boston Architectural Club were denied. Three of her local buildings are now on the National Register of Historic Places: the Winthrop Building (7 Water St., Boston), the Craigie Arms dormitory at Harvard College, and Tuckerman Hall, home of the Massachusetts Symphony Orchestra in Worcester.



Louise Parker Mayo

1868–1952

Louise Parker Mayo was a suffragette from Framingham, MA. In 1916 she went with a group of women to picket the White House carrying signs that read "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity." Mayo and the group was sentenced to 60 days in jail for their actions. However, they were pardoned by President Woodrow Wilson after serving two days. This incident brought national attention to voting rights for women and brought us closer to the creation of the 19th amendment.



Mary Parker Converse

1872–1961

Mary Parker Converse was sworn in as a Captain in the U.S. Merchant Marine in 1940 at the age of 68, making her the first woman to hold an Unlimited Tonnage Master's License. Earlier in her life, the Marion resident was a skilled navigator and skipper aboard yachts, then earned a second-class pilot's license for certain steam vessels which allowed her to command her 35-foot vessel out of Buzzards Bay. At the outbreak of World War I in 1917, she signed up with the Red Cross in Boston and became captain of the Boston chapter's entire Motor Detachment.



Elberta Futrelle Copeland

1873–1951

Elberta Futrelle Copeland took over the ownership of the State House News Service in 1913, leading press coverage of Massachusetts government at a time when women were disenfranchised. After she was denied House floor privileges and barred from the SHNS reporters' desk, she tried her case in the court of public opinion, prevailed, and became the first woman to set foot on the House floor. She was the publisher of SHNS for more than 30 years. Copeland settled in Scituate and later lived in the Hotel Bellevue on the corner of Bowdoin and Beacon streets.



Frances Perkins

1880–1965

Frances Perkins, a workers' rights advocate who served as the fourth United States Secretary of Labor from 1933 to 1945, was the longest-serving in that position. A member of the Democratic Party, Perkins was the first woman ever to serve in a presidential Cabinet.



Edith Nourse Rogers

1881–1960

Edith Nourse Rogers was an American social welfare volunteer and politician who served as a Republican in the United States Congress. She was the first woman elected to Congress from Massachusetts. Until 2012, she was the longest serving Congresswoman and was the longest serving female Representative until 2018. The VA hospital in Bedford is named in Rogers' memory.



Margaret Harwood

1885–1979

Margaret Harwood was an American astronomer specializing in photometry and the first director of the Maria Mitchell Observatory in Nantucket, Massachusetts. Harwood was the first person to observe 886 Washingtonia, a minor planet orbiting the Sun, but she was advised not to report the discovery because it was inappropriate for women to receive such public recognition. Harwood went on to be the first woman to receive an honorary Ph.D. from Oxford University and had an asteroid named after her in 1960.



Sybil Holmes

1889–1979

Sybil Holmes, a Brookline Republican, was the first woman elected to the Massachusetts Senate. Holmes was raised in Chelsea, and when admitted to the bar at the age of 21 she was reportedly the youngest woman to become a lawyer in the U.S. Holmes served on the state Commission on Unemployment and Minimum Wage and served as an Assistant Attorney General for four years prior to her election to the Senate in 1936. She later worked as a recorder in the Land Court.



Rose Finkelstein Norwood

1890–1980

Rose Finkelstein Norwood worked in many unions during her career as an organizer and served as president of The Women's Trade Union League. She fought for the rights of married women to work and keep their pay, and she campaigned for publicly funded daycare for the children of women who worked in the war industry during World War II.



Jennie D. Loitman Barron

1891–1969

Born to Belarusian Jewish immigrants, Jennie D. Loitman Barron was the first woman judge appointed for life to the Municipal Court in Boston and the first woman appointed to the Massachusetts Superior Court.



Alice Driscoll Burke

1892–1974

Alice Driscoll Burke was the mayor of Westfield from 1940 to 1943, 1954 to 1955, and 1958 to 1959. She was the first woman mayor in Massachusetts and New England.



Fanny Goldstein

1895–1961

Fanny Goldstein became a librarian in the Boston Public Library's North End branch in 1913, and by 1922 was the first Jewish head librarian of any library in Massachusetts, at the West End Branch. Through her work, Goldstein strove to help immigrant and minority children learn about their heritage.



Carmela Teoli

1897–1970

Carmela Teoli was an Italian-American mill worker whose testimony before the U.S. Congress in 1912 called national attention to unsafe working conditions in the mills and helped bring a successful end to the "Bread and Roses" strike in Lawrence. Camella Teoli Way in downtown Lawrence is named in her honor.



Cecelia Payne-Gaposchkin

1900–1979

Cecelia Payne-Gaposchkin was a British and American astronomer and astrophysicist. In her 1925 doctoral thesis she proposed that stars were composed primarily of hydrogen and helium. She was the first woman to receive her Ph.D. in astronomy from Radcliffe College.



Ruth Graves Wakefield

1903–1977

Ruth Graves Wakefield was an American chef, known for her innovations in the baking field. She pioneered the first chocolate chip cookie recipe, an invention many people incorrectly assume was a mistake.



Dorothea Leighton

1908–1989

Born in Lunenburg in 1908, Dorothea Leighton founded the field of medical anthropology, the study of the relationship between health and culture. After earning a medical degree, Leighton studied anthropology and informed her studies with fieldwork conducted with the Navajo people in Arizona and New Mexico and Yoruba people in Nigeria. She held faculty positions at several universities and was the founding president of the Society for Medical Anthropology.



Julia Child

1912–2004

*Julia Child was an American chef, author, and television personality. She is recognized for having brought French cuisine to the American public with her debut cookbook, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, and her subsequent television programs, the most notable of which was *The French Chef*, which premiered in 1963.*



Sarah Pillsbury Harkness

1914–2013

Architect Sarah Pillsbury Harkness was one of seven founding members of The Architects Collaborative (TAC), the team-based practice established with Walter Gropius in 1945 in Cambridge, Massachusetts.



Dorothy Burnham

1915–Present

Civil rights activist and microbiologist Dorothy Burnham played leading roles in many organizations, including support groups for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Women for Economic and Racial Equality, Women's International League for Peace & Freedom.



Mary Pratt

1918–2020

Mary Pratt was a pitcher who played from 1943 through 1947 in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. Pratt has been inducted into the New England Sports Museum, Boston University Hall of Fame, and Boston Garden Hall of Fame.



Zara Cisco Brough

1919–1988

Zara Cisco Brough, also called Princess White Flower, served as the Chief of the Nipmuc Nation, a state-recognized tribe in Massachusetts, from 1962 until 1987. She is best known for her work to preserve Nipmuc heritage.



Eunice Kennedy Shriver

1921–2009

Philanthropist Eunice Kennedy Shriver was the founder of the Special Olympics, a sports organization for persons with intellectual disabilities. For her efforts on behalf of disabled people, she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1984.



Sarah Caldwell

1924–2006

Sarah Caldwell moved to Boston in 1952 and became head of the Boston University opera workshop. In 1957 she started the Boston Opera Group with \$5,000. This became the Opera Company of Boston, where she staged a wide range of operas and established a reputation for producing difficult works under pressure. She was also known for putting together interesting variations on standard operas.



Lillie Jefferson

1924–2014

Lillie Jefferson played a pivotal role in the permanent establishment of the METCO (Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity) program, ensuring greater access to quality education for students of color in Massachusetts.



Katherine "Kay" Fanning

1927–2000

Kay Fanning, a graduate of Smith College in Northampton, was the first woman editor of a national newspaper in the U.S. when she took the helm of the Christian Science Monitor in Boston in 1983. An Illinois native, she started her journalism career at a daily paper in Anchorage, Alaska where she balanced her new reporting career with life as a single mother. Fanning moved to Boston and edited the Monitor for five years before resigning in 1988 in protest of planned drastic cuts to the size of the newspaper and newsroom.



Barbara Walters

1929–2022

Boston native Barbara Walters was a world-renowned broadcast journalist and television personality. She began her career as a writer and producer for NBC's Today show before making history in 1976 as the first woman to co-anchor an evening news broadcast on ABC's Evening News. In the late 1990s, Walters created the popular daytime talk show The View, which she co-hosted until 2014. Known for her bold and insightful 20/20 interviews with U.S. presidents, global leaders, and celebrities, Walters earned multiple Emmy Awards and was inducted into the Television Hall of Fame for her groundbreaking work in journalism.



Sarah-Ann Shaw

1933-2024

"Sugar Hill" native and TV reporter, Sarah-Ann Shaw, was best known as the first female African-American reporter to be televised in Boston and was especially noted for her coverage of Boston's school desegregation. As a reporter she fought to change the media narrative that traditionally casted Boston's Black and Brown communities in a negative light. She was also known for her presence in civil rights movements and served as a community organizer, fighting alongside prominent activists including Melnea Cass.



Myrna Vázquez

1935-1975

Myrna Vázquez helped found the Villa Victoria Center for the Arts, the art component of Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA Boston), and the annual Puerto Rican Festival.



Anne Everest Wojtkowski

1935-2014

As a math and engineering professor at Berkshire Community College, Anne Everest Wojtkowski sued over pay discrimination, and her analysis led the Massachusetts Teachers Association to join the suit. This case expanded to include female faculty and professionals in all Massachusetts community colleges. The suit was settled in 1992 for \$10.6 million, deemed a giant advancement for women's equity in the workplace. Wojtkowski was the first woman to enter the engineering program at Boston University, where she earned a degree in aeronautical engineering in 1956. She was elected mayor of Pittsfield in 1987 as the first woman to hold that office.



Kitty Dukakis

1936–2025

Kitty Dukakis, the longest-serving first lady of Massachusetts, used her prominence as a political spouse to share her personal struggles with depression and pill and alcohol addiction. Her mental health advocacy led to the Shattuck Hospital in Boston naming an addiction treatment center in her honor, and she ran a support group for people living with depression. She co-chaired the Governor's Advisory Committee on the Homeless and displayed strength in the face of personal attacks and rumormongering from her husband's political rivals. The first Jewish spouse of a major presidential candidate, she raised awareness of the Holocaust and was moved to advocate for refugees, traveling to Thailand to help Cambodian refugees come to the U.S.



Madeleine Albright

1937–2022

Born in Czechoslovakia, Madeleine Albright's family moved to the United Kingdom and then to the U.S. in 1948. She became a naturalized U.S. citizen while attending Wellesley College, where she majored in political science on a full scholarship. President Bill Clinton appointed Albright as secretary of state, and from 1997 to 2001 she was the first woman to hold that Cabinet post.



Caroline Chang

1940–2018

Caroline Chang, a lifelong activist and community leader in Boston's Chinatown, was known for her work as an interpreter, manager of Chinatown's Little City Hall, and as a high-ranking civil servant. For more than two decades, she served as regional manager for the Office for Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. She had earlier worked as an equal opportunity specialist while attending Suffolk University Law School. One of her first jobs was as a flight test scientist at Avco Corp in Wilmington, where she used radar and optical data to analyze the trajectories of test missiles.



Mary Ellen Welch

1941–2019

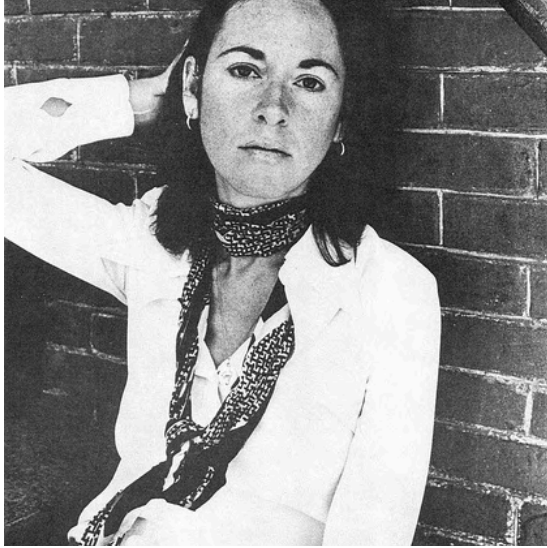
Activist and teacher Mary Ellen Welch advocated for civil rights and affordable housing, and against the impacts of airport expansion felt by many East Boston residents such as noise and air pollution. She led East Boston's Neighborhood of Affordable Housing (NOAH) as its first president and was a founder of the East Boston Greenway Council. The neighborhood greenway for which she advocated was named in her memory.



Bobbi Gibb

1942–Present

Roberta "Bobbi" Gibb was the first woman to run the whole Boston Marathon, boldly breaking into the gender-restricted men's division race and completing the course on Patriots' Day 1966. Gibb disguised herself until she was recognized as a woman and was supported to keep running. She finished with a time of 3:21:40, ahead of around two-thirds of the runners.



Louise Glück

1943–2023

Poet and essayist Louise Glück won the 2020 Nobel Prize in Literature and was praised by the judges for her "unmistakable poetic voice that with austere beauty makes individual existence universal." A Cambridge resident, she pointed in her Nobel lecture to fellow Massachusetts poet Emily Dickinson as an early influence.



Natalie Jacobson

1943–Present

Natalie Jacobson broke new ground as the first woman to fill a highly-prized anchor seat on a Boston evening newscast, starting in 1976 on WCVB-TV Ch. 5. She was also described as a role model for working mothers, balancing her career with an active home life. Jacobson anchored newscasts for more than three decades and became synonymous with trusted TV news in New England.



Margaret H. Marshall

1944–Present

Chief Justice Margaret Marshall served as the 24th chief justice of the Supreme Judicial Court, the first woman to hold the position. She was appointed to the court as an associate justice in 1996 after Justice Ruth Abrams, the first woman member of the SJC, encouraged her to apply. Marshall was elevated to chief in 1999. Raised in South Africa, Marshall was an anti-apartheid activist who left her native country to escape political persecution. She worked as a lawyer in Boston and as general counsel to Harvard University.



Therese Murray

1947–Present

Sen. Therese Murray was the first woman chosen by her peers to lead the Senate as president, in March 2007. She joined the Senate in 1993 as a Democrat representing the Plymouth and Barnstable District and chaired the Senate Committee on Ways and Means from 2003 to 2007.



Christa Corrigan McAuliffe

1948–1986

Christa McAuliffe expanded what was possible for women and schoolteachers with her effort to travel into space aboard the Space Shuttle Challenger. A graduate of Marian High School in Framingham and Framingham State College (now Framingham State University), she was the first teacher who was selected from 11,000 applicants for the NASA Teacher in Space Project. A high school social studies teacher in Concord, N.H. in 1986, she was set to conduct experiments and teach lessons from space before the shuttle tragically broke apart shortly after launch.



Suzanne Lee

1950–Present

Activist Suzanne Lee was lead founder and longtime chair of the Chinese Progressive Association (Boston), a founding member of the Massachusetts Asian American Educators Association, and a member of the Massachusetts Advisory Council on Bilingual Education and the English Language Learners Task Force for the Boston Public Schools.



Denise Boudrot Hopkins

1952–2010

Denise Boudrot Hopkins became the first woman jockey to win a meet title when she captured the autumn riding title at Suffolk Downs in 1974. Riding as Denise Boudrot, she was an apprentice jockey at Suffolk Downs. Nicknamed "Longshot Lady," she racked up five wins on one day during the fall meeting and finished with more victories than any other jockey. She won more than 1,000 races in 13 years on the New England circuit and retired in 1985. Born in Burlington, she started riding horses as a child with a 4-H Club and later lived in Duxbury.



Jessie "Little Doe" Baird

1963–Present

Jessie "Little Doe" Baird is a linguist who helped revive the Wampanoag or Wôpanâak language of her ancestors. The language had not been spoken for more than 150 years when Baird began experiencing dreams about meeting her ancestors and hearing their language. She cofounded the Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project in Mashpee, a joint effort of the Mashpee, Aquinnah, Assonet, and Herring Pond Wampanoag communities, and has served as director since 1993.



Sunita "Sunni" Williams

1965–Present

NASA Astronaut Sunita "Sunni" Williams broke the record for most hours spacewalking for a woman, and in 2025 returned back to earth after nine months in space. A veteran U.S. Navy pilot, she began astronaut candidate training in 1998 and was first launched to the International Space Station in 2006. In 2007, Williams was an entrant in the Boston Marathon -- and ran it in space, the first person to do so, finishing with a time of 4:24. A graduate of Needham High School, the Sunita Williams Elementary School in Needham is named after her.



Jenny Thompson

1973–Present

Competitive swimmer Jenny Thompson is one of the most decorated Olympians in history with twelve medals, including eight gold medals, in the 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004 Summer Olympics (in Barcelona, Atlanta, Sydney, and Athens). Born in Danvers, Thompson started swimming at age 7 at a country club in Groveland and then during the indoor season at the YMCAs in Danvers and Andover–North Andover. After earning a medical degree from Columbia, she completed an anesthesiology residency at Brigham and Women's Hospital and a fellowship in pediatric anesthesiology at Children's Hospital of Boston.



Allison Feaster

1976–Present

WNBA star forward–turned–Celtics executive Allison Feaster was selected as a first-team All-Ivy League player each of her four years on Harvard College's women's basketball team. The South Carolina native was the first athlete in any sport to be honored as Ivy League Player of the Year three times, after also having been Ivy League Rookie of the Year. Feaster graduated Harvard in 1998 and went on to play for WNBA teams in California, North Carolina, and Indiana, as well as play professionally around Europe. She joined the Boston Celtics in 2020 and serves as vice president of team operations and organizational growth.