



Women in History



Setting Type, Saving Her Family

Ann Smith Franklin was one of those Franklins. The wife of printer James Franklin — Benjamin’s brother — she was America’s first female newspaper editor.

Ann Franklin was widowed at age 39 in 1735. Left to raise her children, she took what she learned of the printing trade from James and set out on her own. Her 1736 plea to the General Assembly reads, “Whereas your petitioner being left with several small children which is a great charge to her, and having not sufficient business at the printing trade, humbly prays your Honors will grant her the favor to print Acts of the Colony and what other things shall be lawful and necessary to be printed, in order for your petitioner’s support and maintenance of her family, she having no other way to support herself.”

She got the job, and supplemented that income by printing pamphlets, sermons and other works. Ann revived her husband’s Rhode Island Almanac, becoming the first woman to publish an almanac in America, and also sold her brother-in-law’s more famous Poor Richard’s Almanac.



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Ann eventually went into business with her grown son, James Jr., until his death in 1762. At age 65, she took up her type trays again and became sole proprietor of The

Newport Mercury, Rhode Island’s first newspaper. Despite failing health, she never missed an issue before her death in 1763. Her obituary, which ran in the Mercury,

said she “supported herself and her family, and brought up her children in a genteel manner.”

She was the posthumous recipient of the Yankee Quill

Award (2008), which recognizes a lifetime contribution to journalism in New England, and was inducted into the University of Rhode Island Journalism Hall of Fame.

Medical Firsts

While women tended their families' illnesses for hundreds of years, the first women to become respected medical professionals waited until the 1850s.

Born in England, Elizabeth Blackwell moved to the United States in 1832, eventually settling in Cincinnati in 1838. She started a school with her sister Anna, and continued to make her living teaching various subjects while she saved for medical school.

"My mind is fully made up," Elizabeth Blackwell wrote. "I have overcome stronger distastes than any that now remain, and feel fully equal to the contest. As to the opinion of people, I don't care one straw personally."

She was accepted into Geneva Medical College (Hobart College) in 1847 by a unanimous vote of the all-male student body. Elizabeth studied typhus and worked in poorhouses, graduating in 1849, and continuing her education in Europe. While treating an infant for an eye infection, she contracted it herself and eventually lost her left eye. She continued to practice, however, removing to London to practice at St. Bartholomew's Hospital.

"(An administrator at the hospital), who is very cordial, tells me that I shall have to encounter much more prejudice from ladies than from gentlemen in my course," Elizabeth wrote in 1850 before returning to New York. "I am prepared for this. Prejudice is



Emeline Roberts Jones

more violent the blinder it is, and I think that Englishwomen seem wonderfully shut up in their habitual views. But a work of the ages cannot be hindered by individual feeling. A hundred years hence women will not be what they are now."

Emeline Roberts Jones learned dentistry from her husband, Daniel, who grudgingly accepted her as an assistant after she studied and practiced on teeth he had extracted. Daniel died in 1864, and she continued to practice on her own, traveling around Connecticut and Rhode Island with a portable dentistry chair before settling into her own practice in New Haven, Connecticut. Her son followed her into the practice, earning a



DDS from Harvard and a medical degree from Yale.

She served on the Woman's Advisory Council of the World's

Columbian Dental Conference and, in 1883, was elected to the Connecticut State Dental Society and became an honor-

ary member of the National Dental Association. Jones was the 18th dentist licensed in Connecticut.

First Female Medal of Honor Recipient



Mary Edwards Walker was a volunteer Civil War surgeon for the Union — the first woman surgeon in the army.

She held a rank equivalent to that of lieutenant or captain, and served at the Battle of Bull Run; at a Washington, D.C., hospital; in Chattanooga, Tennessee, after the Battle of Chickamauga; and was held as a prisoner of war.

In April 1864, Walker was arrested after crossing Confederate lines to treat wounded civilians. She spent four months as a prisoner of war, suffering an injury that left her with per-

manent muscular atrophy.

After the end of the war, Walker returned to private practice. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman and Gen. George Henry Thomas recommended her for the Medal of Honor, writing that she “has rendered valuable service to the government, and her efforts have been earnest and untiring in a variety of ways,” and “devoted herself with much patriotic zeal to the sick and wounded soldiers, both in

the field and hospitals, to the detriment of her own health.”

The award was granted by President Andrew Johnson in 1865, making her the only woman to have received the award and only one of eight civilian recipients. That civilian status led to the revocation of the award in 1917, but Walker insisted on wearing hers until she died in 1919. Rebellion and Walker weren’t strangers; she also dressed in mascu-

line clothes, which she called more hygienic and which also got her arrested more than once for dressing like a man; fought for abolition of slavery, prohibition of alcohol, and for women’s right to vote.

President Jimmy Carter restored Walker’s medal in 1977, partially thanks to efforts by her family. Of the 910 recipients to have their medals taken away, she is one of only six to have regained the award.

Stratospheric Ambition

All her life, people told Jeannette Ridlon Piccard that she couldn't. She couldn't fly. She couldn't be a priest. And all her life, Piccard proved them wrong.

Piccard grew up in Chicago and harbored a lifelong interest in science and religion, saying as young as 11 that she wanted to be an Anglican priest and later, in college at Bryn Mawr, writing an essay challenging the church on priesthood for women. She went on to earn a masters in organic chemistry in 1919 and a doctorate in education from the University of Minnesota.

Her husband, Jean, came from a family of balloonists and was the twin brother of Auguste Piccard, noted submariner and balloonist. Jean taught Jeannette how to pilot a balloon and, in 1934, she became the first woman licensed balloon pilot in the U.S., with hopes to reach the stratosphere. Usual Piccard family backers the National Geographic Society, Goodyear, and Dow Chemical balked at paying for a woman piloting the attempt. The Piccards found other backers, however, and sold commemorative ephemera and press releases.

Jeannette took flight Oct. 23,



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1934, with Jean and their pet turtle in the reconditioned Century of Progress, the world's largest balloon specially built for the World's Fair in 1933. The balloon sported several of Jean's inventions, like fog-free windows. They lifted off from Ford Airport in Dearborn, Michigan. Despite some unplanned maneuvers, the Piccards eventually reached an altitude of 57,579

feet during an eight-hour flight over Lake Erie. Jeannette landed near Cadiz, Ohio, in a stand of trees, dooming the Century of Progress and injuring Jean. Jeannette's altitude record would stand for 29 years until the Soviet Union's Valentina Tereshkova orbited Earth in Vostok 6 in 1963.

Jeannette and Jean didn't return to the stratosphere, bouncing around jobs in aca-

deme and consultancies. Jean died in 1963, and Jeannette moved to Houston to consult for NASA. I

But she didn't stay away from controversy. Jeannette fulfilled her 11-year-old dream and was ordained an Episcopalian priest in 1974 at age 79 -- the first woman ordained as a priest in the U.S. She was part of the Philadelphia Eleven, a group of

women ordained as part of an irregular service. She served as a deacon or irregular priest at St. Philip's Episcopal Church in St. Paul, Minnesota, a volunteer chaplain at St. Luke's Hospital, and an assistant pastor at the Episcopal Church on Maccubin. She was also an honorary member of the Seabury-Western Theological Seminary board of trustees. She died in 1981 at 86.

All On Her Own

There have been other women to govern states in U.S. history, but Ella T. Grasso, the 83rd governor of Connecticut, is the first to be elected without having first been the spouse or the widow of a governor. She served from 1975 to 1980.

Grasso was born in Windsor Locks, Connecticut, to Italian immigrant parents. She graduated from Mount Holyoke College with a bachelors (economics and sociology) and masters degree (economics) before becoming assistant director of research for the War Manpower Commission of Connecticut. She also worked for the Connecticut Democratic Party as a speech-writer.

She won her first election in 1952, elected to the Connecticut General Assembly, where she served until 1957, becoming the first woman elected floor leader in 1955. She won election as secretary of state of Connecticut and again in 1962 and 1968, holding several positions with the Democratic National Convention during that time. Grasso was elected to Congress in 1970 and 1972.

Grasso was elected governor in 1974, defeating

Republican Robert Steele. She was known for her economy, even returning a \$7,000 raise she couldn't legally refuse and driving her own car. She was well-known for her handling of a blizzard in 1978, effectively closing the state to allow emergency workers to deal with the storm and make recovery easier. That year, she was re-elected easily. She didn't finish that term; Grasso resigned on New Year's Day 1980 to battle ovarian cancer, which eventually claimed her life in 1981.

President Ronald Reagan awarded Grasso the Presidential Medal of Freedom shortly after her death and, in 1992, she was inducted to the National Women's Hall of Fame. Roads and schools across Connecticut are also named for her, and the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame created civic and public service programs that bear her name.

“It is not enough to profess faith in the democratic process; we must do something about it.”

— Ella T. Grasso



Policewoman's Badge No. 1

On Sept. 12, 1910, Kansas minister and social worker Alice Stebbins Wells put on her hand-sewn, floor-length uniform and picked up a Los Angeles police rule book, a telephone box key, and a first aid book to become the first American-born police officer in the country.

Wells joined the force after petitioning Los Angeles officials for women police officers to better serve women and children who were victims of crime. While most police forces employed women to take care of women prisoners, none had women actually out fighting crime. She worked with the LAPD's first juvenile officer and questioned young women and supervised skating rinks and dances, and is the first woman to hold powers of arrest. According to the department, Wells was charged with "suppression of unwholesome billboard displays, searches for missing persons, and the maintenance of a general information bureau for women seeking advice on matters within the scope of police departments."

Unlike her male counterparts, she didn't carry a gun, but she had an unflagging determination that women had a place on a modern police force. She founded the International Association of Police Women and the Los Angeles Social Hygiene Society, where she supported sex education in the city. Wells was also the first president of the Women's Peace Officers Association of California.

Her efforts lead to more women on police forces around the country and even abroad. The University of California created the first course dedicated to the work of female police officers in 1918. By 1934, Wells was a sergeant serving as LAPD historian. There were 39 female officers on the Los Angeles police force by 1937, and five more in reserves. She retired from the LAPD on Nov. 1, 1940.

Wells died in 1967. Serving as pallbearers at her funeral were high-ranking members of the LAPD and fellow policewomen. Her funeral was escorted by a full-dress honor guard of policewomen.



Shooting for the Stars

Miss Mitchell's Comet, C/1847 T1, soared before the eyes of Maria Mitchell on Oct. 1, 1847. She correctly pinpointed the hurtling chunk of stellar ice and stone, winning a prize from Denmark's King Frederick VI, himself an amateur astronomer.

Maria was raised in a Quaker household. One of the tenets of that faith is intellectual equality between men and women, and William Mitchell taught his daughter astronomy with his personal telescope. She helped him calculate an eclipse at the age of 12.

Maria was initially hesitant to report it because she feared not being taken seriously because she was a woman, she eventually did so at the urging of her father, William. That delay nearly cost her King Frederick's prize; Italian astronomer Francesco de Vico spotted the same comet days after Maria, but reported it first. After an investigation, Maria was awarded the gold medal prize in 1848.

The medal rocketed her to fame. She became the first woman elected a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1848 and of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1850, and was one of the first women elected to the American Philosophical Society. Maria was the first person named to the faculty of Vassar College, where she and her students tracked and photographed sun spots, making the first regular photographs of the sun. She taught at Vassar until her retirement in 1888, at one point insisting on and getting equal salary to male professors.

Maria's 200th birthday will be celebrated Aug. 1. The Maria Mitchell Association (<https://www.mariamitchell.org>) in Nantucket, Massachusetts, is celebrating the date with a series of lectures and events. Celebrate by attending one of those, or get the family out to a local observatory to see how close the stars really can be.

