

## **EARLY AMERICAN HER-story**

### **1587, Virginia Dare**

- First English child born in the territory of the United States
- Puritan settlers from England had strong religious and a strong societal structure. It was believed that a woman was subordinate to her husband and should dedicate her life to rearing children
- German and Dutch colonies varied from their English counterparts when it came to women's roles. In German communities often women were permitted to work in the field and stables and were *even* allowed to own their own clothes and other small items

### **1612, Pocahontas**

- Was taken prisoner by colonists at the age of seventeen. She married planter John Rolfe in 1614, which is documented as the first interracial marriage in American history
- 1619, Jamestown - 90 young single women from England went to become wives of the men there. The women were auctioned off for 150 pounds of tobacco each to be paid to the shipping company to cover the cost of each woman's travel to America. Such women were called "Tobacco Brides". This was the first of many such shipments.

### **1620, The Mayflower Arrives**

- 102 people aboard. There were:
  - 18 married women traveling with their husbands
  - 7 unmarried women traveling with their parents
  - 3 young unmarried women
  - 1 girl
  - 73 men
  - $\frac{3}{4}$  of the women died in the first few months confined to the damp and crowded quarters of the ship.
- 4 women were left alive by the time of the first Thanksgiving
- Women of the Mayflower Project, sponsored by the General Society of Mayflower Descendants is an active organization, working to identify the maiden names and families of the wives of the male passengers on the Mayflower. As of 2010 all but three identities are lost to time.

### **1630, Anne Hutchinson**

- Was a puritan spiritual adviser and mother of 15 children.
- Massachusetts Governor John Winthrop, criticized her for having "a very voluble tongue, more bold than a man."
- She is considered one of the founders of the colony of Rhode Island, and was the first to establish complete separation of church and state and freedom of religion in what would become the United States.
- She also exposed the subordination of women in the culture of colonial Massachusetts. She challenged the belief that women were born into a more sinful state than men, and she invited women to study the

Bible on their own, without relying on the interpretations of male ministers. She was tried in court because of her religious beliefs, which varied from those of the Puritans. She eventually settled with her family in the Dutch colony that is now known as New York.

- In 1643 After Anne's husband died, she moved, with her children, to an area now known as Pelham Bay, New York (part of the Bronx as it is now known). In what was perhaps a case of mistaken identity, Anne and most of her family, were massacred by members of the Siwanoy tribe.

### **1700's and Motherhood<sup>1</sup>**

- Motherhood was the primary role filled by all but a very few women in colonial Middletown. Yet as common as bearing and rearing children might have been, they often proved difficult, physically and emotionally draining, and even downright deadly for the weak of body or faint of heart. The experience of one Middletown woman, Sarah Stow Starr, illustrates the triumphs and tribulations typically encountered by a married woman 250 years ago.
- Sarah Stow was 17 years old when she married 21- year-old tailor Jehosaphat Starr on November 24, 1737. As was frequently the case, Sarah became pregnant almost immediately after the wedding, and the couple's first child, a son named Jabez, was born on August 14, 1738, a respectable 38 weeks after his parents' marriage. Sarah would experience 10 more pregnancies over the course of the next 24 years, delivering her last baby in 1762, when she was 42. The longest gap she experienced between childbirths was just three years and five months; the shortest was one year and four months.
- For a woman to give birth to half a dozen or more babies at intervals of two years or so was a common scenario for that era. There was no reliable method of birth control, save for a degree of protection that nursing a baby provided. And even if some means of limiting the number of children had been available, it is unlikely that many couples would have taken advantage of it.

### **1731 Martha Dandridge Custis Washington, the *first*, "First Lady" of America (YES)**

- Martha was born in Virginia. She was the eldest of three brothers and five sisters. She married Colonel Daniel Parke Custis in 1750.
- Martha and Daniel Custis had four children: Daniel, born in 1751; Frances, born in 1753; John (Jacky) born in 1755; and Martha (Patsy), born in 1756 or 1757. Daniel died at the age of three. Frances died at four years of age. When Martha Custis was only 26 years old, her husband died suddenly. She would go on to lose her teenage daughter Patsy to what was probably typhus.
- Martha married Colonel George Washington January 6, 1759.
- George Washington was inaugurated president on April 30, 1789

### **1746, Lucy Terry, the first known author of African American literature<sup>2</sup> (YES)**

- Lucy Terry, a slave, composes Bars Fight, the first known poem by an African American. A description of an Indian raid on Terry's hometown in Massachusetts.
- Lucy Terry Prince was kidnapped in Africa as an infant and sold into slavery in Rhode Island. At the age of five, she became the property of Captain Ebenezer Wells of Deerfield, Massachusetts. Around the age of sixteen Lucy Terry responded to a 1746 Indian ambush of two white families in a section of town known as "the Bars" by composing the ballad poem "Bars Fight," which earned her local acclaim. She remained enslaved until 1756, when Obijah Prince, a prosperous free black man, purchased her freedom and married her.
- In 1760 the Princes moved to Guilford, Vermont, where Lucy Terry Prince gained local renown as a storyteller and orator while educating her six children. A courageous, eloquent activist, Prince worked hard not only to survive economically but also to protect her family from racist harassment and vandalism. She agitated, unsuccessfully, for her oldest son to be admitted to

Williams College.

### **1753, Phillis Wheatley<sup>3</sup>**

- Despite being an African slave, Phillis Wheatley was one of the most renowned poets in pre 19<sup>th</sup> century America.
- She was taken from Senegal/Gambia, West Africa and brought to Boston, where she was purchased by prominent colonist John Wheatley
- Due to her maturity, she was taught to read and write and became the first significant Black poet in America
- Her themes include celebration of America as well as commentary on the institution of slavery.
- It is documented that Wheatley wrote about 145 poems during her lifetime.

### **1754, Molly Pitcher<sup>4</sup>**

- Molly Pitcher, born as Mary Ludwig Hays McCaully, was a Revolutionary heroine born near Trenton, New Jersey.
- She joined her husband at the Battle of Monmouth during the American Revolution and served heroically when her husband collapsed during battle
- She earned the nickname of “Molly Pitcher” because she carried pitchers of water for the American troops and for the cooling cannons. After her husband collapsed, she supposedly continued firing the cannons.
- She was also a revolutionary women due to her unconventional nature at the time because she swore like a man and chewed tobacco.

### **1788, Sarah Josephina Hale<sup>5</sup>**

- Despite her limited education, Sarah J. Hale was a prominent woman in the advancement of women through journalism through her publication of Godey’s Lady’s Book, along with her husband, which was one of the most influential magazines of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- Her greatest mission was to help the education of women, and covered topics including health, architecture, gardening, beauty, and literature from Edgar Allen Poe and Ralph Waldo Emerson.
- Hale was a revolutionary during her era because she was radical in advocating for equal education for women and men, and proclaiming that women must first receive the proper education before fulfilling their missions.

### **1801, Rebecca Gratz**

- In 1801, at the age of 20, she helped establish the Female Association for the Relief of Women and Children in Reduced Circumstances, which helped women whose families were suffering after the Revolutionary War.
- Perhaps her most significant accomplishment was the founding of the Hebrew Sunday School Society, the first of its kind in America, and the model for all Jewish education in America.
- The Female Hebrew Benevolent Society remains the oldest Jewish charity in continuous existence in the United States.

## 1806, Sacagewea<sup>6</sup>

- A Native American woman who helped lead Louis and Clark on their exploration of the West. She acted as their guide and interpreter for thousands of miles from North Dakota to the Pacific Ocean, during many of which she was either pregnant or carrying a baby on her back.
- Sacagewea was the daughter of a Shoshone chief but was kidnapped at the age of 10 by a rival tribe. She was then purchased by a French trapper, Toussaint Charbonneau, who she later wed. It was through Charbonneau that Sacagewea was connected with Louis and Clark.

## 1810, Ernestine Rose

- Ernestine Louise Potowski was the daughter of the village's rabbi, in the ghetto of Piotrkov, Poland. She rejected an arranged marriage at 16, and left her home within a year, traveling at first to Germany, then Holland, and finally settling in England. She began her career as a public speaker in behalf of social reform, and married William Rose in 1836. They emigrated to New York.
- After Ernestine Rose spoke against slavery in South Carolina in 1847, she was threatened with being tarred and feathered. But she did much more than lecture. By petitioning the New York State Assembly for 12 years, Ms. Rose led a successful campaign for the passage of the Married Woman's Property Bill in 1848, that allowed a woman to control her own assets after she was married.
- Ernestine spoke with "graceful style of eloquence," asking in part, "We have heard a great deal of our Pilgrim Fathers but who has heard of the Pilgrim Mothers. Did they not endure as many perils, encounter as many hardships?"(1)

## 1815, Elizabeth Katy Stanton

- Stanton was the mother of seven children and lived in the dusty upstate town of Seneca Falls, NY where she and Susan B. Anthony helped to create the first convention days.
- Unlike many women of her era she was formally educated and studied Latin, Greek, mathematics, religion, science, French, and writing.
- In an era when it was commonly held that a wife must submit to her husband's sexual demands, Stanton asserted that her children were conceived under a program she called "voluntary motherhood."
- Stanton was the principle author of the 'Declaration of Sentiments', which was signed by 68 women and 32 men during the Convention Days gathering.
- In her closing remarks she wrote, among other things "Now, in view of this entire disfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation—in view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of these United States."

### **1826, Sojourner Truth<sup>7</sup>**

- An African American abolitionist and women's rights activist who was born into slavery in Upstate New York.
- She escaped slavery with her daughter and then went to court to retrieve her son who was unable to escape.
- She was the first African American woman to win such a case against a White man.

### **1845, Margaret Fuller<sup>8</sup>**

- American women's rights advocate. Author of *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) Fuller was influential in changing perceptions about men and women. This book was considered one of the most important early feminist works, arguing for equality and women being more independent
- She was the first full-time American female book reviewer in journalism.

### **1848, First Women's Rights Convention**

- The First Women's Rights Convention as held on July 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> at the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Seneca Falls, New York. A crowd of about 300 people, including both Lucretia Mott and Frederick Douglass were present.
- The Suffragette agenda had to do with the abolition of slavery, female property rights and the right for women to vote.
- The event was described in subsequent press articles as "the most shocking and unnatural event ever recorded in the history of womanity."

### **1850, Harriet Tubman<sup>9</sup>**

- Harriet Tubman was an African American Abolitionist who was born into slavery and later escaped.
- Using the Underground Railroad, Harriet Tubman assisted in rescuing over 300 slaves.
- In her later years, she worked to promote the women's suffrage movement.

### **1886, The Statue of Liberty<sup>10</sup>**

- The Statue of Liberty was a gift to the United States from France in 1886. It was designed by Frederic Auguste Bartholdi, a French sculptor and is located in the New York Harbor.
- It is a symbol of freedom for the people of the United States. This beautiful symbol in the shape of a woman features chains laying at her feet, something not readily visible to sightseers.

### **1889, Jane Adams<sup>11</sup>**

- One of the most prominent social workers in history. Adams developed the settlement house system which offered sustenance, safety, and services to thousands of the nation's underprivileged.
- She helped turn the US to issues of concern to mothers, such as the needs of children, public health, and world peace. She said that if women were to be responsible for cleaning up their communities and making them better places to live, they needed the vote to be effective in doing so

### **1898, YWCA<sup>12</sup>**

- The World YWCA was founded through the convergence of a social activist Lady Mary Jane Kinnaird and the committed Christian Emma Robarts. Mary Jane Kinnaird, born in 1816, was a philanthropist committed to young women's well being. She raised funds and in 1855 set up housing for young single women in London. Equipped with a library, Bible classes and employment bureau. Kinnaird and her associates hoped to help young women cope with the pressures of work and believed it was important to care for the souls of young women along with their physical and mental health.
- Emma Robarts, born around 1818, was also committed to young women. She set up a prayer circle in her hometown on the outskirts of London. In 1855, she brought together 23 women to hold intercession prayer for young women—they called themselves the Young Women's Christian Association. The group went beyond prayer and reached out to the young women they prayed for and involved them in activities to build the mind, body and spirit.
- The first world conference of the YWCA was held in 1898 in London, with 326 participants from seventeen countries from around the world. It was a pivotal point in the founding of the World YWCA, cementing the principles of unity based on service and faith on a global scale.
- From the European refugee crisis after World War II wars in Europe, to the civil rights struggle in the USA and apartheid in South Africa, YWCAs have been at the forefront of raising the status of women and young women worldwide. Today, the YWCA movement empowers women and girls to change lives and change communities in over 120 countries. (Taken from the world YWCA website)
- **1889**–America; The first African-American YWCA branch opened in Dayton, Ohio
- **1890** - The first YWCA for Native American women opened at the Haworth Institute in Chilocco, Okla.
- **2008** - The YWCA celebrated its Sesquicentennial Anniversary, 150 years of service, with the launch of the "Own It" campaign. The campaign focused on igniting a new generation of 22 million young women aged 18 to 34, inspiring them to get involved with important issues facing women and the country today.
- **2013** - Today over 2 million people participate in YWCA programs at more than 1,300 sites across the United States. (2)

### **1916, Margaret Sanger (The Mother of Planned Parenthood)<sup>13</sup>**

- Planned Parenthood dates its beginnings to 1916 when Sanger, her sister, and a friend open America's first birth control clinic in Brooklyn, New York. In Sanger's America, women could not vote, sign contracts, have bank accounts, or divorce abusive husbands. They could not control the number of children they had or obtain information about birth control, because in the 1870s a series of draconian

measures, called the Comstock laws, made contraception illegal and declared information about family planning and contraception "obscene."

- Sanger knows the tragic toll of such ignorance. Her mother had 18 pregnancies, bore 11 children, and died in 1899 at the age of 40. Working as a nurse with immigrant families on New York's Lower East Side, Sanger witnesses the sickness, misery, and death that result from unwanted pregnancy and illegal abortion. The clinic she opened provided contraceptive advice to poor, immigrant women, some of whom line up hours before the doors open. Police raided the clinic and all three women were convicted of disseminating birth control information. (taken from the Planned Parenthood website)

### **1919, Women's Suffrage Amendment is Passed<sup>14</sup>**

- The Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution prohibits any US citizen from being denied the right to vote because of their sex.
- Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton drafted the amendment in 1878, but it wasn't until 41 years later in 1919 that the amendment was submitted to congress for ratification.

### **1934, Josephine Baker<sup>15</sup> (YES)**

- Josephine Baker, also known at the "Black Pearl," is an American- born French singer, dancer, and actress.
- She was the first African American female to star in a major motion picture. She is also known for her support of the American Civil Rights Movement and her work with the NAACP.
- Throughout her work in the Civil Rights Movement Baker began to adopt children of all different ethnicities. She wanted to set an example that people of all races and backgrounds could come together to become a family. In total she adopted and raised 12 children from nations across the globe.

### **1942, Rosie the Riveter<sup>16</sup>**

- Rosie the Riveter is a cultural icon that represents American Women who worked in factories during World War II. Many of these women replaced the male workers who were in the armed forces at the time. Rosie the Riveter is a common symbol for feminism.

### **1955 Claudette Colvin<sup>17</sup> (YES)**

- Before Rosa Park's act of defiance, Colvin refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger and was arrested. But Colvin, unmarried, became pregnant, and civil rights campaigners worried that would create controversy around the issue.

### **1955, Rosa Parks; Mother of a Civil Rights Movement<sup>18</sup>**

- Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white man indirectly leading to some of the most significant civil rights legislation of American history. Her peaceful and dignified campaigning she became one of the most well respected figures in the civil rights movements.

### **1960, Ruby Bridges<sup>19</sup> (YES)**

- At the age of 6 Bridges became the face of desegregation within the American School System in 1960. She quickly became a symbol of progress for the Civil Rights Movement and continues to be revered for her activism, past and present.

### **1960, Birth Control is FDA Approved<sup>20</sup>**

- The FDA approval of Birth Control was the first step in women being able to take control of their reproductive decisions.
- Birth Control became a symbol of sexual freedom and liberation that was not previously present in the Women's Rights Movement of the time.

### **1961, Antonia Pantoja<sup>21</sup>**

- Born in Puerto Rico and immigrating to New York City in the late 1940s, Pantoja quickly realized the struggle of young Puerto Ricans in the Public School System. She worked to develop the bilingual education program in NYC and founded ASPIRA, an organization that promotes positive self-image in Latino youth across the country.

### **1962, Fannie Lou Hamer<sup>22</sup>**

- In the 1960s, this daughter of Mississippi sharecroppers was threatened for trying to register to vote, and jailed and beaten for sitting in a whites-only café. She went on to conduct successful voter-registration drives, and to integrate Mississippi's delegation to the 1968 Democratic convention.
- Hamer was also the victim of forced sterilization. While undergoing surgery for the removal of a tumor, doctors also performed a hysterectomy that left her unable to bear children.

### **1963, Betty Friedan<sup>23</sup> (YES)**

- Leading feminist figure of the 1960s. Her book "The Feminine Mystique" became a best seller and received both lavish praise and intense criticism. Betty Friedan campaigned for an extension of female rights and an end to sexual discrimination.
- Friedan also played a strong role in the development of the National Organization of Women (NOW), which fights for equal rights of women across the country.

### **1964, Title IX is Passed<sup>24</sup>**

- Title 9 is a portion of the Education Amendments of 1972. Under Title 9, no person in the United States shall be excluded or discriminated from any educational activity or program on the basis of sex.
- Title IX plays a key role in trying sexual harassment cases on college campuses and other educational institutions.

### **1968, Shirley Chisholm<sup>25</sup>**



- The first black woman elected to Congress (from New York), and the first woman to run for the Democratic presidential nomination in primaries.

### **1972, Phyllis Chesler<sup>26</sup>**

- Phyllis Chesler is an American writer, psychotherapist, and psychology and women's studies professor. She is a feminist scholar and author of 14 books including her 1972 best seller, *Women and Madness*. She has written on many controversial topics including mental illness, gender, pornography, second wave feminism, and violence against women.

### **1973, Roe V. Wade<sup>27</sup>**

- Roe vs. Wade is a landmark decision by the US Supreme Court on the issue of abortion. It extended a woman's decision to have an abortion, which must be balanced against the state's two legitimate interests in regulating abortions: protecting the life of the fetus and of the mother.
- The court affirmed Roe vs. Wade's holding that a person has the right to an abortion until viability, which is defined by the fetus's potential to survive outside of the mother's womb.

### **1974, Barbara Walters<sup>28</sup> (YES)**

- The first woman to co-anchor a network's nightly news (and earn an unprecedented \$1 million a year for it), she's grilled the world's most intriguing people on our behalf.

### **1977, Rosie Jimenez<sup>29</sup> (YES)**

- A young working-class student and single Chicana mother of one daughter living in the US, Rosie was the [first victim of the Hyde Amendment](#), which disallowed Medicaid to cover abortion procedures to people needing them and receiving Medicaid. Rosie died of an illegal abortion when she realized she was pregnant again and could not afford to cover the cost of an abortion. Rosie's death demonstrates the institutional classism, racism and -isms' in general that still exists today for many people seeking reproductive health care in the US and all over the world

### **1978, Sally Ride<sup>30</sup>**

- As a physicist and astronaut Sally Ride joined NASA in 1978. At the age of 32 she literally broke barriers by becoming the first woman in space.
- After working with NASA for a number of years Ride continued to work by serving on committees that investigated two of America's space shuttle disasters. Ride is also the youngest American astronaut in space.

### **1978, Pregnancy Discrimination Act is Passed<sup>31</sup>**

- The Pregnancy Discrimination Act was the first piece of legislation designed to aid pregnant woman. This legislation guarantees that women cannot be discriminated against by their employers on the basis of pregnancy or related medical conditions.

### **1981, Sandra Day O'Connor<sup>32</sup>**

- The first woman appointed to that bench (in 1981), she retired in 2006 to care for her husband, who suffered from Alzheimer's.
- O'Connor's rise to the bench was a source of inspiration to many woman and girls who had never previously considered the possibility of becoming such a high-ranking officer of the court.

### **1982, Madonna<sup>33</sup>**

- Madonna is an American singer, songwriter, author, actress, director, and philanthropist. She is known as the best selling female recording artist of all time and is a cultural icon because of her image as the Queen of Pop. She rose to fame in the early 1980s due to her provocative lyrics, style of music, and image that pushed the boundaries of mainstream pop music at the time.

### **1997, Madeleine Albright<sup>34</sup>**

- In 1997, Madeleine Albright not only became the 64<sup>th</sup> US Secretary of State, but became the first female US Secretary of State and the highest ranking in the history of the US government.
- During her tenure, she advocated for democracy, human rights, promoted American trade, and influenced American policy in Bosnia and the Middle East. She also received the US Senator John Heinz Award for Greatest Public Service by Elected or Appointed Officials.

### **2007, Nancy Pelosi<sup>35</sup>**

- Pelosi is currently the Minority Leader of the United State House of Representatives. She became the first woman to ever serve as the Speaker of House and presently holds the status of highest-ranking female politician in American History.

### **2009, Hilary Rodham Clinton<sup>36</sup>**

- In 2009, Hilary Rodham Clinton became the US Secretary of State. During her tenure, she advocated for US military intervention in Libya, was at the forefront of the US response to the Arab Spring and the 2012 Benghazi attack.
- Hilary Clinton re-defined US leadership and values and encouraged empowerment of women. She has visited more countries than any other secretary of state.

## 2009, Sonia Sotomayor<sup>37</sup>

- The first woman of color on the US Supreme Court. Born and raised in the Bronx, Sotomayor was able to climb the ranks despite language barriers as well as barriers of poverty in order to achieve her dreams of becoming a judge.
- She was appointed by President Obama in 2009 and is the 4<sup>th</sup> female Supreme Court Justice in American History.

## Footnotes

- [1 http://articles.courant.com/1998-08-12/news/9808090003\\_1\\_birth-woman-baby](http://articles.courant.com/1998-08-12/news/9808090003_1_birth-woman-baby)
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