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National
Women's
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Celebrating Our Past
Inspiring Our Future

Fall 2005

CELEBRATE THESE WOMEN BORN IN FALL

Eleonora Sears (September 28, 1881), a descendant of Thomas Jefferson, was a socialite who played tennis and golf, rode horses, swam, and sailed. Sears played tennis competitively, winning five women's doubles championships and scandalizing crowds with her rolled up shirtsleeves. She nearly lost a country club membership when she rode front-saddle into the polo arena wearing pants. Despite criticism of her unfeminine style, she frequently topped New York's "10-best dressed" list. She played squash as a frequent guest at the all-men's Harvard Club, and was the first known woman squash champion. Sears played and coached women's squash into her 70s, made frequent marathon walks between Boston and Newport, and raised blue-ribbon horses. She died in 1968, known for having "paved the way for women's entrance in sports."



Committee, and in 1964, founded the all-black Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Hamer's anti-segregation speech at the 1964 Democratic National Convention led to the first fully integrated Democratic National Convention in 1968 and roused public support for the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Hamer, who served as political advocate for disadvantaged women and African Americans until her death in 1977, has been called "the First Lady of Civil Rights."

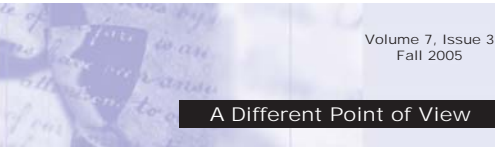
Wilma Mankiller (November 18, 1945) was born in Oklahoma. Her family moved to San Francisco in 1956, where Wilma graduated high school and married. A demonstration staged by Native Americans on Alcatraz in 1969 began her career as an activist. She also began her career in social work. She returned to Oklahoma in 1976 and worked for the Cherokee Nation, focusing on community revitalization and organization. She served as deputy chief of the Cherokee Nation, becom-

ing Principal Chief when the elected chief took a national post. In 1985 she was elected Principal Chief, the first woman elected to the position, in spite of vicious campaigning by her opponents and scare tactics by her supporters. She has said, "I've run into more discrimination as a woman than as an Indian."

Elsie de Wolfe (December 20, 1865) was born in New York City to a family of French Acadian descent. Wolfe frequently traveled to France, developing a knowledge of antique furniture and décor from the Louis XIV era. In 1901 a New York heiress hired de Wolfe to decorate her home, beginning her pioneering career as a professional interior designer. Her most famous project was the Colony Club, the first all-women's dining and recreation club in New York. Elsie's French-inspired work in the Club set the standard in traditional American decorating. She consistently received huge commissions in New York and her work eventually spread to England and France. Elsie de Wolfe, who died in 1950, became a self-made millionaire by creating her own profession long before women could participate in more traditional, male professions.

Fannie Lou Hamer (October 6, 1917) was born in Mississippi to a sharecropper family. At age 44, Hamer began her career as a civil rights leader by registering to vote at the local county courthouse, and suffered police beatings and imprisonment as a result. Undeterred, Hamer organized voter registration drives throughout Mississippi with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating

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A Different Point of View

Dutch Entrepreneurs in Colonial America



View of New Amsterdam (now New York)
Engraved and Printed by J.E. Goult

At school, we learned that New York was once New Amsterdam – but very few of us learned how unusual its women were.

Dutch women had more rights than women in many other countries, including neighboring France, Germany and England. The Dutch West India Company founded New Amsterdam in 1625 as a place to defend river access to the company's fur trade operations in the Hudson River. For over forty

Women could go to court to initiate legal proceedings and argue their own cases. For example, an unmarried, pregnant woman could prosecute the alleged father in a paternity proceeding. Women in these cases often won and the prevailing woman could force the man to marry her, or if he was already married, secure a dowry, payment of childbirth costs, and child support.

Equality among Dutch colonists was demonstrated by the practice of women retaining their own last name at marriage. Children were given their fathers' first name as their surname for life. Thus, there were no generational family names and everyone kept their name regardless of marital status.

Prerequisite agreements were standard in the colony and were also a way that women could achieve a significant degree of autonomy. The prerequisite agreements enabled women with money and/or property to keep their wealth after they married. In most places at this time, a woman's wealth was taken over by her husband at marriage. Annette Jans wrote one of the first agreements, ensuring her property rights when she married in



years, the women living in New Amsterdam generally experienced more autonomy, rights, and income than did their colonial English counterparts.

An important right for women in New Amsterdam was a voice in the public arena.

1638; later, she drafted premarital contracts for her daughters.

Property rights enabled several women to head huge estates, the equivalent of European manors. For example, Maria Van Rensselaer operated a 24-square-mile fiefdom that included gristmills, sawmills, and other income-producing activities.

Women in New Amsterdam had various occupations, and some practiced medicine as midwives and physicians. Among the colony's first publicly-funded buildings was a house for the midwife Tryntje Jonas, who had such a good reputation that the house was built especially as an inducement for her to leave Holland for New Amsterdam. Like most people of her era, Jonas had no physical separation between her work and her home. Both men and women typically ran their businesses from their homes, allowing women to take care of their families and be businesswomen.

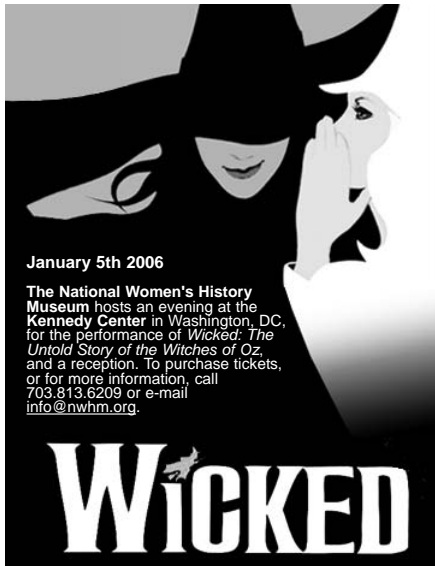
In addition to their other freedoms, women in New Amsterdam were not required to go in public with a chaperone, enabling them to conduct business. For example, Sara Roeloff earned her living as a linguist. Fluent in Dutch, English, and Algonquian, she was employed as a translator during business transactions for the major New Amsterdam businesses. Margaret ...

Dutch Entrepreneurs in Colonial America

Continued from page 1...

Hardbrook kept her shipping business when she married, and while raising five children, she ran an import/export enterprise during most of her life. A frequent ocean traveler, she took furs to Holland and then brought back manufactured goods for eager buyers in America. Annetje Lockermans Van Courtland paved the first street in America. Van Courtland, tired of the dust or mud in front of her house, supervised her servants in covering the road with cobblestone in 1648.

In 1664, New Amsterdam became New York when the Duke of York and his troops took over the colony. Although some individual women continued their careers after the change, it became increasingly more difficult as time passed. English law replaced Dutch law and England's paternalistic assumptions on matters such as names, inheritance rights, property rights, and women's reduced presence in public life eroded Dutch practices. The higher status and freedoms once enjoyed by New Amsterdam women disappeared for centuries.



January 5th 2006

The National Women's History Museum hosts an evening at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, for the performance of *Wicked: The Untold Story of the Witches of Oz*, and a reception. To purchase tickets, or for more information, call 703.813.6209 or e-mail info@nwhm.org.

We have new items in
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Or email staff@nwhm.org.
Please put Membership
Update in the subject line.

Things To Do This Season

Women of our Time

20th century Photographs from the National Portrait Gallery



■ **National Portrait Gallery-Traveling Exhibitions - Women of Our Time: 20th century Photographs from the National Portrait Gallery** is an interactive cyber exhibition with photographs of women who helped change the traditional role of women in the work place, the voting booth, and the country in general. Online at www.npg.si.edu.

■ At the **Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston** the exhibition **Andrea Zittelman: Critical Space** investigates contemporary life in Western Societies. The exhibition can be experienced through January 1, 2006 at the museum, located at 5216 Montrose Boulevard in Houston. For more information visit www.camh.org.

■ In conjunction with **Slavery In New York**, open until March 5, 2006 the **New York Historical Society** presents the **Bernard and Irene Schwartz Distinguished Speakers Series: Slavery in New York: Women Who Said "No"**.

October 26, 6:30pm: **Harriet Jacobs: A Life**

November 9, 6:30pm: **Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Legend**

December 13, 6:30pm: **Our Sisters Crushed and Abused: Gender and Religion in the Antislavery Movement**

The Society is located at 170 Central Park West, New York, New York. Call 212-873-3400 or visit www.nyhistory.org for details.

Letter from our

"Well behaved women rarely make history."

--Laurel Thatcher Ulrich



With all we are doing to promote appreciation of women's history, I never get a chance to watch afternoon television programming. But one of our loyal members reported on a recent segment of the Oprah Winfrey Show. Her guest, Maria Shriver, commented that her favorite t-shirt states "Well behaved women seldom make history" --- a sentiment with which Oprah immediately identified. These two achievers no doubt personally empathize with women's historic struggles to overcome legal and societal barriers.

But there is more to this story. The quotation was taken from the work of a Harvard historian whose work focused on women in colonial New England. Her point was that the good women who built our communities were regrettably omitted from history.

NWHM intends to have it both ways. We will be promoting greater understanding and appreciation of both the well-behaved women and the women who challenged the stereotypes and broadened the opportunities for succeeding generations of women.

Best regards,

Susan B. Jolie
Susan B. Jolie
President



Do you ever wonder how you can learn more about the women you read about in *A Different Point of View*? The newest feature on our Web site, is the Newsletter Resources page where we list the resources for our research. Visit www.nwhm.org to learn more about the women who made history.