

PO Box 1296
Annandale, VA 22003

Tel: (703) 813-6209
Fax: (703) 813-6210
www.nwhm.org
info@nwhm.org

National
Women's
History
Museum

NWHM

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Celebrating Our Past
Inspiring Our Future

Fall 2006

CELEBRATE THESE WOMEN BORN IN FALL



A strong player on the tennis court and a fighter for women's rights, **Rosemary Casals** (9/16/1948) made great strides for women in the world of professional tennis.

After being introduced to tennis by her great-uncle, she realized that she had a natural ability for the sport, despite only being five-foot-two inches tall. Without any professional coaching, she began participating in tennis tournaments, breaking barriers at country clubs with her Salvadoran background and wildly colored outfits. In 1967, Casals won the doubles tournament at Wimbledon and continued to win numerous other tournaments throughout her career. She fought for women's monetary prizes to be equal to men's and also for women to have more media coverage. After undergoing knee surgery in 1978, she became the president of SportsWomen, Inc.

Victoria Woodhull (9/23/1838) of Homer, Ohio was the first woman candidate for President in the election of 1872. She represented the Equal Rights Party. She was an advocate for equal education for women,

women's right to vote, and women's right to control their own health decisions. Woodhull and her sister became the first women stockbrokers in history upon opening their own brokerage house, the Woodhull, Claflin and Company in 1870. Woodhull's presidential platform advocated for an eight-hour workday, graduated income tax, new divorce laws, and social welfare programs that would protect children's rights, aid the homeless and care for the abused. In many ways Woodhull was ahead of her time; she was a trailblazer for women in politics for generations to come.

Mercy Otis Warren (9/25/1728) was a published poet and political playwright at a time when many women kept their thoughts to themselves. She took an interest in history at a young age, and after getting married in

1754, was encouraged by her politically active husband to pursue writing. While maintaining a friendship with John and Abigail Adams, she began writing political tracts, which dealt with the turmoil leading up to the American Revolution. "The Adulator" and "The Group"

were plays published in the mid-1700s, on the brink of the Revolution. Some of her later works, like "Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous" and "History of the American Revolution," were influenced by her first-hand experiences with the war.

On September 12, 1992, **Mao C. Jemison** (10/17/1956) of Chicago, Illinois became the first black woman to travel into outer space on NASA Mission STS-47 aboard the Endeavour. Before joining NASA in 1987, she received her bachelors in Chemical Engineering from Stanford University and her doctorate degree in medicine from Cornell University. On Mission STS-47, Jemison served as a Science Mission Specialist on the Space Lab 3 mission. This was a joint operation between United States and Japan. The laboratory held round-the-clock experiments that have added to fundamental knowledge about the behavior of crystals, fluids and human exposure to a weightless environment.



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Volume 8, Issue 4
Fall 2006

A Different Point of View

NWHM PUSHES FOR HOUSE VOTE BEFORE RECESS

These are exciting times. With every day that passes, the National Women's History Museum (NWHM) draws closer to its goal: a permanent home for the museum, adjacent to the Old Post Office Building on Pennsylvania Avenue.

Just before Congress recessed at the end of September, the museum and its supporters came tantalizingly close to bringing S. 501, The National Women's History Act, to a vote in the House of Representatives. NWHM Board Members, advisors, and our coalition of women's service and educational organizations worked tirelessly with Congressional and leadership offices to move the bill. Among the key supporters were Congresswoman Deborah Pryce and Congressman Bill Shuster.

Our legislative strategy involved placing S. 501 on the Suspension Calendar, which has special procedural rules allowing for limited debate and a two-thirds majority for passage. In the last days before the Congressional recess, Congressman Don Young of Alaska, who chairs the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, did agree to add S. 501 to the Suspension Calendar. But alas, it was not enough. Because time was running out, the only bills the House would consider were those that enjoyed unanimous support, so as not to trigger the requirements for time consuming debate and a formal vote.

Our optimism after getting the House leadership to sign off on S. 501 was dashed when Minnesota Rep. James Oberstar, a Democrat, expressed resistance to the bill. Since he is the ranking Democrat on the committee that designates highway and airport project money, his objection could carry a lot of weight regardless of NWHM's widespread Congressional support.

Mr. Oberstar favors a proposal that would tie NWHM to a controversial plan to turn a federal office building into a hotel, making NWHM pay commercial rent to finance the deal. No other museum has ever been asked to link its fate to a commercial developer or pay such a price. Other museums get their sites at little or no cost and receive millions in federal funding.

NWHM continues to pursue legislative strategies to have S. 501 considered under procedures that would allow passage by a simple majority vote during the "lame duck" session of Congress, from mid-November through December. NWHM board members, staff, and coalition members will continue to lobby key representatives, including Young, Oberstar, and Nancy Pelosi.

You can get more details on legislative activities in the Members Only section of the NWHM Web site, www.nwhm.org, where you can also sign the petition to Congress. You can also call or fax your Representative, urging support for the bill so we can get the legislation enacted this year!

NWHM Chosen to Receive Mentoring in Strategic Planning

NWHM was pleased recently when COMPASS, a volunteer consulting alliance, announced it had selected the museum to receive assistance in the area of strategic planning. NWHM was chosen over a number of other applicants.

Volunteers from the COMPASS alliance, who are MBA alumni from Harvard Business School, Stanford Graduate School of Business, Wharton Business School, Dartmouth's Tuck School of Business, and the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, provide pro bono business consulting services to nonprofit organizations.

On October 26, COMPASS hosted a launch event for its 2007 projects, and introduced the winning nonprofit clients to their COMPASS project leaders. NWHM was paired with Susan Stewart and Cliff Beek, an accomplished COMPASS veteran who has worked on museum-related projects in the last two years.

NWHM Board Members Susan Jollie, Kathy Sander, and Joan Wages also met with prospective team volunteers who wanted to learn about NWHM and its specific needs. Work on the strategic planning project will commence next year and will help NWHM to take the next steps in developing the museum.



L to R: NWHM Sr. V.P. External Affairs, Joan Wages, founder of the D.C. area COMPASS project Melissa Williams, NWHM V.P. Program Development Kathy Sander, NWHM President Susan Jollie, and COMPASS Director Amy Gleichen

Boarding Houses, Hotels, and Bed-and-Breakfasts: Women in the Hospitality Industry

Whether the earliest hospitality was offered in a cave or a desert tent or a prairie tepee or a hut made of mud or even ice, it was largely women who maintained that home. Over time, inns emerged to accommodate travelers throughout the Mediterranean world. A husband usually centered himself near the door, where he poured drinks, socialized with customers, and took the money. His sons, when they were old enough, usually cared for visitors' horses or donkeys or camels - but his wife and daughters worked much harder, tending in the kitchen, the dining room, the bedchambers, and wherever else there was "women's work."

This continued to be the case for centuries, especially in the New World, where the model was repeated as the frontier moved west. As time passed, it became increasingly obvious that this was a business a woman could run alone, without help from a husband. Over and over again, widows, spinsters, and deserted women turned to boarding houses and hotels as a way to support themselves in agricultural economies that offered few income-earning choices to women.

With careful management, women in the hospitality business secured far better returns than the earnings of poorly-paid teachers, milliners, or seamstresses - about the only other occupational options open to women outside of industrial cities. If a woman owned a big house or had the capital to obtain one, and if she earned a reputation as a good cook and a clean housekeeper, she realistically could expect to find traveling businessmen eager to reward her enterprise. The large houses that sit (usually vacantly) near small-town train tracks today once were filled with travelers who sat down to a common supper, chatted on the porch in the evening, and filled the boardinghouse bedrooms.

In the post-Civil War South, city mansions were transformed into hotels and plantations into resorts, as genteel women found the strength to lift their families out of the poverty to which the war had reduced them. Some were war widows; others had husbands who survived, but were disabled. Although few such women actually had cooked or cleaned prior to the war, they knew the standards to which they wanted their household run, and they had long experience as hostesses.

From New Orleans to Richmond and especially along the Gulf Coast of Mississippi and Alabama, they opened their formerly exclusive mansions to paying guests. They competed with each other to set the best table and provide the most luxurious rooms. The ambience of cities such as Charleston and Savannah, known for hospitality today, can be traced to these women.

Other women served a market of semi-permanent guests. Because housework was so much more demanding prior to electricity, the era's few professional women often lived at boarding houses or hotels, where other women would cook their meals and take care of their laundry. An upper-class groom who could not yet acquire the servant-filled home that his bride expected instead would opt for a hotel suite. Indeed, until after World War II, it was not uncommon for small wealthy families to place convenience over privacy and make their permanent residence in a hotel.



A boarding house in New York

Many more women targeted much poorer clientele, especially in immigrant communities. Around Pittsburgh, for instance, a Slavic woman who knew the language that steelworkers spoke and knew what they wanted to eat would find herself busy beyond measure. Some such boarding houses operated on the same shifts as the steel mills or coal mines, with men occupying the beds at all hours of the day and night. Again, though, it usually was the husband who was considered the "boarding master," even if he had another job and his wife did all of the work for boarders, often including scrubbing the impossibly dirty clothes of coal miners. Women from eastern and southern Europe were severely exploited as boardinghouse keepers - to the point that Catholic priests began preaching against allowing women to do such work. The effect, of course, was to make it harder for other women to obtain the capital and community support that they needed to run their businesses.

Boardinghouses declined as cars replaced trains and as the nation severely cut immigration in the 1920s. The Great Depression of the 1930s made it much more difficult for women to get bank loans or any kind of credit. Although there was a huge need for hotel rooms during World War II, there also was a tremendous shortage of everywhere necessary to operate them. Nor was there much positive change for such entrepreneurial women when the 1940s turned to the 1950s, as chain motels made their appearance along with superhighways - African-Americans in the industry ironically suffered as racial integration made it possible for their best-paying customers to move up the accommodation ladder.

The decades since mid-century have reinforced these negative economic factors for women who want to run their own enterprises, but many continue in small-business tradition by replicating Europe's bed-and-breakfast establishments. Importantly, the civil rights legislation of the 1960s and 1970s has made it possible for women to insist on their right to promotion within the giant new hospitality corporations.

Membership Updates

If your name is misspelled or you receive multiple copies of the newsletter, please contact us at: P.O. Box 1296, Annandale, VA 22003. Or you can e-mail us at staff@nwhm.org. Please type *Membership Update* in the subject line.

NWHM Launches Two Cyber Exhibits to Shed Light on Women's Role in Education and in the Progressive Era

As part of its ongoing commitment to spotlight the largely unsung contributions of women in American history, NWHM launched two exciting new Cyber Exhibits on its Web site (www.nwhm.org) in September.

The first, *The History of Women in Education*, explores the history of women's education in the United States - from the 1700s, when wealthy young women were lucky enough to receive a basic education; through the 1800s, with its establishment of secondary schools for women; to the mid- to late-1900s, when legislation established gender equality in education once and for all. The education exhibit examines other issues as well - such as the education of slaves, the forced boarding school experiences of many Native American children, racial segregation in schools before the Civil Rights Era, and the varied experiences of female teachers during different eras.

Visitors to the exhibit will learn that most of the first coeducational institutions started in the Midwest. And even though Ohio's Oberlin College, the first to admit women, did so in 1833, most universities took until the late-19th to mid-20th century to admit women. Shockingly, Harvard University did not allow women to receive degrees until 1963, 327 years after the university opened. Why was there such a concerted effort to limit women's educational opportunities during much of our history? People had many concerns about the effects of educating women and men together. They feared, for example, that women would suffer nervous breakdowns if they competed in a man's world, or that their purity would be corrupted - or even that their reproductive systems might be harmed. Tellingly, some feared that a learned woman might be unfit for marriage and motherhood, and that education would "masculinize" women.

The second exhibit, *Reforming Their World: Women in the Progressive Era*, explores women's role in the reform movement during the Progressive Era (1890-1920), when millions struggled with problems caused by industrialization, urbanization, and immigration - problems such as poverty, overcrowding, bad sanitation, poor education, and corruption.

Women's contributions to reform were staggering, considering their limited opportunities to influence public policy. Unlike men, who had the right to vote, could easily run for public office, and were generally more integrated into and involved in public life, women had to address social problems within their own realm, which was generally their home and community. Women turned their club activities from self-improvement to reform and worked on more far-reaching issues, such as starting libraries and kindergartens, inspecting schools, lobbying for the improvement of city sanitation and proper food inspection, lobbying for increased wages and child labor laws, and working to eliminate corruption.

Women also joined in national causes, such as the prohibition of alcohol, woman's suffrage, and peace.

In addition to exploring women's clubs and causes during the Progressive Era, *Reforming Their World* also examines the experiences of African American women during this period and discusses women's varied roles during World War I.

Both exhibits can be accessed by going to the drop down menu under Cyber Museum on the NWHM homepage, www.nwhm.org.



Officers from the Women's League, Newport, Rhode Island, 1900.
Image from *Reforming Their World* exhibit

Letter from our President



As we celebrate Thanksgiving - our country's most popular holiday - I can think of no better way to illustrate NWHM's mission. This particular holiday is associated with gathering with family and friends. The story of the Pilgrims' celebration was spread from New England throughout the country, creating the basis of a shared American heritage.

What is not widely acknowledged is this national holiday is celebrated only because of the contributions of women. Start with the obvious: Sarah Hale, publisher of one of the most popular magazines of the 19th century, lobbied incessantly for a national holiday of Thanksgiving and national unification. The idyllic images of Pilgrims and Native Americans feasting together and Pocahontas sparing Captain Smith's life were propagated to form a commonly held national heritage that to some extent expresses an appreciation that women played an important role in English colonial efforts.

Yet women's contributions are more fundamental. Women did not accompany various failed efforts at colonization. We know that the early women settlers suffered disproportionate mortality rates. But their children survived and ultimately prospered, and women's role in creating homes and communities in the wilderness encouraged others to come.

We have many institutions that enshrine the sacrifices that men made in war. We have nothing that calls attention to the sacrifices women made to populate this country. That is the mission of NWHM - to educate and inspire.

Best regards,

Susan B. Jollie