

# CELEBRATE WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH WITH THE NWHM

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This year for Women's History Month, the NWHM will be co-sponsoring a performance of the one woman show, *Off the Wall: The Life and Works of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*. Our co-sponsors are the Sewall-Belmont House and The Division of United States Studies at the Woodrow Wilson International Center. The show will be staged at The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars on March 24 at 4pm.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860 - 1935) was the grandniece of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Like her great aunt, she was a writer and social reformer. She attended college, but left school to marry and have a child. Shortly after giving birth, she suffered from a near nervous breakdown. These events would later serve as the inspiration for *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Her mental condition prompted her to move to California, seeking a divorce from her husband, who became the guardian of their child. After relocating, she supported herself through her writing. In 1900 she remarried. From 1909 through 1916, she wrote and edited the monthly publication *The Forerunner*. This publication provided her with the opportunity to publicly express her views. She went on to found the Women's Peace Party in 1915 with Jane Addams. While her works and significance are largely forgotten today, she was influential and many articles were written about her throughout her life. Her work *Women and Economics* was published internationally and translated into seven different languages.

Ann Timmons, the playwright and performer, weaves together Gilman's life story, her writings, and her theories on the place of women in society. Using excerpts from some of Gilman's best known works, such as *The Yellow Wallpaper*, *Women and Economics*, and *The Home: Its Work and Influence*, Timmons is able to show Gilman as scholar, an author of fiction, and as an individual.

Please Join Us

March 24, 4:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Flom Auditorium, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars  
1300 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20004-2037

Seating is limited. Please RSVP to [usstudies@wwic.si.edu](mailto:usstudies@wwic.si.edu).  
(Please bring a government-issued photo ID.)

*There will be a reception following the performance.*

## CLANDESTINE WOMEN EXTENDED

The NWHM's popular exhibition, *Clandestine Women: The Untold Stories of Women in Espionage* was extended past Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. The extension allowed the exhibition to coincide with the opening of the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition. The bicentennial celebration, which will run for the next three years, began on January 14. The bicentennial officially commenced on January 18, the anniversary of President Jefferson sending a confidential letter to Congress on the same date in 1803. This letter requested funds for the Corps of Discovery to explore the West. A reproduction of this letter was used in the section of *Clandestine Women* that focused on Sacagawea and her critical role in the success of the expedition.



## SACAGAWEA'S ROLE

Many of the events in association with the bicentennial will focus on the fifteen-year-old Shoshone guide, Sacagawea. The young woman's contributions to the expedition were numerous and invaluable. When the Corps of Discovery needed horses, Sacagawea procured several from the Shoshone. President Jefferson had instructed Lewis and Clark to establish peaceful relations with the native populations. They were able to succeed in this due in part to Sacagawea, who served as a translator for the Corps. Her presence signaled peaceful intentions because war parties never traveled with women. Her knowledge of native plants greatly assisted the expedition - she was able to instruct them as to what was edible so that they could bolster their food supply. It is also worth noting, that if not for her efforts, most of the documentation of the journey would have been lost to future generations. When a boat capsized, it was Sacagawea who rescued most of its contents, which included a great many of the illustrations and notes that were to be given to President Jefferson.



The explorers understood the important role that she played in their journey. William Clark commented upon their return that "[She] deserved [sic] a greater reward for her attention and services on the route [sic] than we had in our power to give her."

In 1999 the US Mint issued the golden dollar coin (pictured above) featuring an image of Sacagawea and her infant son.

President Clinton awarded Sacagawea the honorary title of Army Sergeant in January 2001.

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A Different Point of View

## Valentine's Day is February 14

Valentines were first mass produced in the United States by entrepreneur Esther Allen Howland. In 1850 she placed an ad for her cards in a local newspaper, and soon her business took off. The business she began in her home eventually grew to gross \$100,000 annually. She sold the business and retired in 1881.

## SISTER ACT LINDA AND LORETTA SANCHEZ

Political families are nothing new in America. The Roosevelts and the Kennedy dynasty immediately come to mind. In fact, currently brothers Carl Levin and Sander Levin are serving Michigan in the U.S. Senate and the House, respectively. But this past election, sisters Linda and Loretta Sanchez made history. They are the first sisters to serve in the House of Representatives simultaneously. Both sisters represent districts in California.

While they might be receiving publicity for being the first sisters in Congress, they also represent an important trend for women in politics: both women embarked on their political careers early in life. Because many women in Congress first serve in government on the local level, they win their first term in Congress later in their political careers. Since seniority is an important factor in the organization of Congressional committees, the earlier someone begins their service, the better that person's chances are for attaining a ranking position on a committee.

### Fast Facts About Women in Congress:

- \* The first woman to serve in Congress was Jeanette Rankin. She was elected in by the state of Montana in 1917 - 3 years before the passage of the 19th amendment.
- \* There are currently 62 women serving in the House of Representatives, or 14.25%
- \* Nancy Pelosi (California) serves as the House Democratic Leader

## CELEBRATE THESE WOMEN BORN IN WINTER

**Clara Barton** (December 25, 1821) is perhaps one of the best known heroines of the Civil War. She was born in Massachusetts to a middle-class family and educated at home. During the Civil War she organized a relief program for the soldiers involved in the Baltimore Riots. Later, she urged the citizens in her native New England to donate medical supplies and founded an organization to distribute the donations. After the success of this endeavor, the Surgeon General granted her permission to travel with army ambulances to care for soldiers. In addition to providing much needed nursing care, Barton also worked to determine the status of soldiers listed as Missing In Action. In 1881, she founded the American Association of the Red Cross. In 1904 she retired to her home in Glen Echo, Maryland, where she passed away in 1912. Her home in is now the Clara Barton National Historic Site.



Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWII Collection

Author, anthropologist, and folklorist **Zora Neale Hurston** (January 7, 1891/1901) was born in Natasulga, Alabama in 1891, though she claimed to have been born on the same date in 1901 in Eatonville, Florida, a town her family moved to when she was only one or two years old. She was very active in the Harlem Renaissance, and during that time she developed her unique writing style. Her writing blurred genres and disciplines, and in her experimental ethnographies such as *Mules and Men* she included herself as a character. In 1960 she died in St. Lucie, Florida having suffered a stroke the previous year. At the time she was virtually unknown and was buried in an unmarked grave. In 1973 author Alice Walker rediscovered Hurston's grave and marked it with a tombstone. In 1975 Walker published In Search of Zora Neale Hurston in *Ms.*, sparking a Hurston revival. Eatonville is now the home of the annual Zora Neale Hurston Festival of the Arts and Humanities and numerous seminars and symposia on her life and work.



Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Carl Van Vechten collection

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All proceeds from the Museum Store support NWHM efforts

### Did you know?

In 1933 Laura Ingalls Wilder published *Farmer Boy*, about her husband's childhood in Malone, New York. It is her only book not set in the Midwest.

**Laura Ingalls Wilder** (February 7, 1867) wrote her famous *Little House* books about her experiences growing up in a pioneering family. Her classic young adult novels span the 1870s through 1890s and tell the stories of the Ingalls and Wilder families settling in Wisconsin, Kansas, Minnesota, and South Dakota. She was married to Almanzo Wilder while living in the Dakota Territory in 1885. Nine years later they moved to Missouri and established a successful farm, Rocky Ridge Farm. In 1932 she began writing her novels from this farm in the Ozark hills. After her death in 1957, Rocky Ridge Farm was purchased by the Laura Ingalls Wilder Home Association. It is now open to the public.

**Eliza Nicholson** (March 11, 1849) began her career as a poet, using the name Pearl Rivers. In 1870 she became the first woman editor of a major daily newspaper. When *The Picayune* offered her the position of literary editor, her family disapproved, but she moved to New Orleans in spite of that obstacle. She married the owner of the newspaper and when he died, she inherited *The Picayune*, which at that time was deeply in debt. Although she was advised to file for bankruptcy, Nicholson did not and within a few years she and the newspaper's business manager - who she later married - had transformed *The Picayune* into an innovative family newspaper and more than tripled its circulation.

# RURAL WOMEN'S HISTORY

One of the major criticisms of women's history is that it focuses only on the women who challenged society, not women who were successful and important within societal norms. For example, many historians writing about women's history tell the tales of women who reformed the social ills of the city, or who joined a traditionally male workforce. It goes without saying that these women and their achievements are an important aspect of history. Their stories are hard to unearth simply because often they were not recorded. However, it is even more difficult to tell the stories of women who influenced history through traditional female roles.

Obviously, housewives, mothers, nurses, and teachers are a major part of history. Rural women who worked on farms faced some of the most treacherous conditions - isolation from towns and services, difficult physical labor, harsh weather conditions - yet their efforts ensured survival through the food and textiles they produced. The matter is further complicated by the fact that rural areas across the country are vastly different from one another. This dissimilarity makes it impossible to generalize rural life. Consequently rural history is usually thought of as regional history, and its importance in the national scope is often lost. The NWHM hopes to change this and bring the important contributions of rural women to light.

## Did you know?

Diaries written by women on West Virginia farms in the 1920s listed some of their duties as washing, cleaning, cooking, churning butter, and making and mending clothing and household linens. They also participated in the seasonal needs of the farm. Many women raised chickens, canned produce, gardened, butchered, and made soap among other responsibilities.



March is Women's History Month. The story of how this particular commemoration of women began is one from which we at NWHM have drawn some lessons. Like many of the contributions women have made throughout our history, this initiative started in the local community. The first celebration was inaugurated by the Education Task Force of the Sonoma County Commission on the Status of Women during the week of March 8, 1978. The concept caught fire and spread across the nation after Molly Murphy MacGregor presented the idea to a national conference of leaders of women's and girls' organizations in 1979. The following year President Jimmy Carter issued a Presidential Message proclaiming Women's History Week. That same year, The National Women's History Project was founded to produce educational materials that were used by state education departments and women's organizations in thousands of communities. By 1987, with broad bipartisan support, Congress passed a resolution to establish a National Women's History Month.

There are some important parallels to our effort. First, a seemingly small group of people with great vision can make far reaching changes in how women are perceived in our society. The NWHM's spark of genius was our founder, Karen Staser, who was dumbfounded to learn that there was no place in the nation's capitol for her daughters to learn about women's history. She saw a need and then went about organizing a group of dedicated women to fill the void.

As we move into our next stage of development, we likewise appreciate the need to spread the idea through already established women's organizations with broad national scope. For that reason, we have been building a National Coalition. As we learn more about many of these organizations, some with their roots planted two centuries ago, I am reminded that women have understood the need to come together in common causes for some time now. This legacy is instructive, and that is why we have begun providing brief profiles of some of these organizations in our newsletter. With their support local communities throughout the country will embrace the NWHM's mission, and our national membership will continue to grow vigorously. Working through millions of women nationally, we can generate broad public support for the NWHM's goals and programs. This is how women make history and it is a story that needs to be told.

Warmest regards,

Susan B. Jollie, President

## Yes! I want to continue supporting the National Women's History Museum

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## Letter from our President



**Watch your mailboxes! Membership renewals will be arriving shortly!**

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## OUR NEWEST COALITION MEMBERS

The NWHM is pleased to welcome the newest members of our National Coalition. The Coalition members support the NWHM's mission, support our efforts to secure a building site in downtown Washington, DC, and collaborate on mutually beneficial projects. As of January, the American Association of University Women, the National Foundation of Women Legislators, Inc., Women in Defense, and the Women Presidents' Organization have joined. Many other organizations have been contacted regarding joining the National Coalition.

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) promotes equity for all women and girls, lifelong education, and positive societal change. It was officially founded in 1921 through the merger of The Association of Collegiate Alumnae (ACA) and the Southern Association of College Women. The ACA's roots, however, go back to 1881 when Marion Talbot convened a meeting of 17 of the first female graduates in America. The ACA was officially established the following year to expand women's educational and employment opportunities. Among the women who have received fellowships from the AAUW are Jenny Bramley, inventor of the cathode ray tube, and astronaut Judith Resnik, the second American woman in space. Other women who have been affected by the AAUW via awards or financial support include two Nobel Prize winners: Marie Curie (Physics 1903, Chemistry 1911) and geneticist Barbara McClintock (Physiology and Medicine 1983).

## AVON CALLING!

The California Perfume Company, renamed Avon in 1939, was founded in 1886 by salesman David Hall McConnell. The company's very successful, and often imitated sales plan, however, was the idea of Mrs. Persus Foster Eames (P.F.E.) Albee. Mrs. Albee, a woman from Winchester, New Hampshire, is often referenced as the company's first "Avon Lady" but she was much more than that. Known as a "General Traveling Agent" Mrs. Albee was hired to take over the daily operations of the perfume sales. She developed a business plan that was not only incredibly successful, but also became one of the identifiers of the company. She recruited women to serve as "depot agents" selling the perfumes and other products door to door in their own neighborhoods. By 1903 the California Perfume Company had a network of over 10,000 agents. She was so important in the early years of the company that in McConnell's 1903 publication, The History of the California Perfume Company, he referred to Albee as "Mother of the California Perfume Company."

Twice Avon has offered its customers the chance to buy Barbie dolls in the image of Mrs. P.F.E. Albee. Two different dolls were offered in 1997 and 1998.