

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

NONPROFIT ORG  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA  
PERMIT NO. 6010

Celebrating Our Past  
Inspiring Our Future  
Winter 2006

Volume 8, Issue 1  
Winter 2006

A Different Point of View

NWHM  
National  
Women's  
History  
Museum

Maggie Mitchell Walker:  
Astute Businesswoman and Successful Banker



At age 17, Maggie Mitchell was elected as an officer in the Women's Union, a local group of black women who provided insurance for themselves. In the societies, which were local and nonprofit, poor people paid a few cents weekly into a mutual insurance program that then assisted them in time of need. Many provided access to a doctor; most offered burial insurance and sometimes disability coverage.

When Wall Street fell in 1929, her bank was solid and absorbed most of the other area banks that served blacks. With its name changed to Richmond Consolidated Bank and Trust, she paid dividends to stockholders during the Great Depression, when many other banks closed their doors.

Maggie Walker suffered from diabetes, which caused her death at 68. She left her estate to her widowed daughter-in-law. Her Richmond residence, just off of I-95, at 600 North 2nd Street, is a historic site operated by the National Park Service and is open to visitors.

A Baltimore woman, Mary Prout, founded the insurance plan called Saint Luke that Maggie Mitchell joined in the early 1880s. Mitchell developed highly astute business methods, especially the introduction of a weekly newsletter that educated African-Americans on the importance of savings. An 1886 marriage changed her name to Walker, but she continued with her career while bearing three sons.

Throughout February, which is Black History Month, it is expected that media and educators will talk about the accomplishments of black men, overlooking the many inspiring stories of black women who overcame legal impediments based on both their race and gender. One example of these early leaders is M A G G I E M I T C H E L L W A L K E R (1867-1934) from Richmond, Virginia, who was a leading businesswoman at the turn of the twentieth century and is often credited as being the first female president of a bank in the United States.

Walker was a leading businesswoman and is often credited as being the first female president of a bank in the United States.

Her aptitude for business was clearly demonstrated after she became Saint Luke's executive secretary in 1899. The company was \$400 in debt and down to two employees: at her death 35 years later, it had paid out \$3 million in benefits and its staff of 50 supervised solid assets. She expanded from insurance into banking in 1903: with assets of \$8000, she began Saint Luke's Penny Savings Bank, and by 1920, could cite 645 homes "entirely paid for through our bank's help."



Mitchell was born in Richmond, Virginia, two years after the Civil War ended. Her parents were employed as cook and butler for Elizabeth Van Lew, who was the postmaster of Richmond. Van Lew provided a highly positive role model for young Maggie.

CELEBRATE THESE WOMEN BORN IN WINTER

A poet and literary critic, **Harriet Monroe** (12/23/1860) raised money to found *Poetry* magazine in 1912. As editor, Monroe followed an open door policy in her selections. She published poems by poets such as Carl Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay, T.S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, and William Carlos Williams. Moore is credited with initiating a renaissance in American poetry by supporting innovative writers focusing on urban, industrial issues and creating an outlet to reach the American public. Today, *Poetry* remains the leading publisher of modern American verse.

relationship with them. In addition to her groundbreaking study on gorillas, *Gorillas in the Mist* (1980), she was an outspoken critic of illegal gorilla poaching. Sadly, in 1985, Fossey was murdered, probably by one of the poachers she had denounced.

**Rosa Parks** (2/4/1913), a seamstress who lived in Montgomery, Alabama, was active in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). On December 1, 1955, Parks



Rosa Parks

protested segregation laws by refusing to give up her bus seat to a white man. Her action sparked the yearlong Montgomery Bus Boycott, ending when the Supreme Court desegregated public transportation in Alabama. The boycott marked the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. Parks continued to strive for equality during the rest of her life. After her death on October 24,

2005, she was laid in the Capital Rotunda, the first woman to receive this high honor.

**Jackie Joyner-Kersey** (3/3/1962) has been called the greatest woman athlete of the 20th century. Born in a poor neighborhood in East St. Louis, Illinois, Joyner-Kersey excelled in basketball, volleyball, and track and received an athletic scholarship to the University of California at Los Angeles. She entered the 1984 Olympics and participated in three more Olympic games, winning a total of three gold medals and setting the women's record for the heptathlon. In 1996, Joyner-Kersey began playing professional basketball for the Richmond Rage. She currently lives in East St. Louis with her husband and former track coach, Bob Kersee.

**Dian Fossey** (1/16/1932), devoted to protecting endangered gorillas, lived for over 30 years in the Virunga Mountains of Rwanda. She studied the behaviors of mountain gorillas and developed a close, trusting



Dian Fossey

of her life. After her death on October 24,

Things To Do This Winter



**Special Event: Tea with Martha Washington**

Learn about 18th century etiquette, dancing, and clothing over tea, pound cake, fruit, and cookies with Martha Washington.

**Location:** Gadsby's Tavern Museum  
134 North Royal Street, Alexandria, VA 22314

**Event** is on February 26th, 2006, from 3-5 pm  
**Admission:** \$20 per person, reservations required  
**Call:** 703-838-4242

**Temporary Exhibition: Conversation Among Blues Women**

Learn about the experience of a diverse group of African American women in the 21st century.

**Location:** Anacostia Museum and Center for African American History and Culture  
1901 Fort Place, SE, Washington, D.C.

**Open:** daily, 10 am - 5 pm, until April 2nd, 2006  
**Admission:** free  
**Call:** 202-357-2700

**Temporary Exhibition: Reclaiming Midwives: Pillars of Community Support**

This exhibition explores the history of African American midwives from the days of slavery to the mid-20th century.

**Location:** Anacostia Museum and Center for African American History and Culture  
1901 Fort Place, SE, Washington, D.C.

**Open:** daily, 10 am - 5 pm, until April 2nd, 2006  
**Admission:** free  
**Call:** 202-357-2700

**Temporary Exhibition: The Way We Worked**

Visitors can view over 80 photographs documenting American men's and women's labor from 1857 to 1987.

**Location:** National Archives  
8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740-6001

**Open:** daily, 10 am to 5 pm, until May 29th, 2006  
**Admission:** free  
**Call:** 1-866-272-6272

**Online Exhibition: Imagining Ourselves, A Global Generation of Women**

Learn about how women in their twenties and thirties around the globe define themselves by reading their stories and viewing their art. The online exhibit launches March 8th, 2006 and runs until June 2006, at the website of the International Museum of Women, www.imow.org.



NWHM To Host Two Events Focusing on Women's History

During the month of April, the National Women's History Museum and the Woodrow Wilson Center are co-sponsoring two opportunities to learn about women in history.

The program on April 17, 2006, focuses on a novel written in 1878 by Olive San Louie Anderson, *An American Girl, and Her Four Years in a Boys' College*. Ms. Anderson's novel was based on her experiences as one of the first women to attend the University of Michigan. The discussion of this novel will be led by one of its co-editors, Elisabeth Israels Perry, Professor of History, Saint Louis

University, a distinguished author, and advocate for inclusion of women in history textbooks.

The second program, on April 19, 2006, will consider new scholarship in U.S. women's history, with a focus on two books: Alisse Portnoy, *Their Right to Speak: Women's Activism in the Indian and Slave Debates* and Louise Knight, *Citizen: Jane Addams and the Struggle for Democracy*. These authors both portray the ways in which dynamic women from different generations participated forcefully and effectively in the predominant public policy debates of their times despite the

impediments that women then faced.

Each presentation will be in the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars at 1300 Pennsylvania Ave., NW in Washington, DC. The programs are scheduled from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. in the Fifth Floor Conference Center. Following the presentations, NWHM and the Wilson Center will host an informal reception that will afford further opportunities to interact with the authors, commentators, and fellow NWHM members. For additional information, visit wilsoncenter.org. We hope to see you at one or both programs!

Letter from our President



During the month of April, the National Women's History Museum and the Woodrow Wilson Center are co-sponsoring two opportunities to learn about women in history.

The program on April 17, 2006, focuses on a novel written in 1878 by Olive San Louie Anderson, *An American Girl, and Her Four Years in a Boys' College*. Ms. Anderson's novel was based on her experiences as one of the first women to attend the University of Michigan. The discussion of this novel will be led by one of its co-editors, Elisabeth Israels Perry, Professor of History, Saint Louis University, a distinguished author, and advocate for inclusion of women in history textbooks.

The second program, on April 19, 2006, will consider new scholarship in U.S. women's history, with a focus on two books: Alisse Portnoy, *Their Right to Speak: Women's Activism in the Indian and Slave Debates* and Louise Knight, *Citizen: Jane Addams and the Struggle for Democracy*. These authors both portray the ways in which dynamic women from different generations participated forcefully and effectively in the predominant public policy debates of their times despite the impediments that women then faced.

Each presentation will be in the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars at 1300 Pennsylvania Ave., NW in Washington, DC. The programs are scheduled from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. in the Fifth Floor Conference Center. Following the presentations, NWHM and the Wilson Center will host an informal reception that will afford further opportunities to interact with the authors, commentators, and fellow NWHM members. For additional information visit wilsoncenter.org. We hope to see you at one or both programs!

Best regards,  
*Susan B. Jolie*  
Susan B. Jolie  
President

Wicked Performance and NWHM-Hosted Reception a Success



Actor Sebastian Arcelus, who played Fiyero, joined NWHM Board Member Ann Stone (left) and President Susan Jolie at the reception at the Kennedy Center following the performance of *Wicked*.

NWHM Board members, Advisory Board members, Charter members, and friends came together January 5th to take part in a benefit performance of the sold out Broadway hit *Wicked* at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.

On the surface, it might seem an odd fit. What could a work of fiction about the relationship between the two "witches" in the *Wizard of Oz* (Glinda the Good and the Wicked Witch of the West) have to do with women's history? But on many levels, this play celebrates the strength and positive qualities of women and dramatizes what happens when history is badly distorted...in this case, most specifically, the "history" surrounding these two women...The story is about what happens before Dorothy drops into Oz and how Glinda came to be labeled as "The Good" and how Elphaba (the so-called Wicked Witch of the West) came to be labeled as "The Wicked."

"Where I am from we believe all sorts of things that aren't true. We call it - 'history,'" says the Wizard of Oz as he tries to justify what he has done to smear Elphaba's image. While we may not have had the *Wizard of Oz* writing women's history in the past, our history has been similarly distorted or just plain omitted. This play inspires us all to work that much harder to fill in the blanks and correct the errors.

After the play, NWHM hosted a reception for NWHM members, where they were able to meet the cast of *Wicked*, mingle, and enjoy refreshments.

NWHM MVPs



NWHM gratefully acknowledges the gift of \$10,000.00 contributed by Magda Ratajski in honor of her mother Helena Podlowska Ratajska.

Help Us Keep You Informed!

If you would like to receive updates about special events relating to women's history, please send us your email address at [staff@nwhm.org](mailto:staff@nwhm.org).