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Women's History in the Hudson Valley

***Ten Stories from Columbia
and Dutchess Counties***

2022

Dear Friends,

Our history is filled with countless women who fought for their rights, made their voices heard and changed the fabric of American society. Many of them continue to break barriers to this day. And yet, despite the extraordinary achievements of women, far too many of their stories have been overlooked. While their names may not yet appear in history books, we are proud each year to recognize and share the invaluable contributions these Hudson Valley pioneers have made to make a difference in our lives and world.



The 2022 volume of **Women's History in the Hudson Valley: Ten Stories from Columbia and Dutchess Counties** features the stories of Ruth Piwonka, of Kinderhook, whose deep knowledge of the history of the Hudson Valley was matched by her dedication to her community, which she served for many years through her roles in public office and civic organizations; Cecelia Magill, who fought racial discrimination in industrial hiring in Poughkeepsie in the 1940s and segregation throughout the Hudson Valley for many years; Senior Chief Petty Officer Shannon M. Kent, who was raised in Pine Plains and died in service of our nation while deployed with the U.S. Navy in Syria in 2019; and many more.

My office is honored, once again, to produce and distribute **Women's History in the Hudson Valley** in partnership with the Mid-Hudson Library District as part of Women's History Month. The 10 women highlighted in this year's edition made significant strides toward equality, helped others in times of need and shaped the Hudson Valley communities we call home. Please enjoy their stories and find inspiration in their strength, determination and passion.

Sincerely,

Didi Barrett
Member of the Assembly, District 106



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Minnie Catherine Allen

New Lebanon
1852-1922

Shaker Eldress and Advocate

Minnie Catherine Allen was one of the most prominent members of Columbia County's Shaker community. Born in Indiana, Allen grew up in a religious family and was sent to board with the Mount Lebanon Shaker Society. Her parents intended the arrangement to be temporary, but Allen was so

enamored with the Shakers' communal way of life that she joined permanently and became the manager of the community's store. In 1897, Allen published "A Full Century of Communism, The History of the Alethians, formally called Shakers," which chronicled Shaker history to educate non-Shakers on community values.

From 1860 to 1910, the Mount Lebanon Shaker Society was active in various movements, including pacifism, women's rights and animal protection. Allen got involved as well and became an outspoken advocate for the rights of women and animals. She attended a meeting of the International Council for Women in Toledo, Ohio, and led a petition drive in support of women's suffrage. In 1908, as the Shaker movement was dying down, Allen became first eldress in



the Central Shaker Ministry. She preserved thousands of Shaker documents and artifacts, donating many of them to libraries and museums. It is thanks to Allen, and her preservation efforts, that the Shaker Museum at the research library in Old Chatham, the historic Mount Lebanon site in New Lebanon and other institutions across the nation can educate the public on the contributions that the Shakers have made to the Hudson Valley.





Sally Good Church

Hudson
1868-1964

Historic Preservationist

Sarah Baker Good, nicknamed Sally, grew up in an affluent family in Lock Haven, Pennsylvania. The Good family were friends with the Churches; Frederic Edwin Church was a prominent landscape painter who built the Olana estate on the banks of the Hudson River. The estate consisted of a working farm, the main residence

and a 250-acre designed landscape.

Sally became engaged, in secret, to Louis Palmer Church, Frederic's son. After Frederic's death in 1900, Louis inherited Olana and announced his engagement to Sally. A gracious hostess, Sally entertained guests frequently and became one of the most prominent women in the Hudson Valley.

Throughout their years at Olana, Sally and Louis barely changed the estate. Accounts from their servants suggest that the couple made an effort to honor Frederic's artistic legacy by leaving everything as it was when they arrived. Louis died in 1943, and Sally continued to preserve Olana until her death in 1964 at the age of 96. Sally Good Church's steadfast efforts to preserve Olana as Frederic Church imagined it helped lead to the estate



being listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places. In 1966, Olana was acquired by New York State and opened to the public as Olana State Historic Site.





Ruth Piwonka

Kinderhook
1940-2021

Village Trustee and Historian

Ruth Piwonka was one of the foremost local historians in the Hudson Valley. Born in Chicago, she moved to Kinderhook in 1969. Her love of history and relentless pursuit of knowledge led her to become an expert on Dutch colonial history in New York. For decades, Piwonka was Kinderhook's Chief Historian, both in official and unofficial capacities,

and served as Executive Director of the Columbia County Historical Society. This nonprofit organization has educated the public on the history and culture of Columbia County for over 100 years.

Piwonka was also a committed environmentalist and public servant. Piwonka was a Trustee of the Village of Kinderhook and served on the village zoning board. She was the first Executive Director of the Columbia County Land Conservancy. She was named the 2020 Martha Washington Woman of History, a distinction awarded by Washington's Headquarters State Historic Site to a woman who has made contributions to Hudson Valley history through education, promotion and preservation.

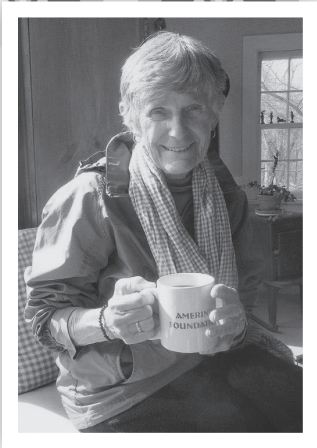


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Nancy H. Smith

Claverack
1932-2021

Educator and Activist

Nancy H. Smith dedicated her life to fighting poverty and inequality worldwide. Raised in Jenkinstown, Pennsylvania, Smith moved to the Hudson Valley in the 1960s and took a job at Columbia-Greene Community College. For 20 years, she taught psychology and anthropology. This led to a lifelong interest in social equality and the pursuit of multiple service

opportunities. During the Cambodian humanitarian crisis of the 1980s, she spent two years as the Cambodian Field Director for the American Friends Service Committee and coordinated educational, environmental and physical rehabilitation programs.

In the 1990s, Smith took a job with Oxfam-UK overseeing development programs in West Africa, Somalia, Nepal and Afghanistan. She arrived in Afghanistan just after the Taliban took over and advocated for the rights of Afghan women, often in meetings with Taliban representatives. Smith was also witness to the Battle of Mogadishu between United Nations forces and supporters of Somali warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid, which culminated in the "Black Hawk Down" incident in October 1993. Her advocacy for the rights of women and oppressed people continued



throughout her life. At home in the Hudson Valley, Smith fought for affirmative action policies at Columbia-Greene Community College, participated in an anti-nuclear power group and led a weekly vigil for peace in downtown Hudson. She was a true advocate for human rights, both abroad and at home.





Dora B. R. Thorne

Chatham
1920-2019

Artist, Farmer and Veteran

Born in Norwich, New York, Dora Thorne was a veteran, artist, farmer and educator. During World War II, she joined the United States Marine Corps and served as a draftsman at the Quantico Marine Corps Base in Virginia. Thorne developed a lifelong appreciation of art, graduated from the Pratt Institute in New York City and received a BFA from the University at

Albany in 1971. She painted miniatures and taught ceramics, passing down her artistic insights to the next generation.

For decades, Thorne and her husband, William Thorne Jr., operated Thornecrest Poultry Farm in Chatham. After retiring, they spent summers in Chatham and winters in Florida and went RV camping across the country. Thorne took tremendous pride in her military service and was an active member of American Legion Post 42 in Chatham and the Daughters of the American Revolution. Her artistry, creativity and love of country personified the best attributes of the Greatest Generation.



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Gertrude S. Cooper

Hyde Park
1889-1977

Superintendent, Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site

Gertrude S. Cooper made history as the first female Superintendent in the National Park Service. Born in Boston, Massachusetts, Cooper was a childhood friend of Eleanor Roosevelt. She married Dexter P. Cooper, a world-renowned electrical engineer, in the

early 20th century. Cooper traveled with her husband around the world, visiting many American states and other nations. After Cooper was widowed in 1938, she settled in Hyde Park and became neighbors of Eleanor and her husband, President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

On July 16, 1940, President Roosevelt appointed Cooper Superintendent of the Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site, which preserves Frederick William Vanderbilt's riverfront estate. During the Roosevelt presidency, the mansion housed the Secret Service and the President's guests. Cooper was responsible for managing the mansion and its grounds and promoting guided tours. She left the mansion in 1945, shortly after President Roosevelt's death. She later became the Director of Greenwich House, a settlement house working to alleviate poverty in New York City, and retired in Killington, Connecticut.



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Sadie Peterson Delaney

Poughkeepsie
1889-1958

Librarian and Bibliotherapist

Sadie Peterson Delaney was a pioneer in the field of bibliotherapy, the therapeutic use of storytelling. Born in Rochester, New York, Delaney attended high school in Poughkeepsie. She graduated from the College of the City of New York in 1919 and then received library training

at the New York Public Library School. Delaney was instrumental in the development of the New York Public Library's African American collection which opened in 1925. She also ran reading programs for at-risk youth and the blind. Within the context of the time period, this was a radically progressive initiative.

In 1924, Delaney became the head of the library at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Tuskegee, Alabama. The hospital primarily served African American veterans, many of whom had physical or mental disabilities. Delaney used bibliotherapy to help patients, including running book talks and teaching over 600 patients how to read Braille. Delaney worked at the hospital for 34 years until her death in 1958.



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Shannon M. Kent

Pine Plains
1983-2019

Senior Chief Petty Officer, United States Navy

A mother, artist, writer, polyglot, student of psychology and expert naval cryptologist, Shannon Kent's passion for knowledge, dedication to her family and community, as well as love of country made her a true patriot and an inspiration to women everywhere. From a young age, Kent established herself as a high achiever, who pursued

multiple interests and quickly developed them into accomplished talents. Growing up in Pine Plains, Kent ran track, rode horses and learned Spanish on her own. This would be one of many languages that she would eventually be fluent in, in addition to six dialects of Arabic.

Shannon's family has a long history of public service, and she not only continued that tradition, but took it to new heights. She enlisted in the Navy in December 2003 and became a qualified cryptologist and a highly skilled intelligence professional. In 2007, Kent's tenacity, drive and skills enabled her to be part of Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) missions, and her efforts, reflected in the citation for her Joint Service Commendation Medal, "contributed directly to the capture of hundreds of enemy insurgents and severely degraded enemy combat



capability.” Following this deployment and substantial training, that Kent was one of the first women to complete, Kent achieved a position on a Navy SEAL support team, and became the antithesis of age-old notions that women shouldn’t or couldn’t serve in combat.

Kent served in the Navy for fifteen years and was deployed nine times, including five combat deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. During her service, she earned a Master’s Degree in Psychology, was accepted into a Ph.D. program in clinical psychology and applied to become a naval officer. Despite being fit to serve in combat, she was ultimately denied an officer’s commission because of a cancer diagnosis. True to her fighting spirit, Kent proceeded to lobby Congress for a change in medical regulations for new officers.

Soon after, Kent was deployed once again, this time to Syria to locate ISIS cells. A casualty of the 2019 Manbij bombing, Kent was the U.S. military’s first female combat death since the fight against ISIS began. She was the Navy’s first enlisted sailor to be given the honor of lying in the chapel of the U.S. Naval Academy and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery. Kent was also posthumously awarded the Bronze Star, and is one of only three women whose name is engraved on the National Security Agency’s Cryptologic Memorial Wall in Fort Meade, Maryland. Her courage, strength, resiliency and service had a tremendous impact even after death. Days before her memorial service, the Navy amended the regulation that denied her an officer’s commission, and named the amendment in her honor.





Cecelia Magill

Poughkeepsie
1918-2003

Civil Rights Leader

Cecelia Magill was a lifelong resident of Poughkeepsie and civil rights activist. Her son, Robert Magill Jr., has described his mother as having a “feisty side,” and her courage to stand up for her rights had a tremendous effect in her community. In 1942, Magill applied for a job with the Schatz Federal Bearing Company.

After Magill learned that Schatz would not

hire her because of her race, she worked with the Catharine Street Community Center to alert the federal government. The government intervened and Schatz released a statement in which they promised to hire “without regard to race.” Magill’s successful fight against segregation is a part of Hudson Valley civil rights history that is often untold but is vital to the development of Poughkeepsie and the battle for equality.



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Lucinda Franks

Hopewell Junction
1946-2021

Pulitzer-Prize Winning Journalist and Writer

Lucinda Franks was a pioneering journalist who shattered barriers in a male-dominated field. Born in Chicago and raised in Wellesley, Massachusetts, Franks graduated from Vassar College in 1968 with a degree in English. She then began working at United Press International (UPI). Although initially hired to cover beauty pageants, Franks went

to Northern Ireland by herself and was there when violence broke out. Despite a UPI policy barring female journalists from covering war zones, Franks continued her reporting, but was later transferred to New York City.

While in New York, she worked with author Thomas Powers on a five-part story on a member of Weather Underground, a left-wing militant organization that was a faction of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Published in 1970, the story won the Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting. Franks was the first woman to win the Pulitzer for National Reporting and, at the age of 24, the youngest person to win a Pulitzer. She worked as a staff writer for The New York Times and The New Yorker and wrote several books including "Timeless: Love, Morgenthau and Me," an account of her marriage to Robert M. Morgenthau,



the long-time Hudson Valley farmer and Manhattan District Attorney.



