



**Women's History in
the Hudson Valley**

Courtesy of

Assemblymember
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Women's History in the Hudson Valley

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

2025

Dear Friends,

Women's History Month is a time to reflect on the challenges women, past and present, persevere through to realize their dreams and achieve equity, justice and a fair voice in our society. To ensure more women's stories are told and that they reach a wider audience, my office, each year, publishes this booklet recognizing women with ties to our region - from the 18th century to the present - who have made a real impact, locally, globally or in between.



The 2025 volume of Women's History in the Hudson Valley: Ten Stories from Columbia and Dutchess Counties features philanthropist and former state leader Joan Kaplan Davidson; Sarah Van Ness, who went from an enslaved woman to one of the first black women to own land in Columbia County; Ray Eames, groundbreaking artist and designer; Julia Wilbur, a civil rights activist and suffragist; and many more.

To help share the stories of these amazing women, we work in partnership with the Mid-Hudson Library District, distributing our booklet to public and school libraries across our Assembly District. We have chronicled 10 women in this year's edition who made significant strides toward equality, helped those in need and shaped the Hudson Valley communities we call home. Please enjoy their stories and find inspiration in their strength, determination and passion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Didi Barrett". The signature is written in a cursive style and is located below the word "Sincerely,".

***Didi Barrett
Member of the Assembly, District 106***



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Emma Jane Cady

*East Chatham
1854-1933*

Theorem Painter

Emma Jane Cady was born in East Chatham, New York, on November 13, 1854, to Norman Cady, a farmer. While her family was initially from Connecticut, they moved to Columbia County in the middle of the 18th century before Emma's birth. She was the oldest of three children and was remembered by neighbors and family members as

beautiful, strong-willed and active.

Cady was not known by her neighbors and family for being an artist. However, her work was discovered in the 1930s by folk art collectors J. Stuart Halladay and Herrell George Thomas. Initially, her work was assumed to be that of another person under the same name who lived in New Lebanon around 1820. However, research performed in 1978 by Ruth Piwonka and Roderick H. Blackburn revealed her true identity.

Cady mastered the theorem painting technique, which involved making stencils and using them to make drawings or paintings on fabric or paper. When she began practicing art, the technique was no longer popularly utilized. She used transparent and opaque watercolor paints, applied mica flecks to her depictions of glass and used a textured cloth to spread powder over her stencils.

Emma has five known works of art: four watercolors and one oil on canvas. Of her four watercolors,



two depict still-life glass compotes and two are images of doves sitting on branches. One of these was produced for her brother and sister-in-law in celebration of the birth of their eldest son in 1890, her only signed and dated work. Her works are considered among the finest examples of theorem painting, and she is one of the few theorem artists known to have signed her work.

One of Cady's still-life paintings, *Fruit in Glass Compote*, was donated to the American Folk Art Museum by Ralph Esmerian. The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum owns a nearly identical piece.

Emma never married, and after the death of her parents, she moved in with a nephew. Around 1920, Cady moved to Grass Lake, Michigan, where she lived with her sister and her family until her death in 1933.

Photo Citation:
Public Domain





Adrienne Citrin

*Ancramdale
1945-2019*

Community Volunteer

Adrienne Citrin was born in Brooklyn on January 9, 1945, to Louis and Rose Dinkowitz. She earned a bachelor's degree from Brooklyn College and a master's degree in education from New York University. Adrienne became a librarian in the New York City school system before spending most of her career as a dedicated and beloved teacher for fourth

through sixth grades in the city.

Adrienne relocated to upstate New York with her husband, Michael, after accepting an offer to serve as a special education teacher in the Onteora Central School District, where she worked until retiring in 2000. After retirement, she and her husband moved to Ancramdale, dedicating much of her time to community service and leaving a lasting impact on the community.

She served as the president of the Ancramdale Neighbors Helping Neighbors Association (ANHNA) for nine years, which thrived under her leadership. It provided fresh food to several local families, grants to local students and adults for higher education expenses, school supplies to children in need, holiday baskets for local families and assistance during family emergencies.

In addition to her role as ANHNA president, Adrienne was a well-known presence in Ancramdale



for her various other contributions to the community. She helped start the Ancram Kids Summer Camp and was active in the program, arranging special outings and reading to campers. She also volunteered and fundraised for countless organizations and local events, including the Roe Jan Library, Ancram Fire Company, and Ancramdale Presbyterian Church's Annual St. Patrick's Celebration Dinner.

Adrienne passed away on February 6, 2019, at 74. The ANHNA administers a need-based scholarship in her honor, the Adrienne Citrin Memorial Scholarship, that helps students cover food, transportation, books and other expenses for necessities throughout the school year.

*Photo Citation:
The family of Adrienne Citrin*





Joan Kaplan Davidson

*Germantown
1927-2023*

Philanthropist

Joan Kaplan Davidson was born to Jacob and Alice Kaplan on May 26, 1927, in New York City. She was raised in Croton-on-Hudson and earned a bachelor's degree from Cornell University in 1948, followed by a postgraduate degree in education from Bank Street College of Education in Manhattan a year later. After teaching and

writing advertising copy for Macy's, she moved to Washington, D.C., where she worked on the staff of the Senate Armed Services Preparedness Committee under Senate Majority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson. In 1953, she married C. Girard Davidson, who served as the Truman administration's assistant secretary of the interior. Together, they had four children and later divorced.

In 1967, the J.M. Kaplan Fund, with the National Endowment for the Arts, started Westbeth Artists Housing. This adaptive reuse initiative helps provide affordable housing and workspaces for artists and arts organizations. Joan managed the creation and served as the first president of Westbeth, which opened in 1970. Westbeth became a model for rehabilitating industrial buildings and was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2009 and designated a New York City landmark in 2011. Joan took over the J.M. Kaplan Fund upon her father's retirement in 1977, following a position as



chairwoman of the New York State Council on the Arts from 1975-77.

Joan gave up the presidency of the J.M. Kaplan Fund in 1993. However, she remained active as president emeritus when she was appointed as the New York State Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation by New York Gov. Mario Cuomo. Her tenure was short-lived, ending with the election of Gov. George Pataki. However, she remained involved in conservation efforts, establishing programs supporting the state's natural resources and preserving rural communities, such as the Rural New York Grant Program and the Industrial Heritage Reuse Project.

In 1995, Joan founded Furthermore, which provided grants for publishing nonfiction books related to the arts, history and the natural and human-made environment. The organization helped publish over 1,400 books, utilizing more than \$8 million in grants. In 1996, Davidson became one of the founding members of Historic Hudson, a preservation organization dedicated to protecting the quality of life and the cultural and architectural heritage of the City of Hudson.

Joan passed away at 96 on August 11, 2023, in Hudson. She is survived by her four children, John Matthew, G. Bradford, Peter W., and Betsy; her 12 grandchildren; and her five great-grandchildren.

*Photo Citation:
The family of Joan Davidson*



Leila “Lee” Vanderbilt Stott

*Hudson
1880-1969*

Suffragist & Educator

Leila “Lee” Vanderbilt Stott was born to Leila and William Stott on November 25, 1880, in New York City. Throughout her life, she distinguished herself as an active member and leader of the women’s suffrage movement in the Hudson Valley. She was also passionate about education

and worked as an educator and administrator at the City and Country School in New York City from 1917-45.

Lee served as chair of the Woman Suffrage Party’s Third District of Albany in 1916, where she helped raise over \$8,000 to support the movement. In September of that year, she gathered suffrage workers on the schoolhouse lawn in Ravena to speak about the importance of the suffrage movement. Later that day, the group rallied at the Park Hotel.

Her leadership continued when she was involved in a suffrage meeting held at the Methodist Episcopal Church in Voorheesville in the summer of 1917. The suffragists discussed the various forms of women’s war work as a continuation of the movement’s previous plans and to strengthen the movement. That October, Lee journeyed alongside her fellow New York suffragists to Washington, D.C., to hear a special address from President Woodrow



Wilson. He showed support and passion for women’s suffrage, but Lee and her comrades sought to pressure the president to take action to grant women the right to vote.

Lee was recognized on the National Roll of Honor of the National League of Women Voters in Washington, D.C., as a significant member of the suffragist movement. Along with 72 other women, Lee’s name was inscribed on a bronze tablet displayed at the national headquarters of the League of Women Voters. Following this recognition, with the support of the League of Women Voters, Lee ran as a candidate for the state Assembly in 1938. Though her bid was unsuccessful, it was a great feat that contributed to her legacy.

Lee passed away at 88 on April 4, 1969, in Hudson, laid to rest in the Hudson City Cemetery.

*Photo Citation:
Public Domain*





Sarah Van Ness

*Kinderhook
circa 1823-1919*


From Enslaved Woman to Landowner

Sarah Van Ness was born in Stuyvesant sometime between 1823 and 1830. She was the firstborn child of Anthony “Toon” Harder and Flora/Florence Van Alen. Later census forms indicated that Sarah could not read or write, so she likely received very little, if any, formal education. As the

oldest of five children and the only girl, her daily life probably consisted of helping her mother with cooking, housework, caring for her younger brothers and perhaps occasionally doing farm chores.

In 1846, Sarah married Samuel Van Ness. Though we can’t say for sure, their families had likely been well acquainted for years, either through the community or church. The white Harder and Van Ness families were historically members of the Kinderhook Dutch Reformed Church, and it is well documented that many families took their enslaved people to church with them. Most Blacks that grew up in that church continued to attend even after manumission. Sarah was active within the church community and became a full congregation member around 1875. Her descendants continued to be members of the Dutch Reformed Church for over a century.

Sarah and Samuel lived near her parents on a small farm in



Stuyvesant. Her father, Anthony, owned a 125-acre farm – no small feat for a previously enslaved Black man. Over the 33 years of their marriage, the Van Nesses would have 14 children, most of whom died young. Only two of Sarah’s children outlived her.

Samuel passed away in 1879. Two years later, Sarah did what few people in her position had ever done: purchased her own home and property, becoming one of the earliest Black female landowners in the county. Her house, still standing on William Street in Kinderhook, would establish generational wealth for her surviving children and grandchildren. She lived in this house for the remaining 38 years of her life, caring for her mother until her death in 1881; raising her teenage daughter, Sarah Ann; and eventually raising her granddaughter, Agnes, after the death of her mother, Rosanna.

In September 1919, Sarah passed away in her beloved home following a long illness. Her funeral, held in the front parlor, was officiated by Rev. Collier of the Dutch Reformed Church and by Rev. Schermerhorn of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, exemplifying her significance to both the Black and white communities of Kinderhook. Her obituary in the Columbia Republican noted that she was an “aged and well-known colored woman” who was one of Kinderhook’s oldest citizens and that she “had all her faculties til the very end.”

*Photo Citation:
The African American Archive of Columbia County*



Dorothy Day

Tivoli

1897-1980

Social Activist & Candidate for Sainthood

Dorothy Day was born to John Day and Grace Satterlee, a native of upstate New York, in Brooklyn on November 8, 1897. She was the third oldest child with three brothers and a sister. She was interested in religion from a young age, frequently studying the Bible and attending church. In 1914, she attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign on a

scholarship, but after two years, she decided to leave and relocate to New York City.

Dorothy gravitated toward social activism. While living on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, she worked on the staff of several socialist publications such as *The Liberator*, *The Masses* and *The Call*. In November 1917, she was arrested for picketing at the White House, advocating for women's suffrage as part of a campaign called the Silent Sentinels. She was sentenced to 30 days in jail and was released after 15, 10 of which she spent on a hunger strike.

She worked for many years as a journalist at local newspapers, such as the *Staten Island Advance*, and Catholic publications, such as *Commonweal*. In 1932, Day traveled to Washington, D.C., to report on the Hunger March for the *Commonweal*. There, the marchers inspired and encouraged her to become more involved in social activism, and she felt there was space in the movement for



Catholic leadership. That year, she met Peter Maurin, a French immigrant with whom she co-founded the Catholic Worker Movement.

The movement officially started with the first edition of the Catholic Worker on May 1, 1933, priced at 1-cent per copy. The publication was volunteer-run and did not feature ads. It sought to provide hope to those suffering during the Great Depression and share Dorothy's revolutionary ideology of marrying the teachings of the Catholic Church to social activism for the working class. The Catholic Worker ran for nearly a century, publishing its final edition in 2021.

In 1964, Dorothy purchased a farm in Tivoli to serve as one of the many "Houses of Hospitality" that she and Peter Maurin started. These homes were meant to provide housing for underprivileged workers, bring people together in shared religious faith and practice community farming and homesteading. Officially named the Rose Hill Catholic Worker Farm, the Tivoli farm was operational until 1978. Today, "hospitality houses" throughout the Northeast provide food and shelter for those in need in her honor.

Dorothy passed away on November 29, 1980, in Manhattan at 83 after suffering a heart attack. In 2000, she was bestowed the title of "Servant of God" by the Vatican, the first step in being canonized as a saint by the Catholic Church. Dorothy is nearing the end of this process and may achieve Sainthood.

*Photo Citation:
Public Domain*





Ray Eames

*Millbrook
1912-1988*

Artist & Designer

Ray Bernice Alexandra Kaiser Eames was born in Sacramento, California, on December 15, 1912. After graduating from Sacramento High School in 1931, Ray spent a term at Sacramento Junior College before moving with her mother, a widow, to New York to be near her brother, Maurice, a West Point cadet. In 1933, Ray graduated from the May Friend Bennett Women's College in Millbrook,

where she studied under Lu Duple. She subsequently moved to New York City to study abstract expressionist painting with Duple's mentor, Hans Hofmann. Ray's career initially centered around painting, becoming a founding American Abstract Artists group member.

Following her mother's death in 1940, Kaiser studied at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and moved beyond painting as her sole focus. At Cranbrook, Kaiser met her husband, Charles Eames, who headed the school's industrial design department. Charles was married with one child then but divorced his wife and married Ray in 1941. The two settled in Los Angeles.

In 1943, Charles and Ray Eames opened their design office, Eames Office, which was widely known for its furniture but also included filmmaking, information design and design theory. Ray was largely responsible for the Eames Office's



graphic and commercial work, and she independently designed 27 covers for Arts & Architecture Magazine from 1942 to 1948. Between 1943 and 1978, the Eames Office produced numerous furniture designs that were commercially manufactured, developing iconic designs including the Eames Lounge Chair and the Shell Chair.

Following Charles' death, the Eames Office's productivity slowed. Ray continued to work on several unfinished projects, consulted with IBM, published books, gave lectures, accepted awards and administered the Eames archive and estate. She donated approximately 1.5 million 2-dimensional objects to the Library of Congress for archival safekeeping. She authored a book featuring all Eames Office projects from 1941 to the mid-80s. The book was published shortly after she passed away on August 21, 1988 – 10 years to the day after Charles's death.

Ray's contributions to Eames Office were severely overlooked during her lifetime, with Ray often portrayed as insignificant. In recent decades, however, her work has received more attention. In 1990, Furniture History published a thorough interview between design historian Pat Kirkham and Ray. As Kirkham put it in the introduction to the interview transcript, "The interchange of ideas between these two enormously talented individuals is particularly difficult to chart because their personal and design relationship was so close." Charles famously said, "Anything I can do, Ray can do better."

*Photo Citation:
Public Domain*



Gretchen Reed

*Poughkeepsie
1939-2023*

Gospel Music Organizer

Gretchen Reed was born in Warsaw, North Carolina, on April 20, 1939. Her life and career are a testament to her love of music and commitment to her faith. Gretchen received formal musical training in voice and piano at the Hampton Institute. She became a minister and musician who sang all over the world. She also volunteered at the prison ministry, soup kitchens and street ministries.

In 1960, Gretchen became the choir director at Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Stormville, New York. Over the next decade and beyond, she organized gospel concerts and was a highly solicited gospel soloist in Dutchess County. She also served as a pianist in a female gospel trio, Deliverance, with Barbara Riley Davis and Delores Long. Her programs featured gospel choirs rather than gospel quartets.

Gretchen came onto the Poughkeepsie gospel choir music scene in the late sixties and the early seventies – during its peak and beginning of a two-decade-long ebb. She is remembered for her beautiful singing voice and musical prowess. She often sang alongside her friend and musician, Marva Clark, who accompanied her on the piano.

In 1977, she organized “The Greatest Choir Music Festival Ever” at the Bardavon, featuring the Mid-Hudson Community Choir, directed by Marva Clark, and four



out-of-town choirs from Newburgh, White Plains, and New Haven. Gretchen was also active in a Poughkeepsie area chapter of the Gospel Music Workshop of America (GMWA).

A long-time resident of Poughkeepsie, Gretchen passed away at the Pines Nursing Home on February 10, 2023. Gretchen is survived by her children, Robert and his wife, Ka'Neen Reed; Tracey and her husband, Mark Phillips and Ronald Reed; seven grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

*Photo Citation:
Gretchen V. Reed permission by family*





Martha Thornley

*Wappingers Falls
1931-2021*

Community Activist & Woman of Faith


Martha A. Gutowski Thornley was born in New York City in 1931 to Charles J. and Colette McGill. She grew up in Fairfield, Connecticut, with her older brother John. Martha attended Luralton Hall, an all-girls Catholic high school in Milford, Connecticut, and in June 1953, she received a bachelor's

degree in English from Trinity College in Washington, D.C.

Later that year, she married Joseph L. Gutowski, a fellow recent graduate from the nearby Georgetown University, whom she met during their shared college years. Martha and Joseph settled in Wappingers Falls, where they raised six children, Paul, John, Ann, Mary, Carl and Robert, who would later give her seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

As her children grew up, Martha returned to school and earned her master's of social work from Adelphi University in 1981. She then began a rewarding career in social work at Vassar Brothers Hospital, where she remained until her retirement in 1993. During this period, Martha faced the deaths of several loved ones: her son, Paul, in 1985; her husband, Joseph, in 1993; and her daughter-in-law, Helen Ke, in 1994.

In 2004, Martha married James T. Thornley, father of Kevin Thornley and Kimberly Kane,



and grandfather to four. In addition to spending quality time with loved ones, Martha was passionate about supporting and serving her community. She dedicated much of her time to aiding those in need. Her religious faith was also very important to her throughout her life.

As a member of Christ Episcopal Church in Poughkeepsie for 20 years, Martha taught Sunday school and served as a lector and Eucharistic minister. She was one of the early founders of the overnight homeless shelter, which opened its first five beds in the Christ Church parish house. Martha also pioneered a Cursillo weekend retreat in 1966 and was active in the movement throughout her life. She was also involved in Marriage Encounter and Tres Dias.

Martha volunteered at the Beacon Correctional Facility for Women for 16 years, working with the Kairos Prison Ministry program. She was active in the early days of the AIDS epidemic, working with Bread for the Journey to organize all churches to provide meals for those in need. At the time, there were very few services and a great deal of fear.

Martha passed away peacefully at her home in Wappingers Falls, New York, surrounded by her family, on July 7, 2021. She was 90 years old.

*Photo Citation:
Road Scholar*



Julia Wilbur

Milan

1815-1895

Abolitionist & Suffragist

Julia Ann Wilbur was born in Milan, New York, on August 8, 1815, to Stephen Wilbur and Mary Lapham. From 1829 to 1831, she attended Nine Partners Boarding School. Her mother died in 1835, and her father soon remarried. She remained at home to help raise her siblings until 1844 when she moved to Rochester to become a teacher. Her work in the Rochester public school system brought her

attention to the wage gap between male and female teachers, which is believed to have sparked her interest in women's rights efforts.

Julia was an early member of the Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society (RLASS), later acting as a correspondence secretary, which funded Frederick Douglass' newspaper. In 1862, the RLASS asked Julia if she would be interested in helping men, women and children who escaped slavery by crossing into Union-occupied territory. She agreed, traveling to Washington, D.C., in October of that year before moving to Alexandria, Virginia, to work as a relief agent at the behest of the National Freedmen's Relief Association. She worked in Alexandria from November 1862 to February 1865 alongside Harriet Jacobs, a formerly enslaved woman. The women provided supplies and education to people freed from slavery, and Julia also advocated for better housing and health care for freed people.



After the Civil War, Julia continued to work as a visiting agent for the Freedmen's Bureau, still funded by the RLASS. She distributed tickets that could be exchanged for fuel, food and other necessities but lamented in her diary that the needs far outweighed available aid. She made several trips to Richmond and Fredericksburg to provide supplies and to witness and report on conditions for formerly enslaved populations.

As work with the Freedmen's Bureau wended down, Julia sought a job with the federal government. She moved to Washington, D.C., in 1865 and worked as a clerk, becoming the first woman to work in the U.S. Patent Office. She continued her work there until she was almost 80 years old.

With the end of the Civil War, Julia refocused her energy on suffrage efforts and is noted to have worked alongside Susan B. Anthony. In 1869, she planned with five other women to register to vote in local elections in Washington, D.C. They presented a letter to election judges that read, in part, "We know that it is unusual for those of our sex to make such a request. We do so because we believe ourselves entitled to the franchise." Julia passed away in 1895 in Washington, D.C.

*Photo Citation:
Public Domain*



