

Sarah A. Gray

ca. 1847–1893 | Alexandria
EDUCATOR

Sarah A. Gray (ca. 1847–January 8, 1893) was born free in Alexandria. Unlike most African Americans who were denied an education under slavery, she attended a Catholic school for girls near Baltimore during the 1850s. When the Civil War broke out, many enslaved men, women, and children escaped to Alexandria, which soon came under the control of the U.S. Army. Determined to help the former slaves, known as contrabands, Gray and a colleague founded a school in October 1861 and held classes throughout the war. In 1867 Gray established the Excelsior School, where she taught reading, writing, math, and geography, and also trained her female pupils in needlework as a way for them to earn a living.

In 1870 Virginia created its first statewide system of public schools, which were racially segregated by law. Gray became a teacher at Alexandria’s school for African American girls. The school board named her principal of Hallowell School in 1883. Striving to provide a high-quality education for her students, she traveled north to study new teaching methodologies. At a time when most public schools in Virginia focused on primary grades, Hallowell began adding high school classes for its advanced students. Gray suffered poor health in the last years of her life and retired a few months before her death. When a new school for African Americans opened in 1920, the city honored Gray’s service by naming it the Parker-Gray School, for Sarah A. Gray and John F. Parker, another local African American educator.

Mary Elizabeth Nottingham Day

1907–1956 | Staunton
ARTIST

Acclaimed artist **Mary Elizabeth Nottingham Day** (November 29, 1907–April 2, 1956) grew up in Culpeper, which often figured in her paintings. After graduating from Randolph-Macon Woman’s College (later Randolph College) in 1928, she studied for three years at the Art Students League of New York and received two fellowships for further study in Europe. Elizabeth Nottingham, as she was known professionally throughout her life, first exhibited in New York galleries in 1929 and continued to show her work regularly in New York and Virginia. One critic wrote that “her palette could ‘sing’ or ‘moan’ in her unceasing quest to portray the moods of Virginia’s countryside.”

Returning to Virginia early in the 1930s, Nottingham received a commission to paint a series of historical panels for a Winchester school. In 1936 she became director of the Big Stone Gap Federal Art Gallery and later that year became director of the Lynchburg Federal Art Gallery, supervising the development of exhibitions as well as classes in painting, composition, interior and costume design, and hand crafts. Nottingham served as assistant state art supervisor of the Works Projects Administration’s extension service in 1940–1941. She married artist Horace Talmage Day in 1941, and the couple joined the faculty at Mary Baldwin College, where they directed the art department. Committed to bringing art to rural areas of the state, Elizabeth Nottingham Day served as a board member and as president of the Virginia Art Alliance and sat on the State Art Commission from 1950 until 1956.

Katherine Coleman Goble Johnson

1918– | Hampton
MATHEMATICIAN

Growing up in West Virginia, **Katherine Johnson** was fascinated with numbers. A stellar student, she began college at age fifteen and was encouraged to study advanced math, including a course

on the analytic geometry of space that was developed just for her. After graduating from West Virginia State College (later West Virginia State University) in 1937, she taught school, married, and had three daughters. When she learned that the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA) at Langley Memorial Aeronautical Laboratory (later Langley Research Center) was hiring African American women to verify calculations needed by engineers, she and her family moved to the vicinity of Hampton, Virginia.

Johnson joined NACA in 1953 as a research mathematician and was part of a pool of women she has described as “computers who wore skirts,” who read data, ran it through engineering equations, and turned it into usable information. Temporarily assigned to an all-male team in the Flight Research Division, Johnson demonstrated her knowledge of analytic geometry and was assigned to the Space Task Group of the new National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in 1958. She calculated the landing trajectory for the first American in space—Alan Shepard’s 1961 mission. For the first moon landing in 1969, she calculated how to propel space capsules into orbit around the moon and how to send landing units to and from the lunar surface. She retired from NASA in 1986, and for many years continued to speak with school groups, urging students to pursue opportunities in math and science. In 2015 she received a Presidential Medal of Freedom in recognition of her accomplishments.

Flora Lonette Davis Crittenden

1924– | Newport News
EDUCATOR AND LEGISLATOR

Flora D. Crittenden was born in New York City and moved to Newport News as a teenager. After graduating from Virginia State College (later Virginia State University) in 1945, she realized her lifelong dream to teach at George Washington Carver High School, one of Newport News’s segregated public schools. During her thirty-two-year career there she served as a teacher, guidance counselor, and director of guidance. While raising three children, she earned a master’s degree from Indiana University and accepted a fellowship to study at the University of Louisville. An inspirational teacher and counselor, Crittenden helped African American students adjust to school desegregation and enabled hundred of students to attend college, sometimes cosigning loans herself. She was also active in the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Urged by former students to run for office, Crittenden began her political career in 1986, when she was elected to a four-year term on the Newport News City Council. She won a special election to a vacant seat in the House of Delegates in January 1993. Later that year she was elected to the first of five two-year terms in the House of Delegates, where she advocated improvements in education, public transportation, and public health. She served on a number of influential committees—Education, Privileges and Elections, the Chesapeake and Its Tributaries, and Transportation—before retiring in 2003. In 1994 the Newport News School Board renamed Carver the Flora D. Crittenden Middle School, a magnet school for mathematics, science, and technology.

Nominated by Sabrina Carnesi, librarian at Flora D. Crittenden Middle School, Newport News.

Elizabeth Lee “Betty” Masters

1929–2015 | Salem
PHOTOJOURNALIST

Growing up in Salem, **Betty Masters** (October 8, 1929–June 24, 2015) helped her father develop photographs in his darkroom. She fostered her love of photography at Roanoke College, where she enrolled in a class taught by her father and was one of the staff photographers for the school’s yearbook before earning her B.A. in classics in 1949. Two years later the *Roanoke World-*

News (later the *Roanoke Times and World News*) hired Masters as its first female photographer. She was soon recognized for the quality of her work, and in 1955 she became the first female judge for the annual News Photo Contest of the White House News Photographers Association, which did not then accept women as members.

A skilled photographer, Masters documented life in the Roanoke Valley, including presidential visits, sports events, hurricanes, and poverty in the Appalachian region. She won awards in the Virginia Press Photographers Association’s annual contests throughout her career, and in 1957 her work took first place in the University of Richmond’s Outstanding Photo Series of the Year. She served multiple terms as secretary of the Virginia Press Photographers Association (later the Virginia News Photographers Association) and was the first woman to serve as its president in 1954–1955. As a result of her professional accomplishments, Masters achieved equal pay for her work before she retired from the *Roanoke Times* in 1992. She remained active at Salem Baptist Church, where she became the congregation’s first female deacon.

Edwilda Gustava Allen Isaac

1937– | Farmville
CIVIL RIGHTS PIONEER

In the spring of 1951, **Edwilda Allen** was a thirteen-year-old eighth-grade student at Robert Russa Moton High School in Farmville. Conditions at the all-black school were abysmal, with inadequate facilities, outdated textbooks, and severe overcrowding that left many students attending classes in makeshift tar-paper shacks. On April 23, 1951, student Barbara Johns led a walkout of 400 students to protest the school’s unequal facilities. Allen, one of the student leaders recruited by Johns, organized her eighth-grade classmates for the walkout. As a result of Allen’s leadership role, her mother lost her state teaching license and was forced to find work in North Carolina. The walkout led to a lawsuit against Prince Edward County that became one of five cases incorporated into the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954.

After graduating from high school in 1955, Allen attended Wisconsin’s Alverno College, where she again blazed a trail as one of its few African American students. She taught music, married and raised a family, and eventually returned to Farmville. She became involved with the Martha E. Forrester Council of Women, which helped spur the purchase of the Moton School from the county for designation as a National Historic Landmark and to establish the Robert Russa Moton Museum. In the decades since that fateful day in 1951, Edwilda Allen Isaac has educated and inspired students with her story of uncommon courage in fighting for the rights of African Americans.

Nominated by Pamela Rockenbach Plahs on behalf her seventh-grade social studies students Madison Hofmann and Logan Gill, Swift Creek Middle School, Chesterfield County.

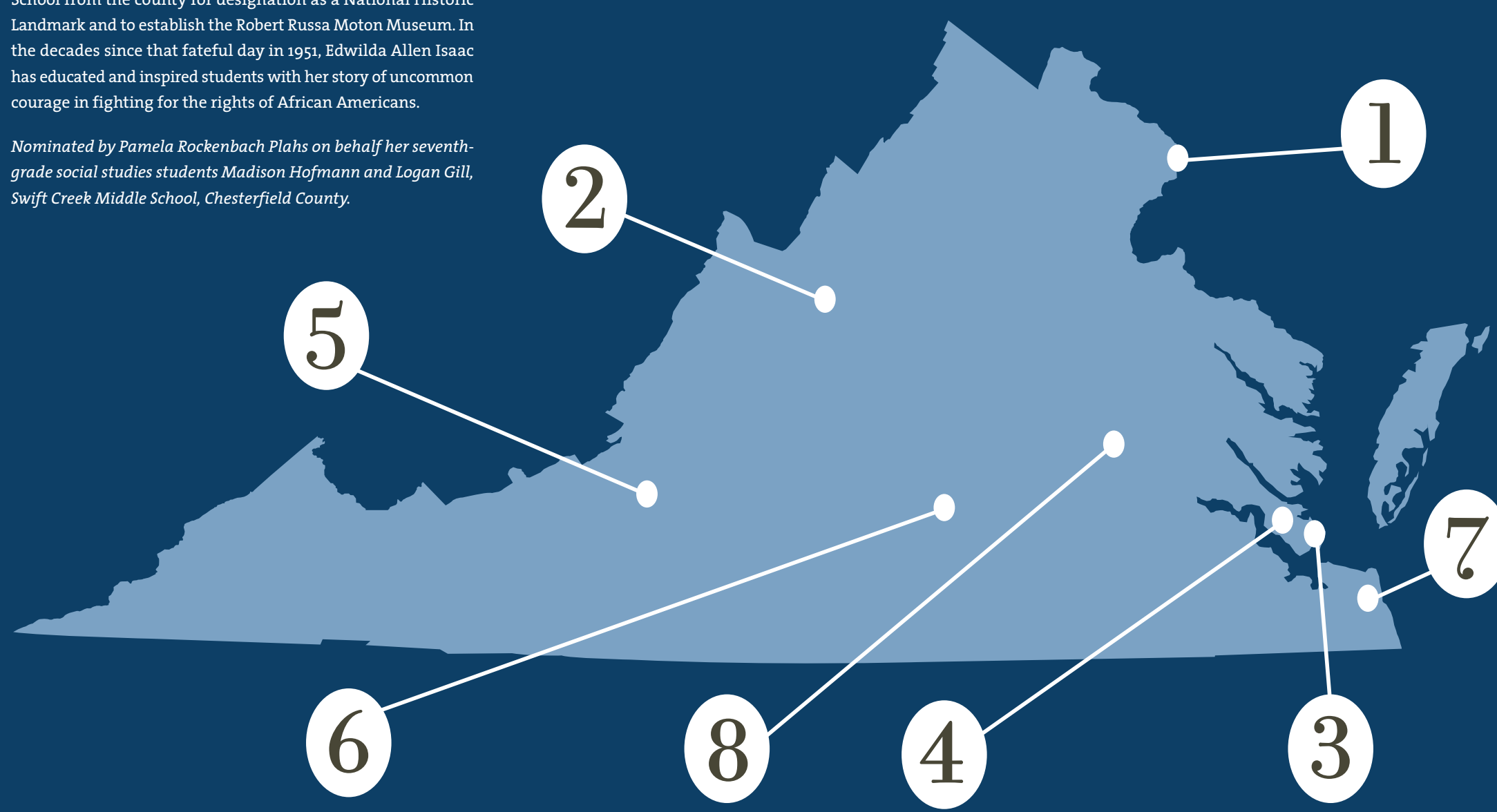
Meyera Fran Ellenson Oberndorf

1941–2015 | Virginia Beach
MAYOR

Meyera E. Oberndorf (February 10, 1941–March 13, 2015) began her career in public service when she became a member of the Virginia Beach Public Library Board during the 1960s. Despite opposition from male politicians, she became the first woman to win a seat on the city council in her second attempt at public office in 1976. She served as vice mayor from 1986 until 1988, when she became the first woman elected mayor of Virginia Beach as well as the city’s first popularly elected mayor. During her twenty years in the position, Oberndorf was a tireless advocate for the city and its residents. She championed the city’s public library system, promoted a family-friendly oceanfront, and fought for the Lake Gaston pipeline to ensure that Virginia Beach had a guaranteed water source. When the Defense Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission recommended relocating the Oceana Naval Air Station, Oberndorf rallied local support and worked with members of the General Assembly and Virginia’s congressional delegation to preserve the base, which was the city’s largest employer.

Recognized by *Newsweek* in 1996 as one of the country’s twenty-five most dynamic mayors, Oberndorf was candid and courageous in her personal life as well. During the 1990s she made public her breast cancer diagnosis. Near the end of her life she acknowledged that she was suffering from Alzheimer’s disease and allowed the media to follow her story as the disease progressed. In 2008 the Virginia Beach City Council voted to rename the central library in Oberndorf’s honor to recognize her many achievements.

1. Sarah A. Gray
2. Mary Elizabeth Nottingham Day
3. Katherine Coleman Goble Johnson
4. Flora Lonette Davis Crittenden
5. Elizabeth Lee “Betty” Masters
6. Edwilda Gustava Allen Isaac
7. Meyera Fran Ellenson Oberndorf
8. Ana Ines Barragan King



Ana Ines Barragan King

1957– | Richmond
FOUNDER AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF
THE LATIN BALLET OF VIRGINIA

*Recipient of the VABPW Foundation
Business Leadership Award*

Ana Ines Barragan King, a native of Colombia, in South America, learned flamenco, jazz, and modern dance at an early age from her mother, a dancer and teacher. She attended the Instituto Departamental de Bellas Artes of Colombia, and earned a B.F.A. in dance and choreography. She founded the Santander Jazz Ballet in Colombia and was its artistic director for a decade.

After her marriage, King came to Richmond, where she studied dance at Virginia Commonwealth University and later joined its faculty in the Department of Dance and Choreography. She began a dance company early in the 1990s and in 1997 established the Latin Ballet of Virginia. King refers to herself and her company as “ambassadors of dance and culture,” because along with dance technique, they also teach its history as well as the culture of Latin America. She has developed educational programs to teach students Spanish and English through dance and to use dance as therapy for children with special needs. King’s work has brought access to the arts to many low-income families and the Latin Ballet of Virginia has continued to thrive. Hundreds of students attend its classes at multiple locations each year. In addition to being the company’s artistic director and administrator, King continues to teach and choreograph award-winning dance pieces, including the annual *Legend of the Poinsettia*.

King has received numerous honors, including the Theresa Pollak Prize for Excellence in the Arts (Dance) in 2011 and the YWCA of Richmond’s Outstanding Women Award for Arts in 2015.

VIRGINIA WOMEN^{IN} HISTORY 2016

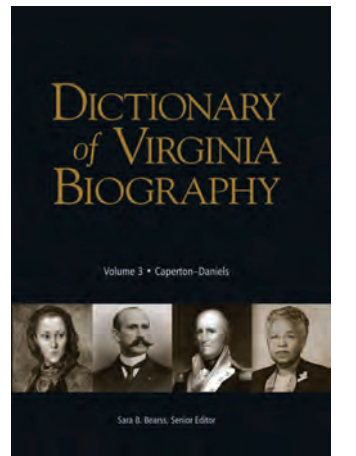
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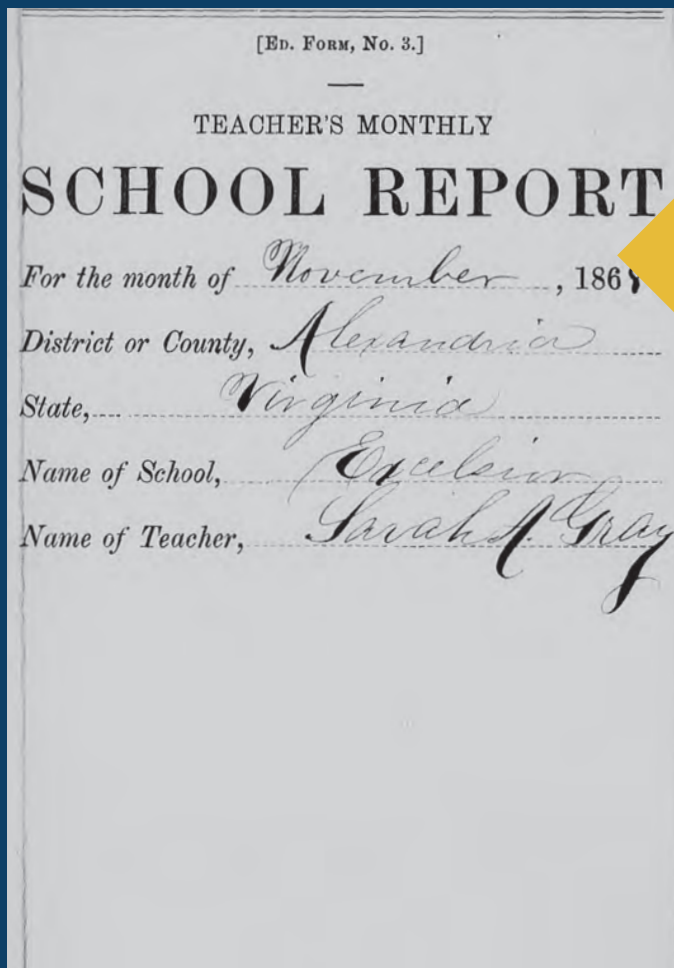


Learn more about Virginia women in the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography* (Richmond: The Library of Virginia, 1998–2006), *Changing History: Virginia Women through Four Centuries* (Richmond: The Library of Virginia, 2013), and on the Library of Virginia’s websites, www.lva.virginia.gov and www.virginiamemory.com.

Instructional materials and nomination forms for the 2017 project are available at www.lva.virginia.gov/vawomen.



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Sarah A. Gray

ca. 1847–1893
Alexandria
EDUCATOR

A teacher and principal for more than thirty years, Sarah A. Gray had a profound influence on the education of African Americans in Alexandria.

Mary Elizabeth Nottingham Day

1907–1956 | Staunton
ARTIST

A gifted teacher who strove to bring art to all Virginians, Elizabeth Nottingham Day was also an acclaimed artist of the Virginia scene.



Katherine Coleman Goble Johnson

1918– | Hampton
MATHEMATICIAN

A talented mathematician, Katherine Johnson worked for NASA for more than thirty years and calculated the trajectories for America's earliest manned space flights and the first moon landing.

Flora Lonette Davis Crittenden

1924– | Newport News
EDUCATOR AND
LEGISLATOR

As a teacher, school counselor, and member of the House of Delegates, Flora D. Crittenden exemplifies her belief that education is the key to success.



Elizabeth Lee "Betty" Masters

1929–2015 | Salem
PHOTOJOURNALIST

A trailblazer for women in the field of photojournalism, Betty Masters was the first female photographer hired by the *Roanoke Times*.

Edwilda Gustava Allen Isaac

1937– | Farmville
CIVIL RIGHTS PIONEER

As a teenager, Edwilda Allen Isaac helped lead a walkout of students from R. R. Moton High School that contributed to ending school segregation in the United States.



Meyera Fran Ellenson Oberndorf

1941–2015
Virginia Beach
MAYOR

The longest-serving mayor of Virginia Beach, Meyera E. Oberndorf was a tireless advocate for the city and its residents.

Ana Ines Barragan King

1957– | Richmond
FOUNDER AND
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
OF THE LATIN BALLET
OF VIRGINIA

As founder and artistic director of the Latin Ballet of Virginia, Ana Ines King shares Latin American dance and culture with students and audiences across Virginia.



Recipient of the
VABPW Foundation
Business Leadership Award

VIRGINIA WOMEN ^{IN} HISTORY 2016

Women have played an integral part in Virginia from its beginnings, yet their contributions have often been overlooked in the history books. Until well into the twentieth century, written histories tended to focus on the historically male-dominated fields of government and politics, the military, and large-scale property ownership to the virtual exclusion of all other venues of leadership or achievement. They ignored women's critical roles as educators, nurses, lay leaders and missionaries, farmers, artists, writers, reformers, pioneers, business leaders, laborers, civic activists, and community builders.

Today, we recognize and celebrate women's accomplishments in all walks of life, particularly in March, which Congress has designated as National Women's History Month. The Library of Virginia presents the 2016 Virginia Women in History project to honor eight women, past and present, who have made important contributions to Virginia, the nation, and the world. We encourage you to learn more about these extraordinary women who saw things differently from their contemporaries, developed new approaches to old problems, served their communities, advanced their professions, strove for excellence based on the courage of their convictions, and initiated changes in Virginia and the United States that continue to affect our lives today.

www.lva.virginia.gov/vawomen

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