WOMEN IN R.I. HISTORY

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

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Many women who contributed to local history have been overlooked or overshadowed through the years and their names may be unfamiliar today. But their achievements include a hospital, institutions of higher learning, social reform and an intangible legacy of commitment and inspiration.

In observance of Women's History Month, women reporters and editors produced this series of profiles published in the Providence Journal–Bulletin throughout March 1994.

ANNE HUTCHINSON **1591-1643**

A fearless voice for religious freedom

Had Anne Hutchinson lived in this century, she might have become a televangelist or Oprah-style talk-show host.

She had a lot to say, and was both charismatic and fearless in saying it.

But remarks and beliefs that would prompt yawns today landed her in bitter controversy, driving her in nine years from Boston to Rhode Island to her horrible death in the New York wilderness.

Before she died, however, she had established the first women's group in American history and tested the principles of free speech that would later play such a crucial role in the Revolution.

Anne Marbury was born around 1591 and grew up in an England seething with religious and intellectual dissent. When James I succeeded Queen Elizabeth I, he clamped strict state controls on England's churches, infuriating dissidents and fueling the Puritan movement.

Marbury became a follower of Puritan minister John Cotton after her marriage to William Hutchinson. When Cotton left for the New World, she followed with her husband and their large family (they eventually had 14 children).

The Hutchinsons were wealthy, arriving in Boston in 1634 with the equivalent of a half-million dollars. At first, Hutchinson was well-regarded as a clever, hard-working woman skilled in nursing.

The colony numbered less than 1,000 at that point, and women had little role in church or civic affairs. An ardent admirer of Cotton's, Hutchinson began to invite women to her home to discuss his sermons.

The weekly sessions grew increasingly popular with men as well as women, and Hutchinson began to articulate her own beliefs. Unfortunately for her, they differed from those of the established ministers.

Hutchinson believed that salvation, or grace, was an internal matter between the individual and God. That clashed with the establishment view that one achieved salvation only through following God's law and performing good works.

It's hard today to comprehend how serious the rift was. Religion was vital to the colony, its reason for being and its all-consuming interest. Establishment ministers believed Hutchinson was preaching sedition; they called her party the Antinomians, or the lawless ones.

In 1636, the Antinomians elected one of their own as governor. It was the height of their power; the next year he was thrown out of office and Hutchinson was arrested and tried for sedition.

"The Lord judgeth not as man judgeth," she said after her conviction. "Better to be cast out of the church than to deny Christ."

In 1638 she and her family were banished; they traveled to Portsmouth, R.I. That colony soon splintered, with a contingent heading farther south to found Newport.

Hutchinson remained in Portsmouth for four years, despite attempts by the Boston colony to regain control over the splinter group. Upon her husband's death in 1642, however, she decided to move farther into the wilderness to escape their control.

The family settled in what is today Pelham Bay Park in Westchester County, N.Y. The territory was controlled by the Dutch, who were extremely tolerant in religious matters.

The Indians, however, were bitter at previous harsh treatment by the settlers, and Hutchinson and all but one of her children were slaughtered on Aug. 16, 1643. Her daughter Susan was captured by the Indians, later to be ransomed and returned to Rhode Island, where she eventually married John Cole of North Kingstown.

JODY McPHILLIPS

Taken from "Rhode Island's Joan of Arc," by Paul F. Eno, part of the Rhode Island Historical Society's series of essays in honor of the state's 350th anniversary, and Anne Hutchinson: A Biography, by Edith Curtis, published in 1930.

MARY DYER **Died 1660**

Abiding faith brings death on gallows

Mary Dyer was a gentlewoman by birth and a rebel by trade.

The wife of a London milliner, she could have spent her life as a dutiful Puritan, reading the Scriptures with other cossetted women of her class. Instead, she went willingly to her death, a martyr to the cause of Quakerism and religious freedom.

Quakers were considered dangerous subversives in 17th century England, where they were flogged, deported, even hanged. When they fled to the colonies, the Quakers hoped to find a more tolerant religious climate. But in Massachusetts, at least, they encountered a society as repressive as the one they left behind.

America was founded on the principles espoused by Quakerism: free speech, freedom of assembly, the separation of church and state.

These beliefs flew in the face of the strict religious orthodoxy of the Puritans.

Dyer wasn't always a Quaker. First, she became good friends with Anne Hutchinson, a notorious freethinker who was kicked out of Massachusetts for her unorthodox views.

When the Hutchinsons took refuge in Rhode Island, Mary and her husband, William, followed and settled in Newport, where they became "people of consequence."

Several years later, during a five-year visit to England, Dyer converted to Quakerism.

When she arrived in Boston on her way home, Dyer was immediately thrown into prison because of her Quaker views. She was not set free until her husband promised that she would speak to no one until she reached the Massachusetts border.

Two years later, in 1659, Dyer was caught visiting several Quakers in a Boston prison. This time she was formally banished with a warning that she would be hanged if she ever returned.

But within a month, Dyer was back, demanding fair treatment for her fellow Quakers. She was imprisoned and, after a short trial, sentenced to be hanged.

On the day of her execution, the crowd was so great that the bridge between Boston and the North End broke.

Dyer was led to the gallows, a giant elm on the Boston Common. Her arms were bound, her skirts tied around her ankles and her face covered with a handkerchief.

"She was made to watch while her companions were executed," wrote H. Addington Bruce, author of Women in the Making of America. "The rope was placed around her neck. She ascended the ladder. Only then was she told that she would not die."

Her reprieve carried a price: She could never return to Massachusetts.

Once again Dyer was hustled off to Rhode Island, where she could have practiced her faith in the safety and comfort of her family and friends.

But she returned to Boston a few months later.

Again she was arrested and sentenced to die. Again she was given a chance to save herself on the gallows. And once again she refused.

"Nay, I cannot," she told the crowd. "For in obedience to the will of the Lord, I came. And in His will, I abide, faithful to the death."

Dyer was hanged June 1, 1660. The next day she was buried in an unmarked grave on the Boston Common. After her execution, a Puritan said scornfully, "She did hang as a flag for others to take example by."

He was right. The king of England then banned all further executions of Quakers in Boston.

LINDA BORG

Sources: Women in the Making of America, by H. Addington Bruce; Rebel Saints, by Mary Agnes Best; The Hanging of Mary Dyer, by George Hodges.

ANN FRANKLIN **1696–1763**

'The Widow Franklin,' printer to R.I.

She was, in '90s terminology, a single mother who worked outside the home.

Ann Smith Franklin had three young children and a business to run when her husband, James, older brother to Benjamin Franklin, died in Newport in 1735.

She and James had married in Boston on Feb. 4, 1723, amid controversy surrounding his publication, the New England Courant. James had been imprisoned there after criticizing the governor in print. Deciding that Boston was not a wise place to conduct a business, James and Ann accepted the invitation of his brother John, a tallow chandler in Newport, and moved there.

Bringing the first printing press to operate in the colony, James, with Ann as his assistant, launched the Rhode Island Gazette, the colony's first newspaper, on Sept. 27, 1732. The weekly newspaper was published for less than a year.

After a long illness, James died on his birthday and wedding anniversary, leaving Ann the responsibility of caring for the family and operating the print shop.

From the basement of the town's schoolhouse in Washington Square, just a short distance from where, today, their printing press is on display at the Museum of Newport History, Ann Franklin continued to run the business, taking in mostly commercial work the first year.

She not only had a family to support, but a reputation to uphold, as James was the colony's printer. She took over the title and was known as the Widow Franklin.

She revived the profitable Rhode Island Almanack, which James had begun in 1727 under the pseudonym Poor Robin. From 1739 to 1741, Ann wrote, edited and printed this second series, thereby becoming the first woman in America to write an almanac, in addition to being the first female printer.

Born in Boston Oct. 2, 1696, a daughter of Samuel and Anna Smith, Ann most likely didn't plan a "career" as a printer. But according to Joan Youngken, curator of the Newport Historical Society, "I think it was absolutely remarkable, but it was not terribly unusual for women to inherit their husband's business and manage it."

Ann Franklin printed Rhode Island's ballots in the election of 1744 and many legal forms, such as mortgages and ship's registrations. While her son James was being apprenticed with his uncle Ben in Philadelphia, Ann's two daughters helped her with the business. James took over in 1748 -but Ann didn't relinquish total control. Bills were found made out in the name of "Ann & James Franklin."

Mother and son printed the colony's currency and in 1758, created another newspaper, the Newport Mercury. But young James died in 1762, and the printing establishment was again in Ann's hands. At age 65, she was a full-fledged newspaper publisher and editor.

Despite having been Rhode Island's official printer and a founder of the colony's first newspaper, she is often overshadowed in historical accounts by her husband and brother-in-law. The obituary of Ann Smith Franklin in 1763 relates little of her professional accomplishments.

Rather, it eulogizes her industriousness, compassion and Christian "uprightness."

More than 200 years after her death, she was the first woman to be inducted into the Journalism Hall of Fame at the University of Rhode Island.

ARLINE A. FLEMING

Sources: Early American Women Printers and Publishers, 1639-1820 by Leona Hudak, 1978, part of the Special Collections at the University of Rhode Island Library, and "Ann Franklin of Newport, Printer, 1736-1763," by Howard Millar Chapin.

JEMIMA WILKINSON **1752-1819**

'Resurrection' inspired her to preach

Whether Jemima Wilkinson of Cumberland ever claimed to be the second coming of Christ is disputable.

She did believe she'd died and been resurrected, á la Lazarus, at which point she changed her name to the "Publick Universal Friend" and went off preaching through the countryside.

By the time she died, she had many followers — but also many detractors.

Wilkinson was born in 1752, the eighth of 12 children. Her father, a Quaker, was a cousin of Stephen Hopkins, who signed the Declaration of Independence. Her mother died when Wilkinson was 12 or 13.

As a girl, Wilkinson was interested in religious ideas, and could spout biblical phrases with ease. She got caught up for a while in the Methodist revivalist movement of the 1770s, then started attending meetings of a new Cumberland sect, the New Light Baptist Group, causing her to be dismissed from the Society of Friends.

It was in October 1776 that she fell ill with a fever and had a "vision" that convinced her she should preach. For more than 40 years, she did, traveling all over New England and attracting large crowds.

Meeting houses were built for her in East Greenwich and in New Milford, Conn.

Wilkinson did not preach a new theology, but was similar to the Quakers in opposing violence and slavery, and emphasizing a do-unto-others theme. Her warnings about how God would punish the sinful were especially effective. As one observer put it: "She Preaches up Terror very alarming."

Among Wilkinson's followers was Judge William Potter of South Kingstown, who is said to have freed his slaves and given up politics because of her preaching. He also built a 14-room addition to his mansion, for use as her headquarters.

One story that's reportedly still told in Kingston — possibly apocryphal and meant to discredit her — has Potter visiting Wilkinson in her private quarters, only to be interrupted by Mrs. Potter.

Wilkinson supposedly defended herself by saying she was only ministering to one of her lambs, whereupon Mrs. Potter is said to have retorted: "Minister to your lambs all you want, but in the future please leave my old ram alone."

"A whole body of folklore, much of it hostile, has grown up around the personality of this unusual woman," according to the entry on Wilkinson in the reference book Notable American Women. "Many of the stories alleging sexual immoralities and messianic pretensions were undoubtedly circulated to discredit her role as a woman teacher and to counteract her effectiveness as a religious leader."

Wilkinson made her last home in Yates County, N.Y. She died of congestive heart failure in 1819, at 67. Her sect dissolved within 20 years.

A sympathetic biography, Pioneer Prophetess, concludes that Wilkinson sincerely believed she was divinely called, and gives her credit for having succeeded despite a lack of education and experience.

"To the chagrin of some men, she demonstrated that a woman could stand before large crowds and preach a sermon that many found moving. She was accepted as a leader of both men and women and inspired one of the earliest settlements in western New York. Few women of the colonial period of American history have matched the accomplishments of Jemima Wilkinson, the Publick Universal Friend."

MARIA MIRO JOHNSON

Sources: Pioneer Prophetess, by Herbert A. Wisbey, Jr. (available at the Johnston public library), and Notable American Women, published by Harvard University.

ELLEANOR ELDRIDGE **1785-1862**

Businesswoman stood up to injustice

Elleanor Eldridge, a part black, part Narragansett Indian woman who went to work as a servant at age 10, etched a distinguished note in history.

She established two businesses, investing her profits in real estate that was valued at $4,800 at her death in 1862.

Although uneducated, she successfully defended her brother in an assault case, and later battled on her own behalf to regain property taken away by whites. She took a high sheriff to court for perjury, and eventually won.

Eldridge was born in Warwick in 1785, the last of seven daughters born to Hannah Prophet, daughter of an Indian mother, and Robin Eldridge, son of an African who had been brought to the United States on a slave ship.

Her mother died when Eldridge was 10 and her father sent her to be a servant for the Bakers in Warwick, for whom her mother had worked as a laundress. By age 14, Eldridge was an accomplished weaver.

In her late teens and early 20s, working as a dairy woman for Captain Benjamin Greene and his family at Warwick Neck, she made great supplies of highly acclaimed cheeses.

At 27, she started a soap-boiling business that drew in enough cash to buy her first house, in Warwick. Three years later, she moved to Providence and started a whitewashing, painting and wallpapering business.

In 1822, Eldridge bought land in Providence and built a house. Five years later, she bought two more lots and another house in Warwick.

In 1831, disaster struck.

Having already suffered one bout of typhus, Eldridge now suffered another. She recuperated, but on her way to visit relatives in Massachusetts, she relapsed. As the story goes, a Providence traveler overheard a conversation at an inn where Eldridge stayed. Word garbled as it wended its way through the grapevine, and in Providence, people believed that Eldridge had died.

Much to their surprise, she returned quite alive in the spring of 1832. Much to her surprise, one of her properties was for sale. Quick negotiations with the mortgage holder halted the sale.

Then her brother George was charged with stabbing a man. Eldridge raised $500 bail and later represented him in court. Eventually he was acquitted.

As if that weren't enough, a cholera epidemic raged in Providence during the summer of 1832, and those who could moved temporarily to the country to escape the disease.

Eldridge went to Pomfret, Conn., working as a nurse for a sick child. She paid the interest on her debt, but fell behind on the principal. When she returned that fall, her property had been sold and her tenants evicted. But she could find no evidence that the sale had been advertised.

On the advice of the state attorney general, she sued the buyer. The sheriff insisted he had advertised the sale and she lost the case, but then hired two detectives to find anyone who might have seen the supposed advertisements. When they could not, she sued the sheriff for perjury.

When the buyer agreed to sell the property back to her for $2,100 ($600 more than she paid for it), Eldridge dropped the suit.

"No MAN would have been treated so," wrote Frances McDougall in The Memoirs of Elleanor Eldridge, "and if a WHITE WOMAN had ever been the subject of such wrongs... the whole country would have been indignant."

KAREN LEE ZINER

Sources: " 'An ornament and honor to her sex:' New England Women from Valley Forge to Fenway Park," a history curriculum researched and written by Jane Lancaster; "Women of All Trades and Amateur Lawyer," taken from Negro Heritage Library: Profiles of Negro Womanhood, Vol. 1, Sylvia G.L. Dannett.

PRUDENCE CRANDALL **1803-1890**
SARAH HARRIS FAYERWEATHER **1812-1878**

How racist hatred touched two lives

The year was 1832. Tuition at Prudence Crandall's boarding school "for young ladies and little misses" in Canterbury, Conn., was a modest $18 a term.

Crandall, who was born in Hopkinton, offered a cultured education, including classes in moral philosophy, music, drawing and "French, taught by a gentleman."

Her efforts to groom women into young scholars were praised in the well-to-do village of Canterbury until Crandall entertained radical notions of admitting black students to her school.

Then trouble started.

Sarah Harris, 19, was the first black student to enroll, carrying hopes that she would one day become a teacher of her own people. Soon, parents of white girls threatened to remove their daughters from Crandall's tutelage.

Faced with the prospect of closing her school, Crandall wrote to abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison for advice.

"I wish to know your opinion respecting changing white scholars for colored ones. I have been for some months back determined, if possible, during the remaining part of my life to benefit the people of color," she wrote.

"I do not dare tell any of my neighbors about the contemplated change in my school, and I beg you, Sir, that you will not expose it to anyone, or it would ruin my present school."

In 1833, Crandall opened her school to "young Ladies and little Misses of color." Locals welcomed her 20 pupils by smearing cow manure on the steps, throwing eggs and stringing up a dead cat on the front gate.

In an effort to shut the school down, state Sen. Andrew Judson pushed through the legislature a "Black Law" that barred out-of-state black students.

Crandall went to jail and then to trial. A judge found her guilty of educating blacks, who he said were not subject to constitutional guarantees of equal rights.

She won her appeal, but closed the school in 1834 anyway after a mob attacked the school and broke all its windows.

Harris, Crandall's first black student, went on to marry blacksmith George Fayerweather of Rhode Island. They named their first child Prudence Crandall Fayerweather.

In 1853 the family moved into a house in Kingston built by George Fayerweather's father. The cottage is on the State and National Historic Registers.

Today, Joyce Stevos of Providence has her great-great-great aunt Sarah Harris Fayerweather to thank for her ambition.

Stevos is the director of strategic planning and professional development in the Providence school system. She's worked in the school department since graduating from Rhode Island College in 1965.

"I think about the kind of commitment she had and the kind of commitment I have to education," said Stevos, who is also president of the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society. "I think in terms of giving back because, if you've been fortunate in your life, you have to have a commitment to others."

CHRIS POON

Source: " 'An ornament and honor to her sex': New England Women from Valley Forge to Fenway Park," a history curriculum researched and written by Jane Lancaster.
Picture is of Sarah Fayerweather.

ELIZABETH BUFFUM CHACE **1806-1899**

A life committed to freedom, rights

Elizabeth Buffum Chace emerged from her Valley Falls house in the 1850s wearing airy bloomers beneath her knee-length dress.

Until then, Chace had worn the roomy Aladdin-style undergarments only in the privacy of her home. One day, she decided to sally forth to make a statement.

But the fortyish activist was ambushed by steely stares from corseted women, and never wore those bloomers in public again. Though offended by the gawking, Chace knew when to pick a fight.

"She wasn't willing to go to the wall about bloomers," said Elizabeth Stevens, who has researched Chace for a decade. "It wasn't part of her major political agenda."

Chace was an aggressive, principled woman who fought for women's rights and battled slavery, never neglecting one of her most important roles, motherhood.

Outliving 7 of her 10 children — some of whom died of scarlet fever — Chace turned for a time to spiritualism, holding seances at her house to communicate with the dead.

Born in 1806, Chace grew up on her grandparents' farm in Smithfield, where her parents instilled the Quaker values of simplicity, independence and freedom of speech.

She attended village schools, then, at 18, boarded one year at the Quakers' Yearly Meeting Boarding School, now Moses Brown. In 1825, the family moved to Fall River, where Elizabeth married Samuel Chace, who worked at his family's prosperous cotton mill.

Her disgust over slavery took root in the 1830s, as she listened to the fiery speeches of her father, Arnold Buffum, and abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, founders of the New England Anti-Slavery Society.

Chace followed suit, and in 1835 she and her sisters founded the Fall River Anti-Slavery Society, trekking door to door collecting signatures on petitions calling for the immediate freeing of slaves; she and her husband hid fugitive slaves in her house.

"She went from being this young Quaker matron," Stevens said, "to being a political activist."

After much soul-searching, Chace, who, by this time had lost five children to illness, left the Quaker Meeting over its refusal to take a tougher stand against slavery.

The Chaces eventually moved to Valley Falls, where she gave birth to five more children — one at the age of 46 — and kept the anti-slavery spirit alive in Rhode Island in the 1850s.

Temperance and voting rights for women preoccupied Chace after the Civil War. Chace, who drank no liquor, tea or coffee, stormed a saloon in Valley Falls, praying and urging the owner to stop serving liquor. (He didn't.)

Chace also cried out for better conditions for women prisoners, helped establish a state school for homeless children and lobbied for the admission of women to Brown University. In 1876 she resigned from the Providence Woman's Club over its refusal to admit a black school teacher.

She was still relentless at 81. In 1887, after learning that an amendment to the Rhode Island Constitution allowing women to vote had been defeated, Chace, in bed recovering from surgery, blurted to a friend, "Well, what shall we do next?"

She died in 1899, at 93. Only a year earlier she had penned an article for The Woman's Journal, a suffrage newspaper.

ELIZABETH RAU

Sources: Elizabeth Stevens, who holds a doctorate in American civilization from Brown University and wrote her dissertation on Chace; and " 'An ornament and honor to her sex': New England Women from Valley Forge to Fenway Park," a history curriculum researched and written by Jane Lancaster.

CHRISTIANA CARTEAUX BANNISTER **1819-1902**

A supporter of arts and social causes

Christiana Carteaux Bannister, a woman of social conscience and style, spent her life battling the same types of social inequities that continue today — nearly a century after her death.

Whether it was speaking out against the meager salaries given Negro soldiers or creating a shelter for homeless colored women, much of her life was spent trying to help those less fortunate.

Little is known about the childhood of the Portsmouth native, who became a successful businesswoman in her 30s by operating a string of hair salons in Boston and Providence.

Christiana, who was part black and part Indian, soon became a supportive patron to an aspiring artist and free black man whom she hired to work as a barber in her Boston salon in 1853.

The artist, Edward M. Bannister, had migrated to Boston from Canada hoping to study art, but was unable to secure a studio apprenticeship or tutelage because those positions were not open to blacks.

In 1857, the couple married and Mrs. Bannister continued to operate her salons in Boston, Worcester and Providence while her husband quit his job as a barber to study and develop his talent full time.

"Madam Bannister's" hair salons specialized in preventing hair from turning gray or becoming diseased, and providing patrons the latest hairstyles; because hair salons were well-known meeting places for abolitionists and the Bannisters spoke out against slavery, historians believe the couple were active in the antislavery movement.

Increasing racial tensions in Boston caused the couple to move to Providence in 1869, where Edward Bannister gained national acclaim as a painter of landscapes and seascapes, and helped to found the Providence Art Club and the Rhode Island School of Design.

In a biography by Juanita Marie Holland, Edward said of his wife that he "would have made out very poorly had it not been for her, and my greatest successes have come through her, either through her criticisms of my pictures, or the advice she would give me in the matter of placing them in public."

The Bannisters prospered, owning homes on Benevolent Street and near Narragansett Bay. They were active in amateur theater, choirs and art circles.

During the Civil War, Christiana became a leader in the movement to gain equal pay and benefits for soldiers in the 54th Regiment, which was the Negro regiment that distinguished itself in some of the bloodiest battles of the war, including the battle of Fort Wagner, S.C.

As president of Boston's Sanitary Fair of Colored Ladies, she also organized fund-raisers to provide emergency funds for wives and children of the underpaid soldiers.

In 1890, disturbed by the plight of homeless Negro domestic workers, Christiana was instrumental in the founding of the Home for Aged Colored Women, which is now known as Bannister House.

Edward Bannister died suddenly of a heart attack in 1901; Christiana died the next year, after becoming ill and moving into the rest home she helped to found. Historians do not know what became of her hair salons, but she is believed to have died poor.

KAREN A. DAVIS

Sources: Edward Mitchell Bannister 1828-1901, by Juanita Marie Holland for Kenkeleba House of New York; "'An ornament and honor to her sex': New England Women from Valley Forge to Fenway Park," a history curriculum researched and written by Jane Lancaster; and "A Heritage Discovered — Blacks in Rhode Island," by Rowena Stewart for the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society.

IDA LEWIS **1842-1911**

The keeper of the Lime Rock light

It was a warm, calm September day in 1859, when four Newport schoolboys decided to go for a leisurely sail. They made it to the Dumplings and back safely, but once inside Newport harbor, the high jinks began.

One of the boys climbed the mast of the small sailboat and began to rock away. The boat capsized, sending the boys, splashing, into the harbor. They surely would have drowned but for the intercession of Ida Lewis.

Lewis saw the boat overturn from Lime Rock lighthouse, where her father was the keeper. She was only 17, but that didn't stop her from launching a rowboat and pulling the boys aboard.

Back at Lime Rock, Ida served the soaked and shivering boys "a stiff dose of hot molasses" and otherwise cared for them until their families arrived.

Thus began an extraordinary career.

Lewis saved at least 18 people — some say more — from the waters off Newport. Many times she ventured out in her rowboat alone, in the freezing cold, risking her life to pull others to safety. All the while, she distinguished herself as one of the nation's first female lighthouse keepers.

"She has worked out the problem of woman's rights in a different manner," Col. Thomas Higginson said in 1869 when the citizens of Newport presented her with a rowboat called Rescue.

"She has been accustomed to assuming the right of helping her fellow-man without asking any questions," Higgins said.

Idawalley Zorada Lewis was born in Newport on Feb. 25, 1842, in a small wooden house at Spring and Brewer Streets. She was the second of four children of Captain Hosea Lewis, who was originally from Hingham, Mass., and Idawalley Zorada (Willey) Lewis, the daughter of a Block Island doctor.

Captain Lewis was appointed keeper of the Lime Rock light in the early 1850s. At that time, Lime Rock was merely a collection of boulders with a small shed on it. (It is where the Ida Lewis Yacht Club now stands.) Captain Lewis rowed out to Lime Rock twice a day to light and extinguish the kerosene beacon.

In the mid-1850s, a house was built on Lime Rock for Captain Lewis and his family, but shortly thereafter he suffered a stroke that left him unable to work. The duties of light keeper fell to his wife, and eventually to Ida, who was officially appointed keeper of the light in 1887.

In 1870 or thereabouts, Lewis married William H. Wilson of Connecticut. But she left Connecticut — and her marriage — after a few months to return to Lime Rock, where she led, by all accounts, a fastidious life.

By the time she died in 1911, at the age of 69, her daring rescues were reported around the globe and the somewhat taciturn Lewis had become a reluctant cause célèbre.

Gen. Ulysses S. Grant asked to meet Lewis on a visit to Newport. Other notable personalities, who made the trip out to Lime Rock by rowboat to pay homage to her, included Mrs. William Astor, financier Jim Fisk and robber baron Jay Gould, who presented Ida with a pair of gold oarlocks.

"It is estimated that over ten thousand people called on Miss Lewis last summer," the June 20, 1870, edition of the Boston Journal reported.

"People would land at the rock, prowl over the house, quiz the family, pry into the household affairs, patronizingly ask the age of each person and what they lived on, and how they felt when Ida was saving souls," the newspaper reported.

ELIZABETH ABBOTT

Source: The Newport Historical Society. Note: Ida Lewis' rowboat "Rescue" is on display at Newport's Museum of Yachting at Fort Adams. The beacon from her lighthouse can be seen at the new Museum of Newport History at the Brick Market.

HELEN A. R. METCALF **1830-1895**

Expo inspires school for 'useful arts'

On May 10, 1876, Helen Adelia Rowe Metcalf was in Philadelphia when all the bells of the city — even the Liberty Bell — began to ring. The clangor announced the opening of the Centennial Exposition, the nation's first world's fair.

Mrs. Metcalf, 46, was the wife of Rhode Island woolen manufacturer Jesse Metcalf. She was a mother of five, a Sunday school teacher and an organist. She had gone to Philadelphia to help arrange Rhode Island's exhibit, one of 38 state displays at the fair. As the turnstiles began to whirl, she mingled with the throngs touring 450 acres of exhibits of progress in agriculture, horticulture, manufacturing, machinery, science and the arts.

More than 30,000 exhibitors represented 50 nations. Fairgoers gaped at newfangled bicycles, telephones, kitchen ranges, ready-made shoes and the world's largest steam engine. They tasted exotic treats: bananas and ice cream sodas.

One especially popular exhibit was the Women's Pavilion. While some of its displays reflected traditional domestic interests — an Arkansas woman had sculpted the bust of a beautiful girl entirely out of butter, "kept on ice to preserve its subtleties" — there was evidence of changing roles in a country where women already accounted for 20 percent of the work force. Women demonstrated machinery and their own inventions.

Also popular were the foreign exhibits, later credited with stimulating tremendous new interest in design and interior decoration in America.

Inspired by what she had seen, Mrs. Metcalf returned to Providence convinced that the country should be doing more to educate young people — and women in particular — in practical design.

She proposed using the $1,675 remaining from the centennial committee's Exposition funds to found a school.

That sum made possible incorporation of the Rhode Island School of Design on March 22, 1877. The first class included 43 students, most of them women. They and those who followed came to learn "useful arts, as, for example, designing for calico printers, for jewelers' designs, for carriage and furniture making."

As her family became the school's major benefactors, Mrs. Metcalf spent 17 years as chairwoman of RISD's committee of management. She was a hands-on manager who hired and fired, ordered supplies, cajoled patrons.

"She was very often at the school watching over both teachers and methods of teaching, stopped beside the students and encouraged them in their work, was anxiously concerned about the furniture and the best arrangement of it," according to a history of RISD by Elsie Bronson.

Mrs. Metcalf also "would take a hand at cleaning on occasion or call in her children and friends to help decorate for a party, for she was tireless in devising ways of entertaining and enlightening persons who contributed to the school or might do so."

Eventually her daughter Eliza, Mrs. Gustav Radeke, took over the reins and served at RISD until 1929.

At the end of the 19th century, though, it was Helen Metcalf who molded the school. She handled finances, made policy and debated such issues as the advisability of using live models in drawing classes. But although Mrs. Metcalf didn't hesitate to advise on the curriculum, there's nothing to suggest that she ever wanted the school to teach butter sculpture.

CAROL McCABE

Sources: Archives of the Rhode Island School of Design; files of the Providence Journal; History of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Biographical, published by the American Historical Society; The Americans: A Social History of the United States 1587-1914, by J.C. Furnas, Putnam's; Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life 1876-1915, by Thomas J. Schlereth, HarperCollins; The Concise Dictionary of American History, Scribner's.

SISSIERETTA JONES **1869-1933**

She sang for kings, died in poverty

From 1890 to 1916, Sissieretta Jones was one of the best-known and highest-paid black singers in America.

She sang for U.S. presidents and for royalty in Europe, and drew sellout crowds with her own minstrel show, Black Patti's Troubadors.

But she died nearly penniless in Providence.

Born in Virginia in 1869, Matilda Sissieretta Joyner was the daughter of a minister of the African Methodist Church. The family moved to Providence in 1876, and Sissieretta attended Meeting Street and Thayer Schools in Providence.

From an early age, she sang for the public — at school functions and festivals at Pond Street Church. She married in 1883 when she was only 14, and had one child, Mabel, who died before the age of 2.

Her husband, David Richmond Jones, was her manager for several years but apparently squandered and mismanaged her money. They divorced in 1899.

When she was 18, she attended the New England Conservatory in Boston, one of the best music schools in America.

By 1887, Sissieretta had begun to draw public acclaim, appearing in front of 5,000 people at Boston's Music Hall in a benefit for the Parnell Defense Fund. In 1888, she made her successful New York debut and was engaged to tour the West Indies with a black troupe.

During that tour, she was presented with the first of many medals she was often photographed wearing.

As Sissieretta's fame grew, she began to be known as "The Black Patti," a phrase coined by a New York City newspaper, comparing her to the great Italian opera singer Adelina Patti.

Although Sissieretta reportedly disliked the name, it remained with her throughout her career.

In 1892, she sang for President Benjamin Harrison in the White House and starred in the Grand African Jubilee, a three-day event at New York's Madison Square Garden.

After she signed a three-year contract with Maj. J.B. Pond, a manager of other well-known singers and lecturers such as Mark Twain and the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, Jones's fees began to rise. She was paid $2,000 for a week's appearance at the Pittsburgh Exposition, the highest fee ever paid to a black artist. (By comparison, Adelina Patti was paid $4,000 a night.)

After legal troubles involving her husband's attempt to book appearances for her independent of Pond, Jones went to Europe for an extended tour.

She sang for the Prince of Wales and the Kaiser, and in a letter home said that she encountered much less racial prejudice in Europe.

"It matters not to them what is the color of an artist's skin," she wrote. "If a man or a woman is a great actor, or a great musician, or a great singer, they will extend a warm welcome. ...It is the soul they see, not the color of the skin."

In 1896, Jones formed her own touring company, Black Patti's Troubadors, which toured for the next 20 years, playing black and white audiences alike. The show included Jones's singing as well as vaudeville and minstrel acts.

Around 1916, she retired to her home in Providence. By the time she died in 1933, her savings were nearly gone and she had sold three of her four houses and most of her jewels and medals.

In her final years, William Freeman, a real estate agent and president of the local chapter of the NAACP, paid her taxes and water bill and provided coal and wood.

NORA LOCKWOOD TOOHER

Source: "'An ornament and honor to her sex': New England Women from Valley Forge to Fenway Park," a history curriculum researched and written by Jane Lancaster.

SARAH DOYLE **1830-1922**

A sphere 'with an infinite radius'

Sarah Elizabeth Doyle combined strength, vitality and determination in a career dedicated to broadening horizons for Rhode Island women in the latter part of the 19th century.

Doyle was perhaps best known as a key figure in the movement that led Brown University to open its doors to women, in stages, during the 1890s.

She also helped establish the Rhode Island School of Design and was a prominent supporter of women's suffrage.

In her own life, Doyle discovered that the path toward social reform lay in a sphere separate from men — a burgeoning world of women's clubs that spread across the country in the late 19th century. But Doyle was fond of saying that that women's sphere, albeit separate, was "one with an infinite radius."

Sarah Doyle was born in 1830 in Providence, where she lived all her 92 years. She was the third of seven children of bookbinder Thomas Doyle and Martha Dorrance (Jones) Doyle.

Doyle graduated from the Providence High School in 1846 and taught in private schools until 1856, when she returned to her alma mater. She was principal of the girls' department of the high school from 1878 until she retired in 1892. But her most important work was yet to come.

Doyle was a prodigious clubwoman. She said women needed the association of other women to develop the educational opportunities long monopolized by men.

She was instrumental in founding the Rhode Island Woman's Club in 1876, a forerunner of a national — and ultimately international — network of women's organizations that were dedicated to social reform at the turn of the century.

In 1889, she helped draft a constitution for the nationwide General Federation of Women's Clubs. Much later, she traveled to Italy as a clubwoman, saying upon her return that she was "more than ever convinced that the stage of civilization of any country is closely associated with the position held by its women."

In Rhode Island, it was an alliance of women's clubs that first sent a delegation to Brown University in 1885 to talk to its president, Ezekiel G. Robinson, about admitting women students.

Nothing happened until the presidency passed to Elisha Benjamin Andrews, who allowed women to take college exams in 1891 and the next year offered tutoring and promised that any women who passed the exams would receive a Brown diploma.

But the women's foothold at Brown was extremely tentative without adequate facilities. In 1895, Andrews turned to Doyle to raise money to build a college where the women could be taught. Two and a half years later, Doyle presided over the dedication of Pembroke Hall, which cost almost $38,000, all of it donated by Rhode Island women, many of them clubwomen.

Although Doyle's manner in public was direct to the point of seeming abrupt, the high school girls whom she taught idolized her for her devotion to them. Many became school teachers themselves and formed the Sarah E. Doyle Club in tribute to her, donating $1,000 a year toward scholarships for women at Brown. She knew how to pass the torch.

GINA MACRIS

Sources: The Search for Equity, Women at Brown University, 1891-1991; Notable American Women, published by Harvard University; Women, Power and Leadership, excerpts from a centennial symposium, Oct. 18-20, 1991; Providence Journal, Dec. 22, 1922.

KATHARINE RYAN GIBBS **1863-1934**

A radical idea — women can work

A woman's career is blocked by lack of openings, by unjust male competition, by prejudice and, not least, by inadequate salary and recognition.

Those could be the thoughts of a 1990s feminist. But they were penned in 1924 by Katharine M. Gibbs, founder of a string of secretarial schools that tapped into the then-revolutionary idea that women could work — and succeed — in the business world.

Gibbs was living comfortably as the wife of William Gibbs and mother of two sons when a tragedy that would change her life struck in 1909. William Gibbs, 53, a gold prospector, inveterate sailor and former cowpuncher, was working on his boat at the Edgewood Yacht Club when its mast snapped and struck him. Gibbs, the club's vice commodore, was killed.

Katharine Ryan Gibbs had been born in Galena, Ill., in 1863, the daughter of a prosperous meat packer. At that time, it was rare for women to work; according to government statistics, only 1,000 American women held clerical positions.

By 1900, an estimated 100,000 women held clerical jobs, but it was still difficult for a woman to support herself by her own labor.

After William Gibbs' death, his widow, noted for her original needlepoint designs, and her sister, Mary Ryan, tried to earn a living as dressmakers and clothing designers. They were unsuccessful.

Gibbs had no business experience or training. She sold her jewelry to pay her rent and she and her sister enrolled in a stenography course at Simmons College in Boston.

A Boston colleague said that two concerns were uppermost in Gibbs' thinking: How could opportunities for women in the world of work be increased? How could women best be prepared for that work?

In 1911, Katharine Gibbs bought a two-room school on Westminster Street in downtown Providence. She began with one student.

The school was considered a modest educational experiment at the time, but it was to mark the beginning of her successful string of secretarial schools.

In those days, most secretaries were men. But as men were called to serve during World War I, women filled some of their jobs.

The Providence school was relocated to the East Side and is now at 178 Butler Ave. Other schools followed, in Boston, New York, New Jersey, Long Island, N.Y., and Connecticut.

The graduates of Gibbs' schools became known as the Tiffany of secretaries. Well into the 1950s, they were known for the hat and long white gloves every student was required to wear.

This year, there are an estimated 95,000 alumnae of the Katharine Gibbs Schools, which graduate 3,500 students each year.

Gibbs died in 1934, just six years shy of 1940 — when the number of female stenographers, secretaries and typists reached the 1 million mark.

SONYA F. GRAY

Sources: Files of the Providence Journal; "The Executive Secretary," published by the Katharine Gibbs School, and "The Gibsonian," published by the Katharine Gibbs School Alumnae Association.

GERTRUDE I. JOHNSON **Died 1952**
MARY T. WALES **Died 1961**

'Very proper ladies' start a small school

"*We should teach* a thing not for its own sake, but as preparation for what lies beyond."

So believed Gertrude I. Johnson and Mary T. Wales, and on that simple and pragmatic premise these two women friends ("maiden ladies" in the parlance of the early 1900s) founded a small Providence business school that eventually would become Johnson & Wales University.

The year was 1914. The two women, who had been friends for some two decades since both had attended the Pennsylvania State Normal School at Millersville, were teaching business courses at Providence's Bryant College when they decided to open their own school. The Johnson & Wales Business School opened with seven secretarial students and at first was housed in Miss Johnson's Hope Street residence. Soon it moved to 222 Olney St. and later to larger quarters on Exchange Place downtown and eventually to the Gardner Building on Fountain Street.

In 1920, the Misses Johnson and Wales promoted their school as offering "Private Instruction in Shorthand, Typewriting, Bookkeeping, English, Arithmetic and Penmanship. Preparation for Civil Service and Court Reporting" — practical job training for the times. Most of the students were men until World War II opened employment doors to more women.

During the war years, "things were topsy-turvy in all lines of work," wrote Miss Johnson, who handled the administrative duties for the school while Miss Wales focused more on teaching.

After the war, in 1947, Miss Johnson and Miss Wales retired to their Warwick home, selling their successful business school, which by then was serving some 120 students, to two Navy veterans, Edward Triangolo and Morris Gaebe, who in the decades to follow expanded Johnson & Wales, branching into the area of culinary training which is today the school's primary focus.

In a telephone interview from his home in Florida, Gaebe, now retired, recalled the two women fondly.

"Miss Johnson was a large stern lady, and all the students who were veterans referred to her as GI Johnson. Miss Wales was very petite, and she was more of the academic influence. They were very proper ladies — they liked music and animals, particularly cats, and they drove an old automobile very carefully.

"In those early days of the school, they set a standard of education, discipline and job placement that we've always been proud of. Together, they started something that has now become a big part of Rhode Island."

Miss Wales died in 1952; Miss Johnson in 1961.

KATHERINE IMBRIE

Source: Johnson & Wales University.
Photos are of Johnson (left) and Wales (right)

ISABELLE AHEARN O'NEILL **1880-1975**

A starring role at the State House

She went from the vaudeville circuit to the Rhode Island political stage, from silent film actress in such screen esoterica as "Joe Lincoln's Cape Cod Stories" to gavel-wielding chairman of the 1924 National Democratic Convention at Madison Square Garden.

From parochial school gymnastics and elocution teacher to federal narcotics agent.

"Could Talk On Anything, Often Did," said the headline above a newspaper profile of the seemingly unstoppable Isabelle A. O'Neill several years before her death in 1975 at the age of 94.

"Home James. And don't spare the horses" was the most memorable line she recalled from her short-lived acting career. But her political career left a permanent mark on Rhode Island history.

In 1922, two years after women gained the right to vote, Isabelle Ahearn O'Neill — youngest of 13 children of a former Woonsocket city councilman — became Rhode Island's first woman legislator. She was elected to represent the citizens of Smith Hill in the Rhode Island House.

Other state and national titles would follow: Deputy Senate floor leader, Democratic National Committeewoman. Radio brought her voice home when she temporarily chaired the party's marathon 14-day, 103-ballot national convention.

"No, I shall not wear a hat during sessions," she said soon after her first election, in response to an inevitable question in her day. "And I want the men to smoke and do anything else they would have been accustomed to do in the State House. I ask for no favors because I am a woman."

She won a three-way race, and went on to serve eight years in the House before moving up to the Senate for another two terms. As one columnist put it: "She says she is going to the State House to represent what she considers the sound judgment of the women of the state, and that she will seek to have the legitimate necessities of the women and children cared for in legislation."

As a legislator and divorced Roman Catholic, Mrs. O'Neill sought to create a Court of Domestic Relations to reduce the number of divorces. While her bill never passed, a similar court was set up two years after she left the Assembly. She fought to expand widow's pensions, and ended up the recipient, herself, of one of Rhode Island's first special pension bills.

A newspaper clip from the early 1950s tells the story: "The General Assembly in its dying hours yesterday remembered one of its former longtime members with a generous pension." To wit: an additional $151.65 a month for a grand total of $2,500 yearly.

In her third term, she drafted a drug control bill that was considered a model for the times, and used her position to rail against doctors who made drugs too easily available. Through her efforts, the state also created a Rhode Island Narcotic Board, which became the springboard for her next career.

In 1933 she left the Senate for an appointment to "one of the most important" jobs given a woman during the Roosevelt administration: legislative agent for the narcotics bureau.

Never a suffragette, Mrs. O'Neill once explained that she got into politics because she was so well acquainted with Providence in 1922. Politics also gave her a national stage.

Decades later, 40 women who had followed Mrs. O'Neill's path to the State House gathered at Micheletti's restaurant in Providence to take stock of how far they had come, and swap "Isabelle" stories. Among them, the acquaintance who remembered Mrs. O'Neill raising hell whenever the Republican doorkeepers tried to shut her Democratic constituents out of the House and Senate galleries.

"There are lot of uncertainties connected with the new Assembly, but nothing is surer than that Mrs. O'Neill will be heard from. She has made it a practice to be heard from regularly and at frequent intervals ever since she was 17 years old," proclaimed a political columnist in her day.

KATHERINE GREGG

Source: Files of the Providence Journal.

MARY D. GRANT **1867-1941**

A Jewish immigrant's legacy to all

Outside the hat shop that Mary D. Grant opened in 1897 on Providence's Prairie Avenue, there were two rows of chairs.

Every morning people would occupy those chairs, awaiting Grant's arrival. But it wasn't hats they wanted. One by one, they came into her shop to share confidences about husbands fleeing and babies arriving and such. Grant gave her advice freely.

It was among many social services, large and small, that this compassionate and resourceful woman bestowed on the Jewish immigrant community. Not the least of her contributions was leading the group of women who founded Miriam Hospital.

Grant was born in Russia in 1867. Her father emigrated to the United States when she was in her teens, leaving five children and a pregnant wife behind. Grant's mother soon died — in childbirth, according to Grant's son; of a broken heart, according to her daughter.

It fell to a teenaged Mary to bring her six siblings to New York and reunite the family. They traveled from port to port, and when they ran out of money, Mary would rent a room and make dresses until she had enough to move.

Finally the children rejoined their father in New York. Mary was beautiful and had many suitors, according to an account by her son. But she required that any man who would marry her also love and care for her five younger siblings. Only Louis Granowsky, a young jeweler from Providence, loved her that much.

They married in 1887 and settled on Willard Avenue in South Providence. (The couple changed their name to Grant in 1903.) Mary and Louis had two children, Fannie and Max.

In addition to running her hat shop, Mary Grant helped the poor Jewish patients admitted to local hospitals. She acted as an interpreter for Yiddish-speaking patients, and started a women's charitable group called the Miriam Lodge that tended to their needs — providing kosher food cooked in huge pots in the back of Grant's hat shop, paying for their beds, taking them to and from the hospital, arranging for their convalescent care and buying such equipment as eyeglasses and wheelchairs.

Most of the Jewish immigrants in Providence came from Russia, where being a physician was one of the few professional jobs open to Jews. But in Providence, Jewish doctors could not admit their patients to local hospitals.

So Grant's group resolved to open a hospital where doctors of any religion could practice. Renamed the Miriam Hospital Association, they put collection boxes in the houses of Jewish residents, and held balls and parties, until in 1921 they had $1,000 for a down payment on a former maternity hospital on Parade Street, in what is now called Providence's Armory district. It took another four years — and help from the men of the community — to raise $75,000 needed to open the Miriam Hospital in 1925. Mary Grant's son, Max, became its first president. (In 1952, the hospital moved to its present location on Summit Avenue, on Providence's East Side.)

Mary Grant continued her charitable work, including helping the Jewish Home for the Aged and Jewish Children's Home. She died in 1941 at the age of 74.

FELICE J. FREYER

Sources: "'An ornament and honor to her sex': New England Women from Valley Forge to Fenway Park," a history curriculum researched and written by Jane Lancaster; and A History of Miriam Hospital, hospital publication.

MAUD HOWE ELLIOTT **1854-1948**

'Noted daughter of a famous mother'

Her birthright was public notability, and throughout her long and accomplished life, Maud Howe Elliott strove to live up to the standards of her well-known and revered parents.

Her mother was Julia Ward Howe, abolitionist pioneer in the women's suffrage movement and gracious hostess who drew the likes of Oscar Wilde and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to her dinner table. She is best known as the woman who, on a sleepless night, penned the poem that would become the lyrics to "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

Maud Howe Elliott's father, Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, founded Perkins Institute for the Blind and was remembered by Helen Keller as the man who invented the system of teaching blind deaf-mutes.

And although Maud Howe Elliott spent most of her summers in the center of Newport society, where hostesses vied to hold their midnight balls on the night of a full moon, she worked ceaselessly to build meaning into what could have been just a life of leisure.

She became a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, charter member of the Art Association of Newport, activist in Theodore Roosevelt's presidential campaign, a founder of the Progressive political party and a participant in the suffrage movement.

Still, the shadow of her parents proved almost impossible to escape. When she died at age 94 at her beloved Newport summer home, called "Lilliput," the obituary, although it listed her many accomplishments, still referred to her as "noted daughter of a famous mother."

The phrase should not diminish the fact that Maud Howe Elliott had the energy and elegance to bridge the world of social activism and that of lace and late afternoon teas in Newport.

She was born Nov. 9, 1854, at the Perkins Institute. She was educated in Boston and abroad, with a curriculum that went beyond academics to include dancing, painting and music. In 1887, at 33, she married John Elliott, an artist who would become nationally known for his portraits.

She wrote several novels, but is best known for the biography of her mother — Julia Ward Howe — on which she collaborated with her sisters. The book was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1915.

Most of her writing was nonfiction. She was a correspondent for several newspapers and her books are chronicles with detailed personal memories that range from finding the poet Bret Harte at the family dinner table to swimming in Narragansett Bay and then foraging for fresh mussels and Aquidneck Island blackberries.

In her last book, This Was My Newport, she recalled a "simpler day" when people dined late on "high teas" of "Newport specialties" such as soft-shell crabs, corn on the cob and johnny cakes.

"If these old Newport houses could speak," she wrote of the grand summer "cottages" of the wealthy, "what tales they could tell... stories of ladies and their lovers who wrote their names with diamonds on the window panes."

Just as she used pieces of her wedding dress and the ballgown her mother wore when the Civil War ended to create her own treasured patchwork quilt, Maud Howe Elliott used the pieces of her rich life to stitch together the picture of an American era.

Her writing and voluminous chronicles and diaries made her a valuable historian who was given an honorary degree of doctor of letters by Brown University in 1940.

She died on March 19, 1948.

BARBARA POLICHETTI

Sources: Files of the Providence Journal; This Was My Newport, by Maud Howe Elliott; Notable American Women, published by Harvard University.

LILLIAN MOLLER GILBRETH **1878-1972**

A career of firsts for mother of 12

Long before women routinely combined families and careers, there was Lillian Moller Gilbreth.

She was the engineer, management consultant, psychologist and professor who was immortalized in the best-selling book Cheaper by the Dozen — which was written by two of her twelve children.

Though she and her husband, Frank Gilbreth, were probably best known for introducing innovative motion studies and efficiency techniques in the work place and at home, she was also a true pioneer in the women's movement.

Her résumé is replete with "firsts," from being the first woman invited to join the football coaching staff at Cornell University to being the first woman to receive the George Washington Award — one of the nation's highest awards in the sciences — for her "outstanding contribution to engineering and management and for unselfish devotion to problems of the handicapped."

Gilbreth was born in 1878 to a wealthy family in Oakland, Calif. Her father told her college was necessary only "for teachers and other women who will have to earn their living. ...No daughter of mine will have to do that." But she attended the University of California at Berkeley, and became the first woman to address a commencement there when she graduated in 1900.

Then, while studying for a doctorate in literature, she met Frank Gilbreth, a successful building contractor. During an unusual courtship, they drew up a contract for what they called their "One Best Marriage" by listing their qualifications for getting married, and plans for the future.

They married in 1904, and though she had studied psychology, education and literature, her husband urged her to become an engineer and his partner. Together, they formed Gilbreth Inc. in New York. They moved to Providence in 1912 to set up a management consulting business, seeking the "one best way" to do everything from factory work to raising a family.

They used motion studies to find ways to simplify and speed a worker's task to help improve production, raising an employer's profits.

Meanwhile, Frank Gilbreth told his wife he wanted six sons and six daughters. In an interview with the New York Post in 1941, she recalled asking him, "How on earth anybody could have 12 children and continue a career?" He said: "We teach management, so we have to practice it."

She worked full time as a mother and consulting engineer while continuing her doctoral studies. She earned a doctorate from Brown University between the births of her seventh and eighth children.

Her husband died in 1924, and she continued to head Gilbreth Inc. for the next 46 years. Determined to run the firm efficiently, she went back to college at the age of 50. She obtained a master's degree in engineering, then doctorates in engineering and science. She also was a professor of management.

When she found that traditional engineering companies didn't want a woman consultant, she focused her attention on domestic engineering.

She helped design modern kitchens, to make housework more efficient. She questioned 4,000 women to design the proper height for stoves and sinks. Ironically, she barely knew how to cook, since she'd had servants all of her life.

She also helped adapt her techniques for the handicapped, developing devices and techniques to help them lead more normal lives.

She traveled the world until she was well into her 80s, finally retiring in 1970. She died at the age of 93.

LAURA MEADE KIRK

Sources: " 'An ornament and honor to her sex:' New England Women from Valley Forge to Fenway Park," a history curriculum researched and written by Jane Lancaster; files of the Providence Journal.

ALICE WINSOR HUNT **1872-1968**

'A thrilling life' devoted to reform

She was a scholar, an athlete, an educator, a pacifist and a social reformer. And she was a terrier when it came to fighting for what she believed was right.

When she died in 1968, at the age of 96, Alice Winsor Hunt left a stunning legacy of reform. She had brought child labor laws to Rhode Island and had pushed to establish the state juvenile court. She had campaigned to abolish the sweatshop and to regulate working hours and wages for women and children.

"I have an inability to stop talking about the things I want done," she once said. "I can't bear to see injustice and the stupidity of exploitation."

Born Feb. 16, 1872, in Providence, she was the daughter of Daniel and Annie Evans Hunt and was a direct descendant of Roger Williams, although she played down the connection. "I have no time for the past," she said. "I'm too busy trying to improve the present."

She graduated from Classical High School and Wellesley College and taught for 10 years. And then Alice Hunt did something that would change her life: She spent a winter in Chicago, assisting nationally known social worker Florence Kelly in a mission for prisoners.

Miss Hunt returned to Rhode Island in 1908 with fire in her eye; committed to social reform and justice — and armed with an iron will and the money and status to support her endeavors.

She led the Consumers League of Rhode Island for 43 years, founded the Wellesley Institute for Social Progress, and organized the League of Women Voters in Rhode Island. She traveled the country, speaking out for U.S. membership in the League of Nations. She served on the state's Milk Control Board and was appointed to a committee studying the problems of black workers.

Always, her pet project was the welfare of children. She crusaded to protect them from dangerous jobs and to limit their work week to 40 hours. She fought to upgrade working conditions, eventually abolishing the common cup and towel, and spoke eloquently for creation of a juvenile justice system whose purpose would be "to take measures to correct the bad influence instead of meting out immediate punishment."

She campaigned tirelessly for 20 years before the state passed a minimum-wage law for women and children but, when the victory was won, all she said was: "The only thing I should get credit for is that I never give in."

An attempt to draft her to run for secretary of state failed when Miss Hunt declared: "I have worked so long as a private citizen to make Rhode Island less backward that I want to go on in the same way."

She is remembered fondly by her great-nephew, Timothy Philbrick of Wakefield, whose daughter is named Alice in Miss Hunt's honor.

"When I was growing up, she lived in Wayland Manor in a two-bedroom apartment," he recalls. "My three brothers and I would go over and she would play hide-and-seek with us in this little apartment. She was in her 80s.

"The word 'feisty' is what comes to mind when I think of her. There is a family story about the day that Aunt Alice was walking on Benefit Street and some would-be purse-snatcher tried to grab her bag. She was 5 feet tall and she turned around and laced the guy right in the chin."

At age 85 Miss Hunt gave up her legislative lobbying activities, declaring, "I've had a thrilling life. I accomplished everything I set out to do — or almost everything." The best year, she said, was 1936, when the sweatshop was abolished and child labor laws passed. "Before the legislation, children five, six and seven came into the mills at 5 o'clock in the morning and worked until sunset."

When she died, the headline on Alice Hunt's obituary read: "She Lived for Others."

MARTHA SMITH

Source: Files of the Providence Journal.

NANCY ELIZABETH PROPHET **1890-1960**

Hardship fueled sculptor's dedication

Nancy Elizabeth Prophet lived from 1890 to 1960, years when prejudice relegated people of color to menial jobs and limited prospects.

But this Providence woman, half Narragansett Indian and half black, never considered herself limited.

With a chisel and mallet and a steely determination, she carved her way into the art world, receiving critical acclaim in the United States and France, while winning friends such as W.E.B. Du Bois, a scholar and leader of the NAACP, and Gertrude Payne Whitney, founder of the Whitney Museum.

Her family and friends tried to dissuade her from her artistic aspirations, encouraging her instead to become a servant or a teacher of her people, but Prophet enrolled in the Rhode Island School of Design in 1914. She was the only person of color at the school.

While at RISD, Prophet married Francis Ford, a black man whose family had come from Maryland. Ford was the only black student to complete the classical course of study at Hope High School in Providence in 1900.

In 1922, four years after she graduated from RISD, Prophet went alone to Paris with $350 in her pocket, determined to further her mastery of sculpting.

She was immediately accepted at L'Ecole des Beaux Arts, a prestigious art school, and worked in squalid studios with no heat. In her journal, which she kept from Aug. 11, 1922 to July 19, 1934, she writes of her struggles to persevere against hunger, illness and lack of sleep.

Her first entry says: "I worked away on my first piece with a dogged determination to conquer... with a calm assurance and savage pleasure of revenge. I remember how sure I was that it was going to be a living thing, a master stroke, how my arms felt as I swung them up to put on a piece of clay."

In that same entry Prophet admits she was so hungry that while in a studio she shared with a young French woman, she stole a piece of meat and potato from the plate of the woman's dog. "This I ate ravenously," she wrote.

Annoyed at herself for what she considered her weakness, she nevertheless invited her husband to join her in Paris. Her journal indicates she found him "helpless (and) without ambition"; the marriage did not last.

Despite her circumstances, Prophet presented herself in an elegant and dignified manner.

Recognition for her clean and bold renderings of heads in wood, metal and stone came in 1924, when she exhibited at the Paris Salons D'Autumne and the Salon des Artistes Francais.

In 1929 Henry O. Tanner, a black painter and expatriate who admired Prophet's work, nominated one of her busts, "Head of a Negro," for the Harmon Exhibition in New York. The piece is now at the RISD museum.

After about a decade in France, during which she had many successful shows both there and in the United States, she returned to the United States.

In 1932 she won the Greenough prize from the Newport Art Association. Also exhibiting at the association's show was Gertrude Payne Whitney. Whitney asked Prophet for the "honor" of purchasing the bust titled "Congolaise," now in the Whitney Museum.

At the urging of Du Bois, Prophet became an art instructor at Atlanta University in 1934. She later joined the art department at Spelman College and initiated work in sculpture there, teaching until 1944.

She died in 1960 of a heart attack at the house she inherited from her father on Benefit Street.

TATIANA PINA

Sources: SAGE, A Scholarly Journal on Black Women; Crisis magazine; Opportunity, Journal of Negro Life; Nancy Elizabeth Prophet Journal, an unpublished manuscript in the Brown University library collection; Black Artists in the Rhode Island Landscape; "'An ornament and honor to her sex:' New England Women from Valley Forge to Fenway Park," a history curriculum researched and written by Jane Lancaster.

LIZZIE MURPHY **1894-1964**

First 'baseman' shone in semipro ball

Long before the All-American Girls Baseball League made its splash in the 1940s, a female first baseman out of Warren had already burst onto the baseball scene. Twenty years earlier, Lizzie Murphy had become the first woman to play against major league players.

One of seven children, Murphy was born April 13, 1894. At a very young age, she found that she preferred sports to dolls and other typically female activities.

"I always loved boys' sports," Murphy told a journalist in 1941. "They're so active, they wake you up."

Murphy was introduced to baseball by playing catch with her older brother. She said the local teams let her play initially because she provided the ball.

But it was through her talents that the 5-foot-6, 122-pound first baseman soon earned a reputation as a solid ballplayer.

"Lizzie had a good pair of hands and she was fast," recalls former Journal-Bulletin sports writer Dick Reynolds. "She was also very smart."

As a teenager, Murphy played with several local teams, including the Warren Shoe Co., while working as a ring spinner in the Parker Mill.

In 1918, at 24, she joined the Boston All-Stars, a semipro team of former major league players. For the next 17 years she traveled the eastern United States and Canada, playing over 100 games a season.

On Aug. 14, 1922, Murphy played first base for the American League All-Stars in a charity game against the Boston Red Sox. In 1928, she played with the National League All-Stars against the Boston Braves. Murphy is also believed to be the first woman to play for a black baseball team, when she played first base for the Cleveland Colored Giants in a game at Rocky Point Park.

Despite being the only woman on the team, Murphy never had difficulty getting along with the other players.

"I didn't have any trouble with the boys," Murphy said. "Of course, they cursed and swore, but I knew all the words."

Reynolds described Murphy as a pleasant person — very frank and outspoken — and as having a "sly and dry" sense of humor.

Her only known confrontation occurred with a team manager when she played for a Warren team at the age of 15. In those days, spectators were not charged admission to semipro baseball games. Instead, a hat was passed through the stands and players would share what was collected.

In Murphy's first game with the team, however, she received nothing. The following Saturday afternoon, as the team began boarding the bus for a game in Newport, Murphy refused to get on until the manager agreed to pay her $5 for every game, plus an equal share of the collection.

To supplement her small salary, Murphy would work the crowds between innings, selling postcards of herself in uniform for a dime.

In 1935, at 41, Murphy retired from baseball. She married Walter Larivee, a mill supervisor, and settled happily into domestic life. But when Larivee died six years later, Murphy went back to working in the mill, and occasionally on shellfishing boats, to support herself. She died July 27, 1964, at the age of 70.

Next month will mark Murphy's 100th birthday, and Red Sox vice president Lou Gorman will present a proclamation at the Warren Town Hall. In addition, Murphy will be inducted into the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame in May.

"Nobody has ever given Lizzie credit (for her accomplishments)," said Reynolds. "One reason, I think, is because in sports, fame is fleeting. Also, I think many people just don't relate baseball to women. But she attracted thousands to the games."

CAROLYN THORNTON

Sources: Files of the Providence Journal; "'An ornament and honor to her sex': New England Women from Valley Forge to Fenway Park," a history curriculum researched and written by Jane Lancaster.

GLENNA COLLETT VARE **1903-1989**

A 'career unequaled in annals of golf'

Glenna Collett Vare was known as the "Queen of American Golf," and was a pioneer in U.S. women's golf before the professional era dawned.

She won the U.S. Amateur title six times before ending her competitive golf career at the age of 56 by winning the Rhode Island Women's Golf Association crown in 1959.

Vare was born in New Haven, Conn., the daughter of George A. and Jane Collett, and grew up in Providence. By the time she was 9, she had already gained fame as a swimmer and diver, but "the family thought she should do something more ladylike, like tennis or golf," said her daughter, Glenna Kalen of Caracas, Venezuela.

Vare learned to play golf at the Metacomet Country Club, accompanying her father and some friends to the golf course. She watched and then asked if she could try hitting the ball.

She "banged a beauty straight down the fairway," said Herbert Warren Wind in his book The Story of American Golf.

Vare quit high school, won the U.S. Girls' Championship, the first of 49 championships, and in 1922 captured her first U.S. Women's Amateur title.

She went on to win the women's national title five more times between 1922 and 1935, including three years in a row, 1928 through 1930.

She was part of the so-called Big Four of women's golf in the 1920s and 1930s, along with Virginia Van Wie, Maureen Orcutt and Helen Hicks, and was dubbed the "female Bobby Jones" by golf writers because of her consistency, skills, attitude and humor.

"Her career was unequaled in the annals of golf," said Phyllis Hollander in the book 100 Greatest Women in Sports. The book listed Vare ahead of Babe Didrikson Zaharias and Patty Berg.

Vare won the Canadian and French Women's Opens. She reached the finals of the British Women's Amateur in 1929 and 1930, but each time lost to Joyce Wethered of England. Vare was also instrumental in reinstituting the Curtis Cup competition between the United States and Britain.

In 1950, Vare was one of six women selected as charter members of the Women's Golf Hall of Fame.

Vare never played professionally. The fame and money that she might have received 40 or 50 years later didn't exist during her prime golfing days. The handful of tournaments for women in the 1920s and 1930s were all amateur.

"Professional golf just wasn't the trend when I was going along," Vare said. "Pro golf was nothing. ...In those days, the pro wasn't allowed in the clubhouse, just the way you wouldn't ask the cook to come to dinner."

Vare never regretted her amateur career.

"I think pro golf is a great thing," she said. "But I don't think I could ever do it. It's too tedious, too tiresome. I can't imagine having to play every week. I have no regrets. I got to travel all over the world. I don't think I would have if I hadn't played golf. I think I would only have been a merry housewife."

The Ladies Professional Golfers Association remembers her annually with the Vare Trophy, awarded to the player with the lowest average of strokes on the tour.

In July 1984, at 81, she played in her 61st consecutive Point Judith Invitational, maintaining a 15 handicap.

In 1988, a year before her death, the Point Judith Women's Golf Committee honored Vare at the Point Judith Country Club Invitational Golf Tournament, the longest running women's tournament in the state.

PAT KENNY

Source: Files of the Providence Journal.

ELIZABETH NORD **1902–1986**

Activist mixed passion, diplomacy

Elizabeth Nord was getting off the second shift at a mill in Central Falls one night when she came upon a scene that would forever stick in her mind.

A man was standing in the rain and wind, handing out leaflets to workers.

"I thought, he means it — you've got to mean it to be standing out in this kind of weather," Nord recalled during a 1975 interview. "I didn't realize then that years later I'd be doing the same thing myself."

The year was 1928. The man standing in the rain was Horace Revere, vice president of the United Textile Workers Union of America.

And Nord, a 26-year-old weaver who had spent the better part of her young life toiling behind silk looms in the Blackstone Valley mills, was feeling the first stirring of social activism.

That year, Nord signed up to join the union.

By 1934, when textile workers across the country were embroiled in one of the biggest strikes in labor history, Nord helped organize workers in the Blackstone Valley.

After the strike, Nord became a full-time union organizer, delivering rousing speeches at union halls and traveling around the country.

Nord's identification with workers' causes had deep roots. Her father was a coal miner and her mother a weaver in Lancashire, England, where she was born in 1902. The family lived through several strikes before moving to Pawtucket when Elizabeth was 10. She got her first job when she was 14 at the Royal Weaving Co. in Pawtucket, attending high school classes at night.

Back then, it was almost unheard of for women to choose careers over marriage and raising families. But Nord did just that. She dedicated her life to helping improve working conditions, wages and education for textile laborers and enforcing child labor laws, first as an organizer and later as vice president for the Textile Workers Union of America.

Organizing in the South, Nord told friends, she had to meet with workers in the cornfields to hide from the company police.

Nord's unique mix of social refinement and fiery determination won her the respect of men and women alike. A petite woman with blond hair swept back from her face and impeccable nails — the tips always colored white and polished — she was equally at ease in the all-male union boardrooms and on the factory floor.

"I learned that if a man thinks you're sincere and knows what you're talking about, there's never any problem," Nord once told a reporter. "Of course, as a woman, you can't shout or pound the table. But you find the calm approach is just as effective."

In the later part of her career, Nord was an assistant director of the state Department of Labor and was a member of the Rhode Island Department of Employment Security's Board of Review, before resigning at the age of 74.

Nord never married, living with her father, Richard Nord, until he died in 1972.

Her cremated remains are buried on top of his grave in the Moshassuck Cemetery in Central Falls. It is a fitting spot: The cemetery is where hundreds of mill workers rioted during the big 1934 textile strike.

Nord's name is carved in a simple granite headstone she shares with her father on a hill overlooking the mills on the banks of the Blackstone River.

LYNN ARDITI

Sources: Mill Life Oral History Collection, Special Collections, University of Rhode Island; The Great Textile Strike of 1934, by James F. Findlay; interviews with Ethel M. Flynn, Nord's former secretary in the union, and Mary Beaulieu, a friend and former employee of Nord's at the Department of Employment Security.