

SELECTED FIRSTS

IN WOMEN'S HISTORY



Jeanette Rankin

GOVERNMENT In 1916, Jeannette Rankin was the first woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. She served another term from 1941 to 1943. A lifelong pacifist, Rankin voted against going to war with Germany in 1917 (World War I), and was the only representative to vote against the U.S. entering World War II.

SCIENCE AND MEDICINE After being the first woman admitted to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Ellen Swallow Richards also became the first professional chemist in the US after her graduation in 1873.

LITERATURE AND PUBLISHING Edith Wharton became the first woman to win a Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1921 for her novel *The Age of Innocence*. Wharton did not begin her writing career until she was almost 40 years old, and through her career published over 40 books.

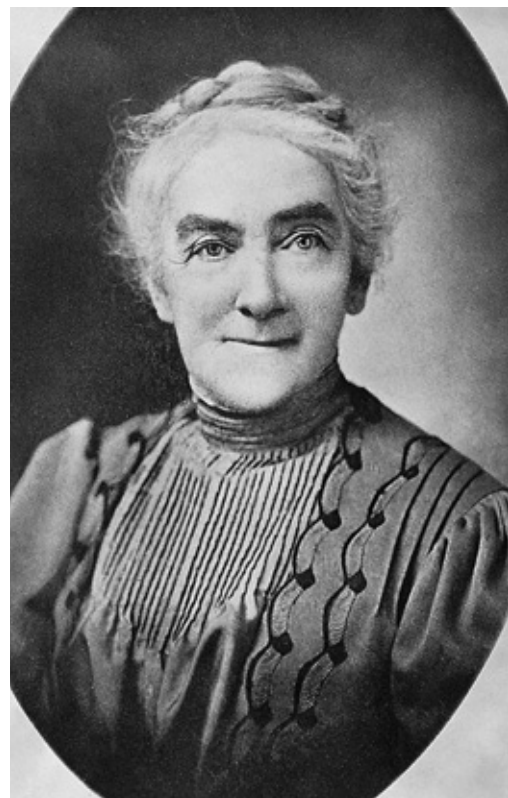
FILM In 1896, Alice Guy Blache became the first American female film director with the release of her film *The Cabbage Fairy*. During her career she directed over 300 short films.

MUSIC In 1914, Mary Davenport-Engberg became the first woman to conduct a symphony orchestra in the United States.

AIR AND SPACE In 1932, Amelia Earhart became the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean. She flew from Harbor Grace, Newfoundland, to Ireland in about 15 hours. In 1937 Earhart attempted to fly around the world, but her plane disappeared. No one knows what happened to her.

MILITARY In 1993, Sheila Widnall was appointed Secretary of the Air Force, becoming the first woman to hold this high-level position for any branch of the U.S. military.

SPORTS In 1967, Althea Gibson became the first woman (and African American) to win the tennis singles title at Wimbledon. During her career, Gibson won ten straight national black women's singles championships, and, in 1971, she was inducted into the National Lawn Tennis Hall of Fame.



Ellen Richards



Amelia Earhart



Althea Gibson

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

MARCH

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH is one of the **outcomes** of a county-wide movement in Sonoma County, California, in the 1970s that brought a focus on women into school curricula as well as into the general public's **consciousness**. In 1978, the Educational Task Force of the Sonoma County (California) Commission on the Status of Women initiated a "Women's History Week." The week of March 8 was chosen since March 8 is International Women's Day. As word of the movement spread, State Departments of Education across the U.S. initiated similar changes to their curricula, and encouraged celebrations of women's history as a means of achieving **equity** in classrooms. In 1987 the National Women's History Project petitioned the United States Congress to recognize the whole month of March as National Women's History Month. Since then, every year the House of Representatives and the United States Senate approve the **designation**.

March is celebrated with special programs and activities in schools, workplaces, and communities. Besides recognizing women's achievements in such areas as science, math, politics, arts, and athletics, a common topic in school curricula is the women's **suffrage** movement in the United States. Before 1920, women did not have the **right** to vote under the constitution. In the **decade** between 1910 and 1920, women organized and were involved in political demonstrations and marches across the United States. Though the vote was brought to the congress several times, it failed to pass. Finally in 1919, after years of **picketing**, **petitioning**, and protesting, the vote passed, resulting in the passage of the Nineteenth **Amendment** to the U.S. Constitution on August 26, 1920. In

November 1920, women voted for the first time in a national election.

Glossary

outcome(s): *n.* a result or the effect of an action

consciousness: *n.* knowledge or awareness

initiate(d): *v.* to begin

equity: *n.* justice or fairness

designation: *n.* something chosen for a particular reason or purpose

suffrage: *n.* the right to vote in an election

right: *n.* a legal claim

decade: *n.* a period of ten years

picket(ing): *v.* to stand or demonstrate outside a building or place of work to prevent people from entering and working, as a means of political protest

petition(ing): *v.* to demand or request some action from a government or other authority

amendment: *n.* a change in a law