



Parts of the U.S. started public celebrations of women's history in the late 1970s. Celebrations of "Women's History Week" generally were held in the week which included March 8, International Women's Day. In 1981, the U.S. Congress passed a joint Congressional resolution proclaiming a national Women's History Week. Then in 1987, Congress named March as Women's History Month.

Pauline Cushman

Pauline Cushman (nee' Harriet Wood) grew up in Michigan. At 18, she struck out to New York City to become an actress, changing her name in the process. She traveled across the South in acting theatres but married and moved with her husband to Cleveland where they settled and had two children. When war broke out, her husband fought for the Union and died in late 1862. Three months later, Paul touring with a theatrical troupe in Union-controlled Louisville, KY, was paid to toast Confederate leader Jefferson Davis after a performance. In doing so she had a plan to ingratiate herself to the rebels and to offer herself to the Union as a spy. Her ruse worked. She became a spy secreting battle plans and drawings in her shoes until she was caught. She was sentenced to be hanged but was saved by Union forces who invaded the area where she was held three days before her scheduled execution. Lincoln gave her an honorary commission as a major and by some reports she returned to the South as a spy dressed in a male uniform. (based on wikipedia.org and Presidio's monument to Cushman)



Christine Ladd-Franklin

In 1882 Ladd-Franklin met the requirements for a Ph.D. in mathematics. She was the first woman to do so at John Hopkins University. However, the trustees denied her the degree and refused to change its policy about admitting women. In the ten years prior John Hopkins had allowed women to study via public and special lectures; however, granting a degree was denied to women. Ladd-Franklin would go on to become a lecturer in the Hopkins Faculty of Philosophy for five years before leaving for Columbia. Nearly 44 years later, her degree was granted to her in 1926. (based on *John Hopkins Magazine*, November 2007)

Claire Boothe Luce

Clare Boothe Luce wanted to become an actress after graduating from high school but she married and had a daughter. The marriage was marred by her husband's alcoholism and they divorced after six years. From there she, went to work as a writer for stage, film and magazines for which she became known for her satire. She joined the staff of *Vogue* magazine as an editorial assistant in 1930. The next year she became an associate editor of *Vanity Fair*. Eventually she became managing editor. She left in 1934 to become a playwright. Late the next year she married Henry Robinson Luce. She continued to write plays but also joined her husband as he toured Asia and Africa for his work as a magazine editor. Shortly before WWII broke out in Europe, Luce had written a stinging critique of British preparedness. Her work helped reshape British war preparations and saved untold lives. She went on to become a U.S. Congressional Representative and an Ambassador. (based on wikipedia)



Emily Reed

Emily Reed was attacked by Alabama segregationist for placing in state libraries a children's book about the marriage of two rabbits one of which was black and the other was white. Alabama lawmakers called the action "possible anti-segregation motive." Reed removed the book from open shelves but placed it on reserve shelves. The author, Garth Williams, said of the outcry, "I was completely unaware that animals with white fur... were considered blood relatives of white human beings." She came under fire again for adding Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *Stride to Freedom* to the states recommended reading list in 1959. As a result, the Alabama legislature introduced a law to require the state library chief to be an Alabama native and a graduate of the University of Alabama or Auburn University. Reed would have been disqualified. She left the next year to become coordinator of adult services for the

Washington, DC, library system. She was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Indiana University. She died in 2000 at 89. (based on an article by Bart Barnes of the *Washington Post*)

Radioactive Experiments on Women

Between 1945 and 1949 Vanderbilt University and the Tennessee Department of Health conducted experiments on women about iron deficiency during pregnancy. Of the 1,600 women in the experiment, about half unknowingly ingested radioactive iron. Four of the women had children die from cancer. In 1998 a lawsuit was settled in which Vanderbilt University paid \$9.1 million, the Rockefeller Foundation paid \$900,000 and the Tennessee Health Department and The Nutrition Foundation paid \$225,000 each. (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 29, 1998)



Anna Coleman Watts Ladd

Educated in Paris and Rome, Ladd was an accomplished sculptor. In 1905 she married Dr. Maynard Ladd of Boston and continued sculpting after her marriage. Her husband had been appointed to direct the Children's Bureau of the American Red Cross in Toul, France in the WWI aftermath.

With horrific battle scars and in the days before plastic surgery, WWI veterans faced a life of permanent disfigurement, depression and isolation. Ladd opened the Studio for Portrait Masks in Paris, administered by the American Red Cross. Working with artist Francis Derwent Wood, Ladd worked to create plaster casts in the Masks for Facial Disfigurement Department. The work was short-lived; the department was disbanded in 1911. Ladd worked there for one year and produced 185 masks. Only a fraction of the war's estimated 20,000 facial casualties were helped. The masks would only last a few years but the recipients were grateful for the

help. In 1932 she was made a Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor. (based on a *Smithsonian* magazine article (February 2007) by Caroline Alexander)

Peggy Gilbert

Peggy Gilbert (nee Margaret Fern Knechtges) broke musical ground for women for decades. In 1924, the year after she graduated from high school, she started her first women's band, the Melody Girls. Moving to California she became a noted jazz saxophonist and bandleader in hot jazz. During and after WWII, Gilbert was active in all-women ensemble bands, playing in a variety of arenas from vaudeville to nightclubs. She was also known as an advocate for women trying to make their way in jazz, a culture long hostile to women instrumentalists. She and other women musicians endured auditions at which band members were asked to lift their skirts to prove they had good legs. She helped find opportunities in bands and in film for male and female musicians. When the war was over, the demand for women's bands dried up, she worked as a secretary for the Los Angeles local of the American Federation of Musicians, continuing to perform nights and weekends. She later formed in 1974 a Dixieland band of older women which performed until 1998. She died at 102 in 2007.

For more information, see Jeannie Pool's documentary film "Peggy Gilbert and Her All-Girl Band," 2006. (Based on an article by Margalit Fox in *The New York Times*)