

West Virginia Women Who Made History

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Several notable women in history have come from West Virginia.

West Virginia is full of astonishing women who have paved the way for the modern-day woman. Several notable women in history have come from the state and have earned distinguished awards, have been champions of women's suffrage and have paved the way for women in the areas of politics, athletics and medicine.

Phebe Tucker Cunningham

Phebe Tucker was a woman of bravery and resilience. After moving to West Virginia as a teenager in 1780, she married Thomas Cunningham at Prickett's Fort, near Fairmont, West Virginia. Phebe Tucker Cunningham was captured by Indians around 1785 and sustained gunshot wounds, the loss of four children and her cabin being burnt down. In May 1788, Phebe and Thomas were reunited. They proceeded to have seven more children and moved to a new homestead in Ritchie County. After Thomas' death, Phebe lived with her daughter in present-day Calhoun County, until her death at age 84. Her bravery and resilience was honored with a monument by the Daughters of the American Revolution at her grave.

For more information, check out the book *A Woman of Courage on the West Virginia Frontier* by Robert Thompson.

Kate Carpenter

Do you know how Kate's Mountain in Greenbrier County got its name? Kate Carpenter and her young daughter Frances made a heroic escape from an Indian attack in 1756. She fled from her home near present-day White Sulphur Springs to the highest mountain near their homestead, now known as Kate's Mountain. Kate's



1984 Olympic gold medalist Mary Lou Retton.

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Mountain has several species of unusual flora including Kate's Mountain clover and box huckleberry. After fleeing, Kate and her daughter lived in Staunton, Virginia for their safety. Frances later moved back to her parents' land which now is the sight of the Greenbrier Resort.

Read more about Kate Carpenter in *Greenbrier Pioneers and Their Homes* by Ruth Woods Dayton.

Ann Maria Reeves Jarvis

Due to contributions by Ann Maria Reeves Jarvis to the great state of West Virginia, we now celebrate Mother's Day. Ann Maria moved to Philippi when her father began to work at a Methodist church. Shortly after, Ann met her husband, Granville Jarvis and moved to Taylor County.

Ann Maria organized the first Mother's Day Work Club to improve health and sanitary conditions. During the Civil War, she encouraged club members to remain neutral and provide assistance to all soldiers. With high tension in the area she promoted peace by organizing Mother's Friendship Day at Pruntytown Courthouse.

After Ann Maria's death in 1905, her daughter dedicated her life to establishing a national Mother's Day. On May 10, 1908 in Grafton, the first official Mother's Day ceremonies took place. In 1914, President Woodrow Wilson signed a congressional resolution recognizing Mother's Day as a national holiday on the second Sunday in May.

Learn more about Ann Maria Reeves Jarvis by reading *Mother's Day Revisited: But After All She was Not a Masterpiece as a Mother and a Gentlewoman* by Marie Tyler-McGraw.

Harriet B. Jones

Harriet B. Jones moved to Preston County as a young child and was very active in several areas including improved health care, women's health, women's suffrage and politics. As a supporter for women's right to vote, Jones belonged to many civic groups in

West Virginia. She aided in the establishment of the West Virginia Tuberculosis Sanitarium, the West Virginia Children's Home at Elkins and the West Virginia Industrial Home for Girls. In 1924, Harriet B. Jones was elected as one of the first women to serve in the West Virginia legislature, serving two terms as a House of Delegate member from Marshall County.

If you would like to learn more about Harriet B. Jones, visit <http://www.wvculture.org/history/women/jonesharriet01.html>.

Mary Lou Retton

Mary Lou Retton was born in 1968 in Fairmont, West Virginia. During the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, Mary Lou Retton became the first American woman to win a gold medal in gymnastics. She also was the only American to win the Olympic All-Around Title. *Sports Illustrated* named her Sportswoman of the Year in 1984. In 2008, she was inducted into the West Virginia Hall of Fame. She retired from competitive gymnastics in 1986 and continues her work as a fitness ambassador promoting nutrition and regular exercise, and also works as a motivational speaker.

You can learn more by reading *Mary Lou Retton: America's Sweetheart* by Christine Dzidrums and Lyle Lopez.

The state has produced women that have made an impact in, not only the state, but throughout the world. These women have created a path where anything is possible if a woman has a desire. They will influence young women growing up in the Mountain State for years to come.

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