

# West Virginia Women Who Made History

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## Educational Objectives

1. Identify women with a relationship to West Virginia that survived Indian attacks, won awards and were activists for a variety of causes.
2. Compare and contrast the women mentioned and discuss their role in the history of West Virginia.
3. Describe the events in each woman's life that led to their importance in West Virginia history.

West Virginia is full of astonishing women who have paved the way for modern-day women. 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.

### Harriet Jones

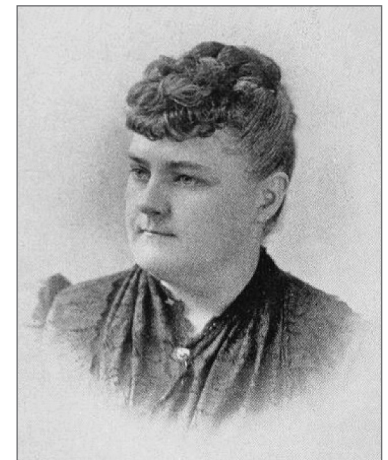
Harriet B. Jones, born in Edensburg, Pennsylvania in 1856, moved to Terra Alta, West Virginia in Preston County as a young child. Jones was very active in several areas including improved health care, women's health, women's suffrage and politics.

Jones attended Wheeling Female College and graduated from Women's Medical College of Baltimore. She also continued her studies in gynecology and abdominal surgery in various northeastern states.

Her success in her studies led Jones to opening a private medical practice in Wheeling. She became assistant superintendent of the Weston State Hospital in 1888 and started a women's hospital in 1892.

As a supporter for women's right to vote, Jones belonged to many civic groups including the West Virginia Equal Suffrage Association, the West Virginia Federation of Women's Clubs and the Women's Christian Temperance Union. As a lobbyist for health care issues, she was able to aid 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, 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.



*Dr. Harriet B. Jones was the first woman to be licensed as a physician in West Virginia in 1885 and the first woman to be elected to its House of Delegates in 1924. (Photo Credit: Photographer unidentified - American Women: Fifteen Hundred Biographies with Over 1,400 Portraits, 1897 (revised edition), Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=49341392>)*

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## Phebe Tucker Cunningham

Phebe Tucker was born in England in 1761. During her teen years, her family moved to the western counties of Virginia. Phebe, reported as a beautiful young woman with auburn hair and green eyes, married Thomas Cunningham on a perfect spring day in April 1780 at Prickett's Fort, near present-day Fairmont, West Virginia. The fort was built in 1774 to provide safety and local refuge to settlers from Indian raids of the Wyandot and Shawnee that were common during the period of the American Revolution.

After their wedding, the couple settled near Ten Mile Creek. Soon after in 1781, Phebe and Thomas had their first child, Henry. The married couple had three more children between 1782 and 1785 – Lydia, Walter and Thomas Jr.

Several months after the birth of their last child, Thomas traveled to Pittsburgh to purchase the supplies that could not be grown on the farm. Several days before the expected return of her husband, Phebe and her neighboring sister-in-law Sarah were attacked by a group of Wyandot Indians. Shots were fired, fire was set to the cabin and the three oldest children were slain. Phebe and her infant son Thomas Jr. were taken captive.

Conditions during her captivity were rough. She traveled more than 200 miles on foot and was given hardly any food. As a result, she was unable to continue breast feeding. The Indians saw little use in the infant child and killed him as well.

Finally, the raiding Indians and their captive made it to their home village in Madison County, Ohio. Fortunately for Phebe, the chief of the village ordered that she would not be treated unkindly. The Indian women also sympathized with Phebe because of the death of her children. Phebe acted as a servant to the group of Indians in the village.

In 1786, a treaty was made between the U.S. government and the Shawnee and Wyandot

tribes. As a result of the treaty, all prisoners taken by the Indians were to be returned. In late 1787 or early 1788, translator Simon Girty arrived at the Indian camp where Phebe was held. After pleas from Phebe, Girty paid her ransom to the Wyandot. She was brought to Kentucky where she met up with allies who offered her a horse. She then joined a group headed for Virginia.

In May 1788, after three years of separation, Thomas and Phebe were reunited. They proceeded to have seven more children and moved to a new homestead in Ritchie County, West Virginia. Thomas became a Methodist minister and established one of the first churches of its kind in this area of western Virginia. After Thomas' death, Phebe lived with her daughter in present-day Calhoun County, until her death at age 84. Phebe Tucker Cunningham's bravery and resilience was honored with a monument at her grave by the Daughters of the American Revolution.

## Ann Maria Reeves Jarvis

Ann Maria Reeves Jarvis was born on Sept. 30, 1832 in Culpeper, Virginia. The family moved to Philippi, West Virginia when her father, Reverend Josiah Reeves, began work at a Methodist church. It was at this time that Ann met her husband, Granville Jarvis, and moved to Taylor County.



*(Photo Credit: Olairian – Own work, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=26708917>)*

Jarvis organized Mothers' Day Work Clubs, which raised money for medical expenses, hired women to care for families whose matriarch was ill and inspected bottles of milk and food products. The goal of the clubs was to improve health and sanitary conditions in the area.



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During the Civil War, Jarvis encouraged members of the clubs to remain neutral and provide assistance to soldiers on either side of the war. They cared for injured combatants and provided food and clothing.

Tension was high in the surrounding communities even during the end of wartime. In an effort to promote tranquility in this era, Jarvis organized Mothers' Friendship Day at the Pruntytown Courthouse. The event was successful and was held for several years afterward.

Jarvis died in 1905 and her daughter dedicated her life to establishing a nationally recognized Mother's Day. The Andrews Methodist Church was built in Grafton in 1873, under Granville's leadership. This was the site of the first official Mother's Day ceremonies on May 10, 1908. It was six years later that President Woodrow Wilson signed a congressional resolution recognizing Mother's Day as a national holiday celebrated on the second Sunday in May.

## Kate Carpenter

Kate and Nicholas Carpenter were among the first white settlers in the Greenbrier Valley. They had a cabin and approximately 1,000 acres near present-day White Sulphur Springs. The couple was subject to an Indian attack in September 1756. Nicholas traveled for help to the forts located in present-day Allegheny County, Virginia and perished in their defense. Kate managed to escape with their infant daughter, Frances. Too young to escape the Indian assailants, Frances and Kate escaped to the highest mountain near their homestead. Kate and her daughter lived in Staunton, Virginia for their safety. Upon marriage, Frances moved back to her parents' land, which later became the sight of the Greenbrier Resort. Kate's heroic escape from capture led to the ridge being called Kate's Mountain. The mountain has several species of unusual flora including Kate's Mountain clover and box huckleberry.

## Mary Lou Retton

Mary Lou Retton was born on Jan. 24, 1968 in Fairmont, West Virginia. She married Shannon Kelley on Dec. 29, 1990. They have four daughters and now reside in Houston, Texas.



During the 1984

Olympic Games in Los Angeles, Retton became the first American woman to win a gold medal in gymnastics. Additionally during the same year, she won silver medals for team and vault and bronze medals for uneven bars and floor exercise. Such success earned her more medals than any other athlete in the 1984 Olympics. She also boasts the only American to win the Olympic All-Around Title. Also in 1984, she was *Sports Illustrated* Sportswoman of the Year. In 2008, the gymnast was inducted into the West Virginia Hall of Fame.

Mary Lou Retton retired from competitive gymnastics in 1986. She continues her work as a fitness ambassador promoting nutrition and regular exercise and also works as a motivational speaker.

The state has produced women who 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.

### **Activities:**

1. Pick one of the women in this lesson. How would West Virginia be different without them as part of its history?
2. Pick a woman from your community or club. Share how this woman has made a difference in your life, your community or your club.
3. Use the following matching Women in West Virginia History quiz as an activity. Answers are below the chart.



## Women in West Virginia History

Match these women with what they are known for.

- A. Ruby Bradley \_\_\_\_\_ West Virginia native that was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for her book *The Good Earth*.
- B. Katherine “Katie” Lee \_\_\_\_\_ First African-American woman to be named to a high-ranking office in West Virginia state government. Served as director of the Department of Mental Health for 15 years.
- C. Joanne Dru \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Kathleen Alice “Kathy” Mattea \_\_\_\_\_ First woman to be elected to the United States Congress from West Virginia.
- E. Pearl S. Buck \_\_\_\_\_ Newspaper editor whose efforts resulted in congressional recognition of the Battle of Point Pleasant as being the first battle of the Revolutionary War.
- F. Elizabeth Kee \_\_\_\_\_ American basketball player from South Charleston High who won a national championship with the UConn Huskies in 2009.
- G. Mildred Mitchell-Bateman \_\_\_\_\_ American film and television actress, known for her role in the films *Red River* and *All the King’s Men*. She was born in Logan, West Virginia in 1922.
- H. Livia Nye Simpson Poffenbarger \_\_\_\_\_ An American cookbook author, television food critic, cook and novelist raised in Milton, West Virginia.
- I. Renee Danielle Montgomery \_\_\_\_\_ An American country music and bluegrass performer from Cross Lanes, West Virginia. She recorded 17 albums and charted more than 30 singles. Known for the song *18 Wheels and a Dozen Roses*.
- \_\_\_\_\_ One of the most decorated women in the U.S. military history from Spencer, West Virginia, who received the rank of colonel in 1958.

Answers: E,G,F,H,I,C,B,D,A

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