



McDowell County FACES Newsletter

The FACES of HOPE

March, 2016

facesfrn.com

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National Women's History Month



In the United States, Women's History Month traces its beginnings back to the first International Women's Day in 1911. In 1978, the school

district of Sonoma, California participated in Women's History Week, an event designed around the week of March 8 (International Women's Day). In 1979 a fifteen-day conference about women's history was held at Sarah Lawrence College from July 13 until July 29, chaired by historian Gerda Lerner. It was co-sponsored by Sarah Lawrence College, the Women's Action Alliance, and the Smithsonian Institution. When its participants learned about the success of the Sonoma County's Women's History Week celebration, they decided to initiate similar celebrations within their own organizations, communities, and school districts. They also agreed to support an effort to secure a National Women's History Week.

In February 1980, President Jimmy Carter issued a presidential proclamation declaring the week of March 8, 1980, as National Women's History Week. The proclamation stated, "From the first settlers who came to our shores, from the first American Indian families who befriended them, men and women have worked together to build this nation. Too often the women were unsung and sometimes their contributions went unnoticed. But the achievements, leadership, courage, strength and love of the women who built America was as vital as that of the men whose names we know so well. As Dr. Gerda Lerner has noted, 'Women's History is Women's Right.' It is an essential and indispensable heritage from which we can draw pride, comfort, courage, and long-range vision. I ask my fellow Americans to recognize this heritage with appropriate activities during National Women's History

Week, March 2-8, 1980. I urge libraries, schools, and community organizations to focus their observances on the leaders who struggled for equality - Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, Lucy Stone, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Harriet Tubman, and Alice Paul. Understanding the true history of our country will help us to comprehend the need for full equality under the law for all our people. This goal can be achieved by ratifying the 27th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which states that 'Equality of Rights under the Law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.'" Carter was referring to the Equal Rights Amendment, which was never ratified, not to the amendment which did become the 27th Amendment to the United States Constitution after his presidency.

In 1981, responding to the growing popularity of Women's History Week, Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) and Rep Barbara Mikulski (D-Maryland) co-sponsored the first Joint Congressional Resolution proclaiming a Women's History Week. Congress passed their resolution as Pub. L. 97-28, which authorized and requested the President to proclaim the week beginning March 7, 1982 as "Women's History Week." Throughout the next several years, Congress continued to pass joint resolutions designating a week in March as Women's History Week.^[4] Schools across the country also began to have their own local celebrations of Women's History Week and even Women's History Month. By 1986, fourteen states had declared March as Women's History Month.

In 1987, after being petitioned by the National Women's History Project, Congress passed Pub. L. 100-9 which designated the month of March 1987 as Women's History Month. Between 1988 and 1994, Congress passed additional resolutions requesting and authorizing the President to proclaim March of each year as Women's History Month. Since 1995, U.S. presidents have issued an-

nual proclamations designating the month of March as Women's History Month.

State departments of education also began to encourage celebrations of Women's History Month as a way to promote equality among the sexes in the classroom. Maryland, Pennsylvania, Alaska, New York, Oregon, and other states developed and distributed curriculum materials in all of their public schools, which prompted educational events such as essay contests. Within a few years, thousands of schools and communities began to celebrate of Women's History Month. They planned engaging and stimulating programs about women's roles in history and society, with support and encouragement from governors, city councils, school boards, and the U.S. Congress.

In March 2011, the Barack Obama administration released a report, Women in America: Indicators of Social and Economic Well-Being, showing women's status in the U.S. in 2011 and how it had changed over time. This report was the first comprehensive federal report on women since the report produced by the Commission on the Status of Women in 1963.

Some organizations have issued statements marking Women's History Month, for example the Republican National Committee and the Democratic National Committee.

A President's Commission on the Celebration of Women in History in America recently sponsored hearings in many parts of the country. The Women's Progress Commission will soon conduct hearings to promote interest in preserving areas that are relevant in American women's history. Some of the groups promoting this interest are state historical societies, women's organizations, and groups such as the Girl Scouts of the USA.



McDowell County Women of Honor

Irene Cornelia Berger (born 1954) is a United States District Judge on the United States District Court for the Southern District of West Virginia. A native of Faraday, West Virginia in **McDowell County**, Berger graduated from West Virginia University in 1976 with a degree in mathematics and from West Virginia University College of Law in 1979.

After graduating from law school, Berger worked as a staff attorney for the Legal Aid Society of Charleston, where her clients largely were low-income individuals facing domestic, consumer and ten-

ant-landlord disputes. She held that job from June 1979 until January 1982.

In February 1982, Berger became assistant prosecuting attorney for Kanawha County, West Virginia. She held that job for more than 12 years.

In May 1994, Berger joined the United States Attorney's office for the Southern District of West Virginia as an Assistant United States Attorney. In July 1994, West Virginia Gov. Gaston Caperton appointed Berger to be a Kanawha

County circuit judge. On July 8, 2009, Berger was nominated by President Barack Obama to serve as a United States District judge for the United States District Court for the Southern District of West Virginia, to replace David A. Faber, who had taken senior status. The United States Senate confirmed Berger on October 27, 2009, in a 97-0 vote. She is the first African-American female federal judge in West Virginia's history.



Minnie Buckingham— born on May 15, 1886, in Putnam County, later moved to Keystone in **McDowell County** and married E. Howard Harper, who was elected to the legislature in 1926. When Harper died in the middle of his term, the county Republican executive committee unanimously recommended Minnie to replace him. In January 1928, Governor Howard Gore appointed Minnie Buckingham Harper to complete her husband's term, making her the first African-American woman in U.S. history to serve in a state legislature.

Her appointment reflected both the growing importance of women in American politics and the large voting bloc of African Americans in southern West Virginia. During her one session in the legislature, she served on the House committees on Federal Relations, Railroads, and Labor. Later that year, she chose not to run for election. It would take 22 more years before an African-American woman would be elected to the legislature. Elizabeth Drewry, also from McDowell County, was elected to the House in 1950. Minnie Buckingham Harper eventually moved back to Putnam County. She died in Winfield in 1978 at age 91.

Elizabeth Drewry- In 1950, Elizabeth Simpson Drewry became the first African- American woman elected to the West Virginia Legislature. She was born in Motley, Virginia, on September 22, 1893. She moved to **McDowell County**. She began teaching in the black schools of coal camps along Elkhorn Creek in 1910, and later taught in the McDowell County black public school system.

Drewry received her education at Bluefield Colored Institute, Wilberforce University, and the University of Cincinnati, and received a degree from Bluefield State College in 1933.

In 1950, Drewry ran again and won the fifth spot on the Democratic ticket. In the general election, becoming the first African-American woman elected to the legislature.

In 1927, During her thirteen years in the legislature, Drewry was a leading advocate for education and labor. She chaired both the Military Affairs and Health committees and served on the Judiciary, Education, Labor and Industry, Counties, Districts and Municipalities, Humane Institutions, and Mining committees. She introduced legislation in 1955 allowing women to serve on juries. West Virginia was the last state to eliminate this form of discrimination. In 1956, Ebony magazine honored Drewry as one of the ten outstanding black women in government.

She retired due to poor health in 1964, having served longer in the legislature than any other McDowell Countian. Drewry died in Welch on September 24, 1979, at the age of eighty-five.



McDowell County Women of Honor

U.S. Army Second Lieutenant

Sara Blanche Vance, commonly called Blanche by those around her, was from Iaeger, **McDowell County**. Sara's town of Iaeger had a population of about 986 at the time she was growing up. Families had low incomes and were divided into small communities surrounding Iaeger known as Coon's Branch, Mile Branch, Christian's Branch, Red Bird, Sandy Huff, and Johnnycake. The opportunities were slim, even more so for women.

Sara was only one among her many siblings, but she started to stand out. Her first accomplishment was getting an education. She left home to get her nursing degree at Raleigh General Hospital School of Nursing in Beckley and ended up staying there to continue her career. After school, she worked at the Pinecrest

Sanitarium in 1934 as a floor manager and briefly went to Cincinnati General Hospital in Ohio.

Her desire to heal and help would take her much farther than Beckley, or Ohio, or even the confines of the U.S. Denying the path of her mother as a housewife and unable as a woman to follow her father as a soldier, Sara would take a path in between as an army nurse. Her decision to join the army in 1942 would first take her to Kentucky, Camp Campbell, Kentucky, to be exact. There she would undergo rigorous training to adapt her to army life. Sarah's training would not be limited to a single camp, though; Indiana would be her next stop. However, no matter how close Atterbury, Indiana, got her to being field ready, it got her no closer to her army unit, who for the most part were all training miles

away at Fort Eustis, Virginia. She'd meet her unit in 1943 under the sweltering North African sun. It would be the farthest Sara had gone from home.

With the 33rd Gen Hospital unit, Sara would travel to Casablanca, French Morocco; Bizerte, Tunisia; and, finally, Italy. Sara would travel in a rickety train, The uncomfortable ride, which offered little water, little sleep, and no light at night, would cross the desolate Moroccan and Algerian countryside, catch a glimpse of the Mediterranean Sea, and finally reach her first official destination—Bizerte.



Shelia Muncy dedicates her life to help better the town of Bradshaw and **McDowell County**, West Virginia. She spends countless hours and many of her days working to do whatever she can to help the people, in the county. Shelia has worked with many organizations throughout the county to provide Christmas for needy children, plan the Bradshaw Fall Festival, prom dresses for local girls, organizing the town breast cancer walk, volunteering at her local 4-H Camp, sitting on FACES Board, contracting to complete breast health initiatives, working with children's reading, and many more.

During the hometown hero Donald Reed commented: "When you look at the work of Shelia, it's about empowering her community and helping the individual person or that family, rise about their current circumstances,". Shelia says she grew up with a single mother in Bradshaw. "Growing up we were limited on what we had. We had a wonderful home, but we were limited. I always said if I ever had the opportunity I would give back to my community," says Shelia. Shelia stayed true to her word and began giving back. She works in McDowell County and says, thanks to the help of her husband she's able to do as much as she can, when giving back.

"I have a wonderful husband. He helps me so, so much," says Shelia. Donald Reed says, "We will never know the impact that Shelia has had upon people, because she may be your secret Santa or she may be the food that shows up at the door. She does a lot of things that no one will ever know and not just her, when you get Shelia, you get her husband, Bobby."

There are just not enough Shelia's in our county.

McDowell County Women of Honor Continued



Miss Freida Riley

Freida Joy Riley was an American science and math teacher. She taught at Big Creek High School in War, **McDowell County**, WV

during the late 1950s and early 1960s while suffering from Hodgkin's disease.

Riley was born in Squire, West Virginia, to J.F. and Sallie Beavers Riley. She graduated from Big Creek High School, Concord College, and completed graduate work

at Ohio State University and West Virginia University. Riley was an alumna of Alpha Sigma Alpha, Beta Pi Chapter at Concord College. As a teacher, she was widely known for her inspiring work with students, including Homer Hickam, Jr. and the Rocket Boys, which was told in Hickam's #1 New York Times best-seller entitled Rocket Boys. Riley was depicted by actress Laura Dern in the feature film October Sky, which was based on Rocket Boys. She also appeared in Hickam's two follow-up memoirs entitled The Coalwood Way (2000) and Sky of Stone (2002).

The Freida J. Riley Award was established in her honor and is award-

ed annually to an American educator who overcomes adversity or makes an enormous sacrifice to positively impact students. The award is sponsored by the Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation and administered by the Partnership for America's Future. Concord College has also established an annual scholarship in Riley's name.

Freida Riley died of Hodgkin's disease on Tuesday, August 5, 1969, in the West Virginia University Medical Center in Morgantown. She was 32 years old. She is interred at Grandview Memory Gardens in Bluefield, Virginia.



Helen Carson—Born in Russell County, Virginia in 1924 to Gus Kastanos and Amanda Patrick Kastanos, Carson grew up the oldest of seven siblings. Her brother Fred died in early childhood but she and sisters Mary, Alice Gaynelle, Betty, Star, Catherine and brother George enjoyed the best life her hardworking parents could provide. The family moved to **McDowell County** in 1930.

In 1965 she began working with the Head Start and by 1966 Carson was promoted to Head Start Director and remained in the position until her retirement in 1999. Helen was the secretary for National Head Start Directors Association and traveled a lot in that position.

Though she notes that her hometown seems to be “evaporating around her,” Carson does her part to keep several longtime community organizations strong. She has been chairman of the Board at the Coalwood Methodist Church, Cape Coalwood Restoration Association, president of the War Library, and serves on the boards of the McDowell County Wastewater Treatment Coalition, FACES, the Commission on Aging and the McDowell County Commission Grievance Board. (excerpts from article by Cathy Patton).

Sharon Walden—2009 Inductee WV Affordable Housing Hall of Fame. A life-long resident of **McDowell County**, she has accomplished practical and long-lasting solutions to affordable housing issues, serving as the founder and Executive Director of SAFE and formed a new non-profit called SAFE Housing and Economic Development, Inc. (SHED) which focuses on permanent housing development. Sharon established Travel Beautiful Appalachia (TBAI) and worked side by side for years with the Blueprint Communities.

Other prestigious awards include:

“Courage in the Community” Award
 “James A. Johnson” finalist
 “Friend of Business” Award
 “Mrs. Mac” Title

“Dianne Reese Advocacy” Award
 “Leadership for a Changing World” Award
 “Skip Jason Community Service” Award



McDowell County Women of Honor Continued

Martha Moore was born July 31st, 1942, in Welch, **McDowell County**. She graduated from Welch High School in 1960 and attended Marshall University for two years. She was married to Charles Thomas (Butch) Moore. Mrs. Moore was a faithful member of Welch First United Methodist Church and former treasurer, Lions Little League Cheerleading Sponsor with Peggy Smith for 20 years, Girl Scout Troop Leader, Administrative Assistant for William B. Swope, M.D., and a humble volunteer for numerous community organizations. She was a member of the McDowell County Chamber of Commerce and served on the McDowell Advisory Council of Health, Inc. from August 2, 1989. Martha began her service to Welch in July 1984 when she was elected to City Council, and within four months was City Clerk. She was

elected as the first female Mayor of Welch in July 1986 and was entering her 25th year. Martha is the longest serving Mayor in Welch history and in 1990 was awarded the Mayor of the Year in West Virginia by the WV Municipal League. Mayor Moore started Bingo to financially assist the Volunteer Fire Department and was a volunteer to the Fire Department Unit #20. Mrs. Moore was appointed to the State Solid Waste Management Authority by Governor Arch Moore in 1988, Chairman of the Welch Water and Sanitary Boards, Chairman of the Welch Police Pension Board, recently appointed to the Community Relations Board by the Federal Prison, and a Board Member of the Pioneer Community Bank since January 2009. She is also a proud member of the Stop the Hurt, Inc. - McDowell County Children's Advocacy Cen-

ter. Mayor Moore had begun a city wide beautification by removing old abandoned buildings, developing the Riverfront Park area downtown, having scenes of Welch painted on the water towers and town buildings and inviting Marquee Theaters to open in Welch. Mayor Moore started many things: Annual Fair, Autumn Harvest, The Last Blast of Summer, Welch Volunteer Fire Department, Welch Bingo and many more engaging activities for the community.



Jean Battlo is a writer of rare and exceptional talent, one with a deep appreciation and love of her home state and a gift for translating those feelings into the written word. The youngest child of Italian immigrants, drawn to Appalachia to work in the coal mines, Jean Battlo was born and raised in Kimball, a small town in **McDowell County**, West Virginia. She attended Marshall University, earning both a B.A. and an M.A. Battlo began her literary career as a poet, publishing two award-winning volumes of poetry – *Bonsai* and *Modern Haiku*. She first attempted playwrighting in response to a request from her community—people who wanted to form a local theatre group but could not afford the royalties charged by publishing houses for producing their materials. Though she had not even thought of writing plays before, Battlo agreed to try. In 1987, Battlo left her job with the McDowell County school system to spend two years as a Writer-in-Residence with the Beckley-based Theater West Virginia. While with the program, Battlo wrote two more plays – *Frog Songs* and *Shakespeare: Love in Stages* (co-authored by Alma Bennett). Scenes from both plays were included in Linda Pinnell's *Getting Started in Theater* (National Textbook Company, 1996). Battlo later turned her playwrighting focus to historical dramas. #8, a play about a Jewish family just prior to the beginning of Hitler's Holocaust, was selected as a finalist by Camel-Sea in 1990, as well as being optioned by Off-Broadway Stage Arts and being listed as a finalist in the Eugene O'Neill National Playwright's Competition. In 1992, she was commissioned to write *Between Two Worlds*. The musical, which premiered at the Pearl S. Buck Home in Hillsboro, WV, was written to celebrate the centennial of the Buck's birth. Jean Battlo was later awarded a seed-grant from the WV Humanities Council to research the 1921 murder of "Smilin'" Sid Hatfield for an outdoor drama intended to help bring tourists to the Hatfield-McCoy Trail in southern West Virginia. The result of that grant, *The Terror of the Tug*, premiered in the summer of 2000 with a performance at Landbridge, WV. *The Terror of the Tug* remains under the control of McArts, the McDowell County community arts organization, and is performed each summer in a specially-constructed outdoor amphitheater.

Meetings/Events of Interest

McDowell Women of Honor is part of the National Women of Honor Month and as this entire newsletter is dedicated to several women that have stood out throughout our history, it is also placed here to share with females in McDowell—you can be whatever you wish to be and here is your proof. There are women in this newsletter that are highlighted for being judges, writers, military, legislators, mayors, teachers that inspire, and community developers. You can choose your destination. You can be the next woman of honor.

As you plot your course in history remember it is not where you come from, what your circumstances are, whether you are poor or rich, what color you are, whether you were raised by your biological parents or others, what anyone else says to or about you. It is what you choose for yourself, understanding your desires, feelings, wishes, abilities, and being willing to change your circumstances to become the best you can be. It is about rising up and being accountable for yourself.



Famous women start when they are small, with wide-eyed innocence and a heart for love, creativity, change, boldness, etc.

As parents we must help them reach their potential.

The child will change but will not be lost if they have people around them that love them!

Southside K-8 Community Schools Meeting

**March 14, 2016
4:00 p.m.
Southside K-8**

South Central Community Collaborative

March 18 2016

Location: TBD

10:00 a.m.—12:00 noon

McDowell County HOPE Coalition

March 28, 2016

10:30 a.m.—12:00 noon

**25 Bank Street
FACES Community Meeting Room**

A graphic for an event titled "RISE UP SOUTHERN WEST VIRGINIA". The text "CHANGE THE FUTURE" is on the left and "OF WEST VIRGINIA" is on the right, both in white on a blue ribbon. The "RISE UP" logo is in the center, with "RISE" in white on a blue shield and "UP" in blue on a white shield. Below the logo, it says "CREATIVE SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS YOUTH POVERTY" and "KEYNOTE SPEAKER: RICH HARWOOD". At the bottom, it says "join 18 OF us" in a mix of white and blue fonts, with "18" being the largest. Below that, it says "WEDNESDAY MAY 20 2016" and "9:00 AM TO 4:00 PM". The location "TAMARACK CONFERENCE CENTER" is at the very bottom.

CHANGE THE FUTURE **RISE UP** **OF WEST VIRGINIA**
SOUTHERN WEST VIRGINIA

CREATIVE SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS YOUTH POVERTY
KEYNOTE SPEAKER: RICH HARWOOD

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WEDNESDAY **MAY 20 2016**
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TAMARACK CONFERENCE CENTER