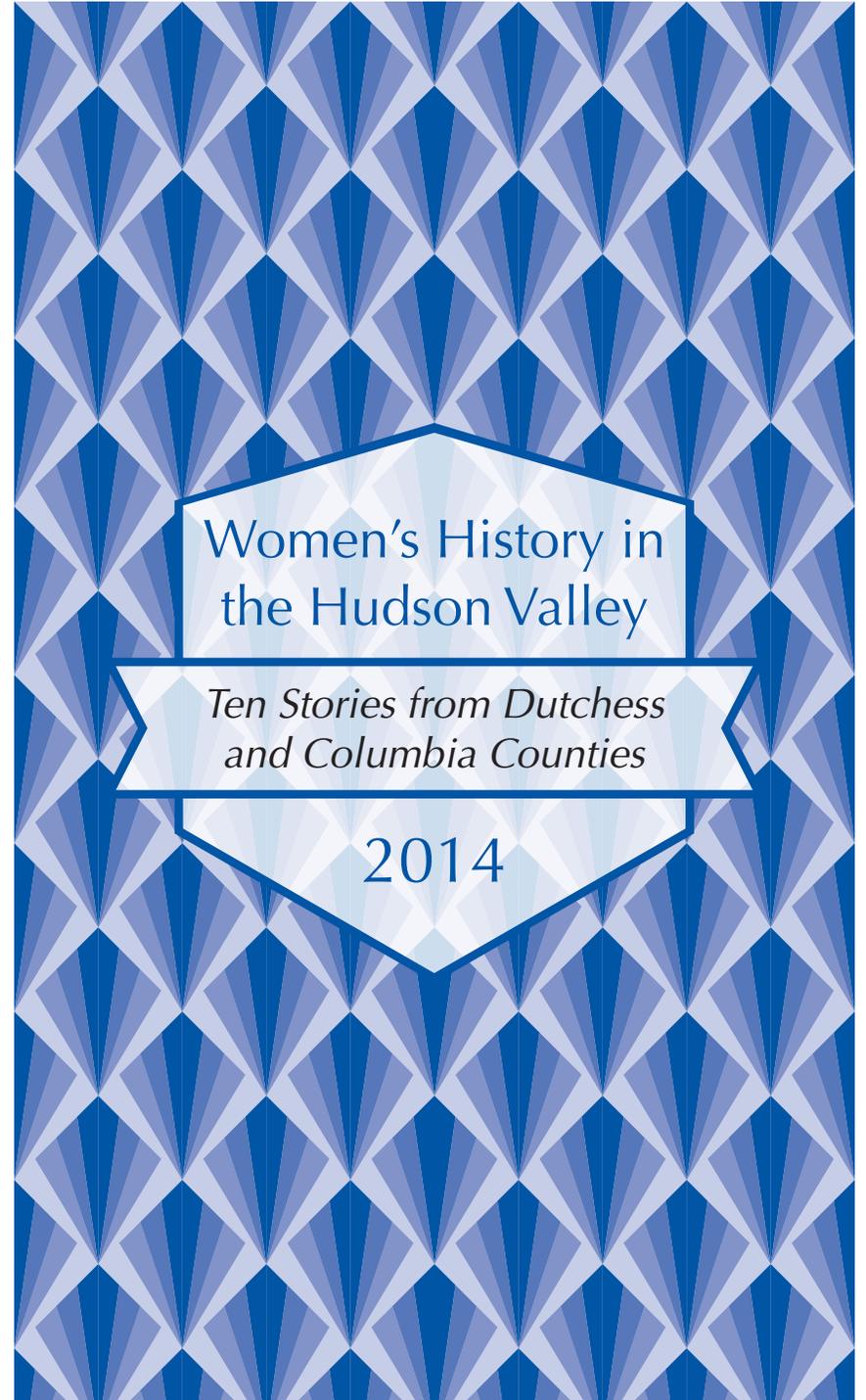


Courtesy of

Assemblymember **Didi Barrett**

12 Raymond Ave., Suite 105
Poughkeepsie, NY 12603
845-454-1703

751 Warren St.
Hudson, NY 12534
518-828-1961
BarrettD@assembly.state.ny.us





Dear Friend,

Women's history has long been written on the leaves of diaries, penned across the pages of letters and scribbled on the backs of photographs. Their stories – even those of bravery or turmoil – tend to be shared in family lore, not chronicled in multi-volume biographies.

Nonetheless, while our founding mothers may not be documented in piles of books the way our founding fathers are, as Cokie Roberts wrote in "Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation," "most of the men who wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, fought the Revolution, and formed the government couldn't have done it without the women. And it was the women who, by insisting that the men come together for civilized conversations in the early Washington dinner parties, helped keep the fragile new country from falling into fatal partisan discord."

The Hudson Valley is rich with the history of pioneering women who once lived or traveled through this extraordinary region, subsequently leaving their mark on our nation. Our premier First Lady, Martha Washington, served as hostess to dignitaries and inspiration to troops at Hasbrouck House in Newburgh during the Revolutionary War.

Preacher and abolitionist Sojourner Truth was born a slave named Isabella in what is now Ulster County. Abolitionist and suffragist Lucretia Mott attended school at the Nine Partners Boarding School in Millbrook. Sarah Bernhardt appeared at the Bardavon in Poughkeepsie, and Susan B. Anthony spoke on more than one occasion at the Hudson Opera House in Hudson.

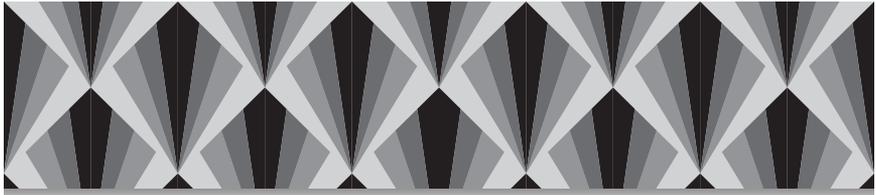
Vassar College, which opened its doors to its first class of young women in 1865, became the first women's college to have a Phi Beta Kappa chapter, a reflection of its academic rigor and innovative faculty, many of whom were pioneering women in their fields.

In celebration of Women's History Month, we are proud to present these ten short narratives of remarkable women who made their homes in Dutchess or Columbia counties. They were artists and activists, elected officials and educators. Their stories are part of our region's history, New York State's history and American history. Their stories are our stories.

For more information on women's history or any other issue, please feel free to contact my office at 845-454-1703 or barrettd@assembly.state.ny.us.

Sincerely,

Didi Barrett
Member of Assembly, 106th District



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Elizabeth Freeman (Mum Bett)

Town of Claverack
1742-1829

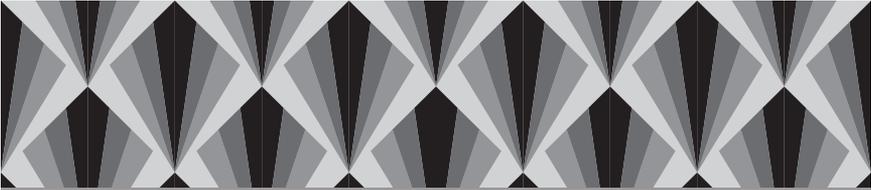
Freed Slave

Elizabeth Freeman was one of the first slaves to win a “freedom suit” in court. She was born into slavery around 1742 in Claverack, N.Y., and was soon after purchased by John Ashley of Sheffield, Mass.

After fleeing the Sheffield residence and refusing to

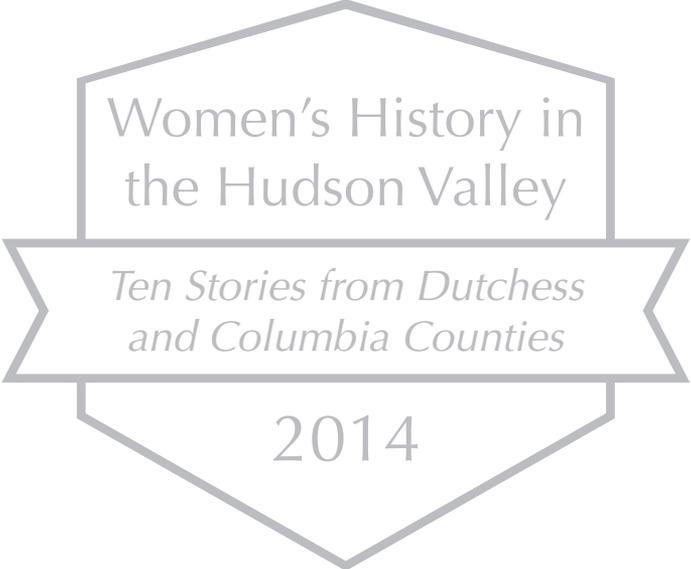
return, Bett urged lawyer Theodore Sedgwick to help her gain freedom. Sedgwick agreed to represent her and Brom, another of Ashley’s slaves. Brom and Bett vs. Ashley was heard in 1781 before a Massachusetts county court.¹ During the proceedings, Sedgwick asserted Bett’s argument that all men, including slaves, were created equal. Bett and Brom became the first African-American slaves to be freed under Massachusetts constitution when the jury ruled in their favor. The court also assessed damages to be paid to Bett and Brom.

Bett chose to work in Sedgwick’s household after the ruling and soon became a well known and sought-after midwife and nurse. After years of work for the Sedgwicks, Freeman and her daughter eventually moved into a home



of their own.

She died in December 1829 as a free woman and will forever be known for the significant legal precedents her case set.²



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¹mass.gov/courts/sjc/constitution-slavery-d.html

²pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2p39.html

Photo Credit: Elizabeth Freeman Center



Samantha Littlefield Huntley

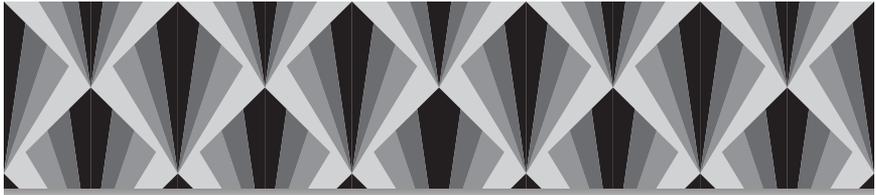
Town of Kinderhook
1865-1949

Local Portrait Artist

Samantha Littlefield was born in 1865 in Watervliet. She married Frank Huntley in 1884 and began her career as an artist, studying in New York

City and Paris. For many years, she was an instructor at the Emma Willard School in Troy. In 1923, she built a home and studio on William Street in Kinderhook.

She is especially known for her portraits of important figures, including New York Governor Martin Glynn, Missouri Governor Herbert Hadley and Archbishop of St. Louis John Glennon. Her works were widely exhibited in such places as the Boston Art Club, Society of American Artists, National Academy of Design, Albright Art Gallery at Buffalo, Albany Historical and Art Society, the French Salon in Paris and the Royal Academy of Arts in London.^{3,4}



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³dalnet.lib.mi.us/dia/collections/dma_exhibitions/1911-19.pdf

⁴askart.com/AskART/artists/search/ArtistKeywords.aspx?searchtype=KEYWORDS&artist=89864

Photo Credit: Columbia County Historical Society





Elizabeth “Lee” Miller, the Lady Penrose

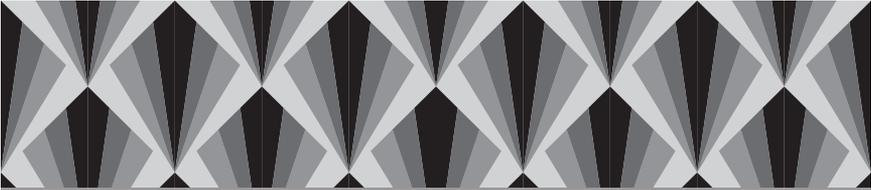
Town of Poughkeepsie
1907-1977

Model/Photographer

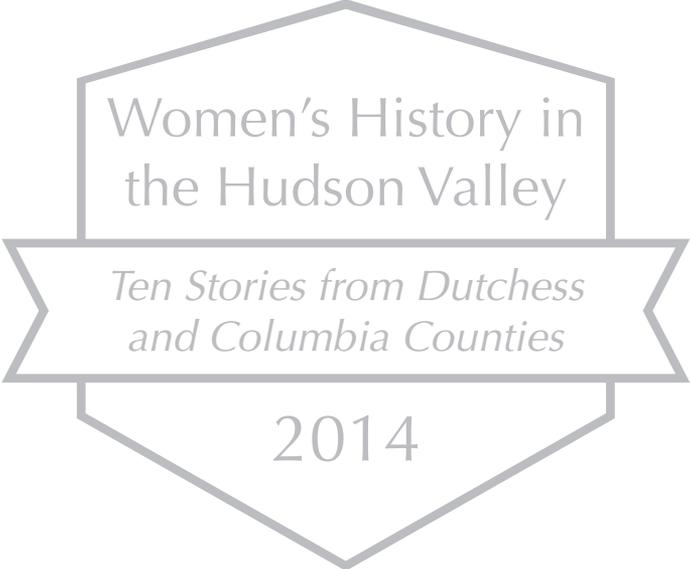
Lee Miller was born in 1907 in Poughkeepsie. As a teenager, she was approached by the founder of *Vogue*, Condé Nast, who saw her modeling potential; she soon appeared on the publication's cover. She became one of the most in-demand models in New York.

In 1929, Miller traveled to Paris to apprentice for the surrealist artist and photographer Man Ray. They quickly developed a magnetic relationship; she acted as both his co-collaborator and muse. She opened her own studio in Paris and became a prominent member of the surrealist movement in her own right.

At the outbreak of World War II, Miller was living in London and working as a successful fashion photographer for *British Vogue*, but she wanted more. She then pursued a new career in photojournalism, becoming the official war photographer for *Vogue* and often teaming up with *Life* magazine. During this time, Miller witnessed and photographed the siege of St. Malo, the liberation of Paris and the terror and liberation of the Nazi concentration camps at Buchenwald and Dachau.



After the war, she occasionally worked for Vogue but remained haunted by the images and experiences of World War II. She settled in England and became a gourmet cook.^{5,6}



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⁵leemiller.co.uk/article/Artists/b4OCCNM2-8snMwHxWgoJ5Q..a?cl=b4OCCNM2-8snMwHxWgoJ5Q...a&ts=WgR4qx0I8ZH1cnZ8qif2BA..a

⁶wmagazine.com/culture/art-and-design/2013/08/lee-miller-photographer-biography-excerpt/
Photo Credit: Man Ray Trust



Jean Murphy

Town of Poughkeepsie
1923-2013

First Female Dutchess County Legislator

Jean Murphy was born in 1923 in Brooklyn. She studied at Packer Collegiate Institute before marrying Robert W. Murphy. Throughout her life, Murphy was a dedicated member of many community organizations, including the Hudson Valley Philharmonic, Cub Scouts and the League of

Women Voters.

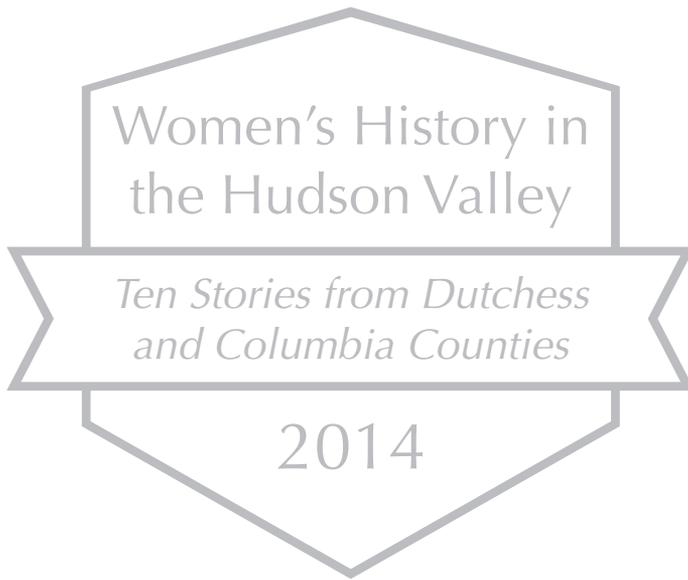
She became the first woman elected to Dutchess County government in 1967, serving six terms in the Dutchess County Legislature. She introduced a prison reform initiative in 1969, and in 1972, she led the way in getting funding for day care included in the budget. She is quoted as saying, "If we are to have a strong society, we must start with strong families." She returned to school to earn a B.A. in Sociology at Vassar College in 1978, but politics remained her passion as she hoped to make a difference in people's lives.

Angered by the majority's decision to eliminate funding for the Child Development Committee from the 1976 budget, and determined to serve the needs and interests of women, Murphy crossed the



party line to support a new chairman of the legislature.

Following her time in the legislature, Murphy oversaw the Town of Poughkeepsie Historic Commission and served as Town Historian.⁷



⁷legacy.com/obituaries/poughkeepsiejournal/obituary.aspx?pid=168535695
Photo Credit: Dutchess County





Lucille Pattison

Town of Pine Plains
1936-2013

First Female Dutchess County Executive

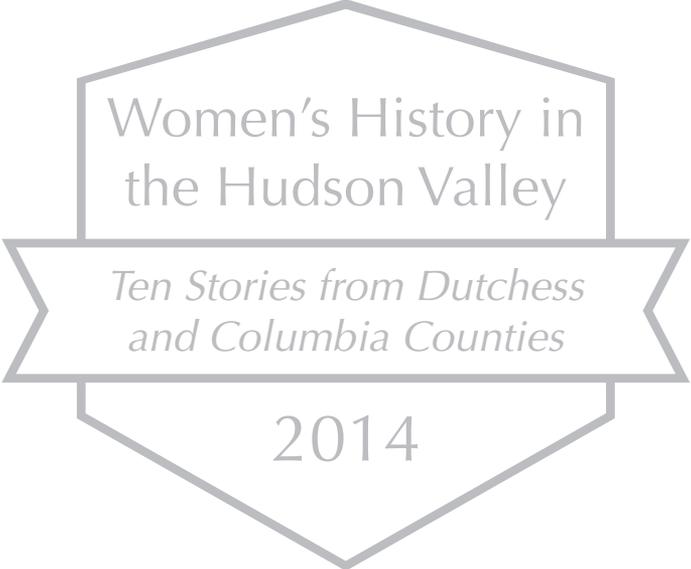
Lucille Pattison was born in Rochester. She grew up on the family farm and was the first member of her family to attend college, earning her B.A. in Government from the Maxwell School at Syracuse University. She went on to complete graduate study in geography and history at the University of Rochester and then taught history at Monroe High School in Rochester. She moved to

Hyde Park in 1964.

Pattison was very active in the community and political campaigns; she was a member of the League of Women Voters and advocated for Planned Parenthood. Pattison was elected to the Dutchess County Legislature in 1973 and served until 1978, acting as Minority Leader and then Majority Leader. She then won a special election for Dutchess County Executive, becoming the first female county executive in Dutchess County and New York State and holding the position for 13 years. Her other endeavors include serving as president of the New York State Association of Counties and advocating for the Resource Recovery Agency and the Human Rights Commission. She is a recipient of the Eleanor Roosevelt Val-Kill Medal.



Pattison retired in 1991 but continued serving the community, acting as a mediator in Family Court for the Mediation Center, as a trustee for Vassar and Northern Dutchess Hospitals, as a trustee for Wilderstein Preservation and as a tutor for incarcerated youth. She undoubtedly redefined local politics for women and helped restore her community's faith in county government.^{8,9,10}



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⁸legacy.com/obituaries/poughkeepsiejournal/obituary.aspx?pid=165434562

⁹aauwpoughkeepsie.org/uploads/PDFs/notable_women/lucille%20pattison.pdf

¹⁰dailyfreeman.com/general-news/20130619/former-dutchess-county-executive-lucille-pattison-dies-at-77

Photo Credit: Mid-Hudson News



Eleanor Roosevelt

Town of Hyde Park
1884-1962

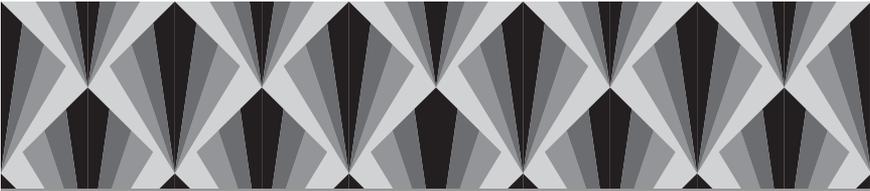
**First Lady of the United States/
Humanitarian/Women's and
Human Rights Advocate**

Eleanor Roosevelt was First Lady of the United States from 1933-1945 during the presidency of her husband Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

She was born in New York City in 1884. Eleanor married Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1905, and they settled in New York

City as well as at the family's estate in Hyde Park, N.Y.

Eleanor redefined the role of First Lady. She was outspoken and knowledgeable. She didn't shy away from political issues and made her opinions known, even if her husband disagreed. She served in place of FDR at public appearances after he was stricken with polio in 1921 and also worked with the Women's Trade Union League, fighting for minimum wage and an end to child labor.¹¹ She fought tirelessly for those who needed a voice - women, minorities and the poor. She helped establish Val-Kill Industries in 1926, hiring local farmers to make furniture in the off-season. After the factory closed in 1936, she converted the property into a home and resided there after her husband's death. The historical site is currently operated by the National Park Service.¹²



Eleanor set additional precedents as First Lady by becoming the first presidential spouse to hold press conferences, encouraging greater attendance by female reporters, and the first to speak at a national party convention. She also wrote a widely syndicated newspaper column, “My Day,” another first. She wrote the column six days a week and touched on a variety of issues. During World War II, Roosevelt’s influence and connection to the American people continued to flourish. She was the mother of four active servicemen and had the White House follow the same food and gas rationing system as the general population. She campaigned for factory jobs to be given to women and government-sponsored day care and urged FDR to continue pushing his New Deal agenda during the war.¹³

After her husband’s death in 1945, President Harry S. Truman appointed Roosevelt as a delegate to the United Nations General Assembly. She soon became the first chairperson of the preliminary UN Commission on Human Rights and was instrumental in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Roosevelt also served as the first U.S. Representative to the UN Commission on Human Rights until 1953. She was posthumously awarded one of the UN’s first Human Rights Prizes in 1968.^{14,15}

¹¹firstladies.org/biographies/firstladies.aspx?biography=33

¹²preservationnation.org/travel-and-sites/sites/eastern-region/val-kill.html

¹³firstladies.org/biographies/firstladies.aspx?biography=33

¹⁴fdrlibrary.marist.edu/education/resources/bio_er.html

¹⁵ohchr.org/Documents/Press/previous_recipients.pdf

Photo Credit: Library of Congress



Lucy Maynard Salmon

Town of Poughkeepsie
1853-1927

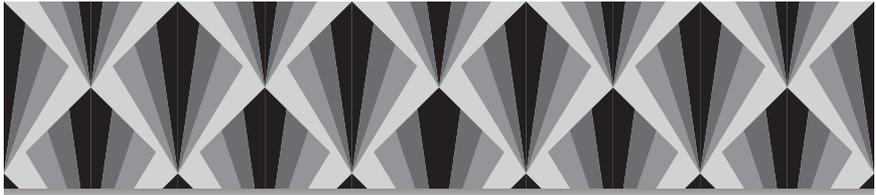
Established History Department at Vassar

Lucy Maynard Salmon was born in 1853 in Fulton, N.Y. She entered the University of Michigan in 1872, a year after it had begun to admit women, earning both her B.A. and M.A. She was hired by Vassar College in 1887 to form a history

department, receiving a full professorship by 1889.

Salmon was instrumental in changing the way history was studied and taught. She focused greatly on social history, embracing less traditional historical records as she encouraged students to question scholarly authorities. Salmon founded the Vassar Alumnae Historical Association, which dedicated most of its resources to purchasing books that better suited her learning style and belief in the unity of historical development.

She was accepted to the American Historical Association in 1885, and in 1897, the Executive Committee invited Salmon to serve on the Association's Committee of Seven. She played a major role in developing the nation's secondary school history curriculum and college



entrance exams.

Salmon was a suffragist, serving on the National College Equal Suffrage League and on the Executive Advisory Council of the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage and leading the suffrage movement at Vassar. She also fought to diminish the power of the college's administration. She secured greater decision-making power for the faculty and introduced the use of a convocation to welcome freshmen.

She was a prominent member of the Poughkeepsie community, serving as regent of the Poughkeepsie chapter of the Daughters of the American Republic and dedicating herself to "cleaning up" the city. The Lucy Maynard Salmon Fund continues to endow Vassar faculty research.¹⁶

¹⁶vncyclopedia.vassar.edu/faculty/prominent-faculty/lucy-maynard-salmon.html
Photo Credit: Vassar College, Special Collection Libraries





Victoria A. Simons

Town of Ghent
1944-2010

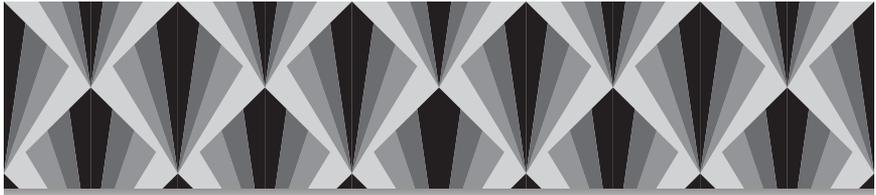
**Pioneer in Columbia County
Local Food Movement
and Newspaper Editor**

Vicki Simons was born in 1944 in St. Louis, Mo. She attended Cornell University and earned a B.A. in English Literature from Queens College. After college, she stayed in New York City to work as a counselor at a women's health clinic, ultimately becoming

vice president of operations. She went on to earn an M.P.A. in Health Care Administration from New York University and moved with her husband to Columbia County in 1977. They founded Message-Desk in Hillsdale before purchasing the *The Independent* newspaper in 1986.

She was editor of the newspaper for 15 years, during which the publication drastically grew and was known for its accurate local coverage. Simons served as president of the New York Press Association, helped create the Center for Community Journalism at SUNY Oswego and was awarded the Emma McKinney Award for distinguished community journalism by the National Newspaper Association.

In 1996, she became the first woman to serve on the board



of the Columbia County Agricultural Society, leading the way in organizing the annual Columbia County Fair. After the sale of the newspaper in 2001, she helped found Columbia County Bounty. The nonprofit promoted local agriculture, and as the first executive director, she played a significant part in extending the bounty model to other Hudson Valley counties.

Until her death, she was a devoted member of the community, participating in many endeavors including serving for six years as Columbia County Coordinator of the Fresh Air Fund. She also served on the boards of United Way of Columbia and Greene Counties and Upper Hudson Planned Parenthood. The Victoria A. Simons Locavore Award is awarded annually to individuals, farms or businesses that work to promote and improve local food enterprise.^{17,18,19}

¹⁷[legacy.com/obituaries/timesunion-albany/Obituary.aspx?pid=140246640](https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/timesunion-albany/Obituary.aspx?pid=140246640)

¹⁸[nysenate.gov/story/vicki-simons](https://www.nysenate.gov/story/vicki-simons)

¹⁹[columbiafair.com/victoria-simons-locavore-award.php](https://www.columbiafair.com/victoria-simons-locavore-award.php)

Photo Credit: Tony Jones





Hannah Van Buren

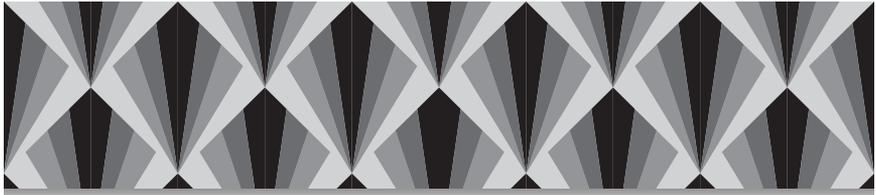
*Town of Kinderhook and
City of Hudson*
1783-1819

Wife of U.S. President Martin Van Buren

Hannah Van Buren was born in 1783 in Kinderhook. She was raised in an isolated, rural Dutch community and married her childhood sweetheart, Martin Van Buren, on February 21, 1807. They soon after moved to Hudson.

The Van Burens relocated to the state capital in Albany after Martin won a seat to the state senate. She devoted herself to the charitable efforts of the local Presbyterian Church. Although little is known about her as a person, contemporary letters indicate that she was busy, sociable and happy.

She contracted tuberculosis and after giving birth to a fifth son in January 1817, she was unable to recover any strength. Knowing that she would not live much longer, she requested that some of the money to be spent on her funeral instead be used to buy food for the needy in Albany. She died on February 5, 1819, and was called “an ornament of the Christian faith” by *The Albany Argus*.^{20,21}



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²⁰whitehouse.gov/about/first-ladies/hannahvanburen

²¹firstladies.org/biographies/firstladies.aspx?biography=8

Photo Credit: Library of Congress





Laura Johnson Wylie

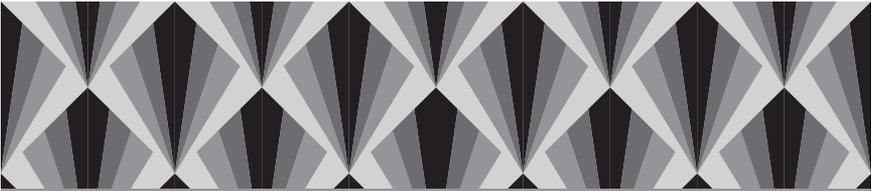
Town of Poughkeepsie
1855-1932

Chair of English Department at Vassar College

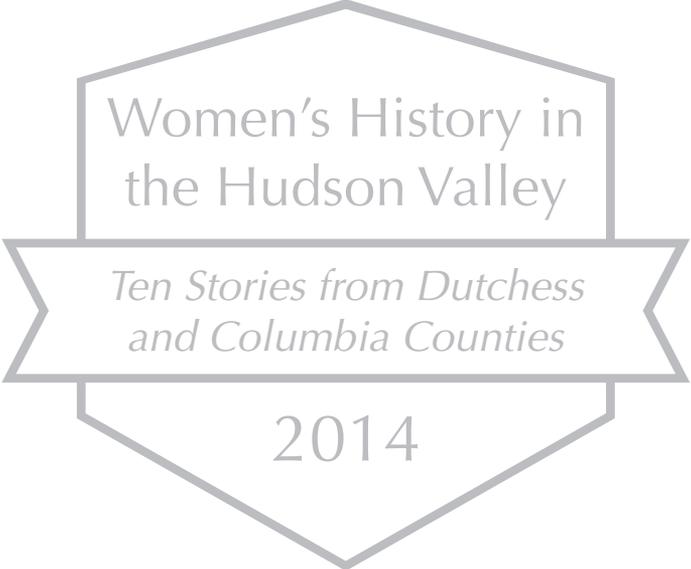
Laura Johnson Wylie was born in Milton, Pa., in 1885. Her family moved many times during her childhood, causing her education to be irregular and inconsistent; she depended on her father for most of her instruction. Laura

graduated as valedictorian from Vassar in 1877, although she admitted she hadn't been able to spell and knew almost nothing about geography when she started her freshman year.²²

She went on to teach at the Packer Institute in Brooklyn before becoming one of the first women admitted to graduate courses at Yale, where she earned her Ph.D.²³ Her thesis was the first female-written thesis published by the university. She became an English instructor at Vassar in 1895 and quickly rose to chair of the department, dedicated to the success and development of her students. Wylie was a devoted activist and helped found the Equal Suffrage League in 1909. After passage of the 19th Amendment, the league became the Women's City and County Club and conducted civic classes for women.



She passed away in 1932, further promoting Poughkeepsie's progressive community by leaving \$10,000 to Vassar for town-gown relations. The home she had with her partner Gertrude Buck was left to the women's club to use rent-free and was eventually bought by the club and used as its headquarters.²⁴



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²²vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/faculty/prominent-faculty/laura-wylie.html

²³specialcollections.vassar.edu/findingaids/wylie_laura.html

²⁴vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/faculty/prominent-faculty/laura-wylie.html

Photo Credit: Vassar College, Special Collection Libraries

