Tishomingo County Courthouse Archives and History Museum
March 2004 Workshop

Pioneering the Future
Women of Achievement Born in 19th Century Mississippi
Educational Activity Booklet
By Jessie Williams

Ida B. Wells
Burnita Shelton Matthews
Elizabeth Lee Hazen

“Pearl Rivers”
Eliza Jane Poitevant Nicholson

Ellen Woodard with Eleanor Roosevelt

Belle Kearney
Introduction

This workshop was offered all through the month of March 2004. We profiled 22 women born in 19th century Mississippi. This is by no means all of the women of achievement born in Mississippi in that century. Next year we will profile different women primarily the ones who were instrumental in the development of the Mississippi College for Women “The W” plus some more authors and others we find between then and now.

We tried to include activities and things that interest all ages.

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Biographies

(Pearl Rivers) Born **Elizabeth Jane Poitevant Nicholson** (1849-1896) along the Pearl River in Mississippi, was the 1st woman publisher of a bigger city newspaper, *The Picayune*. She began as poet under the pen name Pearl Rivers. She took the job as literary editor for *The Picayune*, despite the disapproval of her family. She married the owner of *The Picayune*; who upon his death left her a widow at and the paper $80,000 on debt. Instead of declaring bankruptcy, she turned *The Picayune*'s finances around. Under her leadership, *The Picayune* more than tripled its circulation and influence. She introduced daring innovations for the time by including a society page, departments for women & children, fashion, medical advice, and household hints. She used the paper's editorial pages to battle cruelty against animals.

**Frances Joseph Gaudet** (1861-1934) was born in Pike County, Mississippi, but moved to New Orleans as a young girl. She was married, but sought a legal separation in 1894. The separation led to a life of community service. After witnessing the imprisonment of poor and young blacks for minor offenses, she took the children into her home along with the indigent insane needing reform. When she failed to get needed support from the mayor and other city officials she used the press to gain the support of the white Era club. She also started the first kindergarten for black children in New Orleans. Later she traveled for the Louisiana Negro Chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) as a delegate to the convention in Edinburgh, Scotland. She also toured England, Ireland, and Europe visiting prisons and giving speeches to raise money for her child welfare and prison reforms. Upon her return from Europe she bought 105 acres of farmland, with the money she had earned, to build a school upon. During fundraising and construction of the school she married Adolphe P. Gaudet. Founded in 1902, the Colored Industrial and Normal School served as an orphanage and an academic institution. Students received both academic training and practical skills needed in the south. She remained as principal until her eyesight failed and she was forced to move in with relative in Chicago. She died on December 24, 1934.

**Ida Bell Wells-Barnett** (1862-1931) was born in Holly Springs, Mississippi. In 1876 her parents and youngest sibling died of yellow fever. At the age of 14 she lied about her age and got a teaching job in a rural school to help support her 5 other siblings. She got a teaching job in Memphis, TN in 1884. She started writing articles for her church newspaper and was soon writing for other church papers, and some of the new black weeklies, meanwhile working as a teacher and taking summer courses at Fisk University. She was dismissed from her job teaching in 1891 for writing articles criticizing the city's segregated
schools. She used her savings to buy 1/3 of The Memphis Free Speech and Headlight, where she became editor. She began crusading against lynchings when 3 of her friends were lynched. She had to move to New York because of threats to her life. She helped found many anti-lynching societies, and urged women to form civic clubs. She founded the 1st civic club for black women called The Women's Era Club, in Boston. She was an adult probation officer in the municipal courts, the 1st woman to hold that job in Chicago. She participated in the founding of the NAACP in 1910, but found it too willing to compromise. She organized the 1st black women's suffrage association, the Alpha Club of Chicago. She was one of the most influential black women of her age.

Corrie Belle Kearney (1863-1939) was born in Madison County, Mississippi. Her father had a plantation in Madison County, which he lost during the civil war. She had to quit school to earn money and became a teacher. She first worked for the Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.). She lived much of the time in Washington D.C. where she lobbied for the W.C.T.U. and for women's suffrage. She went all over the United States and Europe giving speeches. She ran for the U.S. Senate in 1922, but did not win. Next, she ran for state senate and was elected in 1924. She was the 1st woman in the south to become a state senator. She wrote two novels entitled A Slaveholder's Daughter and Conqueror or Conquered? She also served as editor for "Mama Flower", a biography of Flora Mann Jones. This biography tells of the philanthropist that the Madison County town of Flora was named after.

Nellie Nugent Somerville (1863-1952) was born on her grandmother's plantation near Greenville, Mississippi. Her father was in the confederate army at the time; federal soldiers had shot her grandfather and burned the family home in Greenville shortly before her birth. Her young mother survived barely 2 years, and though Nugent remarried, he was widowed again in a few months. Until 1870, her strong willed grandmother, S. Myra Smith, raised her. Her father became one of the wealthiest men in Mississippi. At 12, she was sent to Whitworth College, a boarding school in Brookhaven. After 2 years, they said she was too smart for them to teach and she was sent to Martha Washington College in Abingdon, VA. She was a voracious reader, an independent thinker, a great public speaker and a tough-minded politician. She became corresponding secretary of the Mississippi W.C.T.U. in 1894, and organized and chaired the Mississippi Women's Suffrage Assoc. in 1897. By 1915, she was vice-president of the National Women's Suffrage Assoc. In 1923 she became the 1st woman to be elected to the Mississippi legislature. She brought about a major reorganization of the state mental hospital. She outlived most of her comrades and was one very tough, distinguished person.
Margaret James Murray Washington (1865-1925) was one of ten children born to her sharecropper parents in Macon, MS. Her father died when she was 7 and she moved in with her Quaker teachers. At 14, she started her teaching career. At 16, she enrolled at Fisk University, often referred to as the Black Harvard of the South. She suffered poor health but graduated in a predominately male class in 1889. After graduation she went to work at Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute as a teacher of English Literature. After one year of employment and in recognition of her strength of mind and disciplinary power, the board of trustees promoted and appointed her as the lady principal and dean of women. In 1895, she founded the National Federation of Afro-American Women. She married Booker T. Washington in 1892.

Lugenia Burns Hope (1871-1947) Born in Mississippi, her parents later migrated to Cincinnati, then to St. Louis, and then after her father died her family to Chicago, where Hope helped support her family. Hope developed an interest in charity and reform interests in Chicago and was the first black member of the Cook County board of King’s Daughters, there she met many important and influential people. In 1897 she met and married John Hope and they moved to Nashville, where he taught at a local university, and then later to Atlanta. In Atlanta she organized the Atlanta Neighborhood Union and later helped with the YWCA during WWI Hope survived her by a almost a decade. She died on August 14, 1947, at a sanitarium in Nashville, Tennessee.

Ellen Ravenscroft 1876-1949) Born in Jackson, Mississippi, the painter/printmaker Ellen Ravenscroft studied with William Merrit Chase and Robert Henri. She did further study with Castellucho in Paris, France. She won the portrait prize at the Catherine Larillard Wolfe Club, New York City (1908); the prize for landscape painting at the same institution (1915); a special prize and honorable mention at the Kansas city Art Institute (1923); and others. Her work is represented in private and public permanent collections.

Katherine Bellamann (1877-1956) Born in Carthage, Mississippi. She married Henry Bellamann in 1907. She is most known for writing, *Paris Mitchell of Kings Row* a sequel to her husbands’ book *Kings Row*. Mrs. Bellamann’s accomplishments were greatly overshadowed by her husbands, even though they shared notebooks and the same pages sometimes. She was also a poet and had at least two books of poetry published. She may never be considered a great American writer, or even a great regional one, but Katherine Bellamann’s few contributions, especially her novels, are worthy pieces of art, and Mississippi may well be proud of this woman whose life exemplified a devotion to literature.
A'lelia Walker (1885-1931) was born in Vicksburg, Mississippi. Her father was killed reportedly by a lynch mob when she was two. Her mother moved them to Louis, MO. After a series of menial jobs, her mother Sarah Breedlove Walker began inventing and marketing her own Wonder Hair Grower products in the basement. After she graduated Knoxville College she started supervising the mail-order operations of her mother's business. She soon became indispensable to her mother and the business. They moved to Pittsburgh in 1908 and opened their first beauty school. In 1913 she opened another beauty college in New York. In 1928 she built the Walker building in Indianapolis which contained the Walker College of Beauty Culture, a barbershop, salon, grocery store, pharmacy, and the Majestic Walker Theater. The Walker building was the 1st black owned & operated building of its kind in the country. She used her wealth to give generous support young black artists. She bequeathed her entire estate to the NAACP.

Lucy Campbell (1885-1963) Born in Duck Hill, Mississippi, Lucie Eddie Campbell graduated highschool at the age of 14, then taught in public schools in Memphis, Tennessee for 55 years. She is famous for being a composer of gospel hymns. Her hymns include well-known titles like “He'll Understand and Say Well Done”, “Something Within”, “Touch Me, Lord Jesus”, and “The Lord is My Shepherd”. She was one of the first black gospel singers to tour Europe with her songs and her songs were sang at the Grand Ole Opry. She died January 3, 1963, in Nashville, after being hospitalized and sent home for falling off stage.

Elizabeth Lee Hazen (1885-1975) Born in rural Mississippi, Hazen was orphaned at the age of three and raised by relatives. She earned a B. S. at the Mississippi State College for Women then taught school and served as an Army diagnostic laboratory technician during World War I. After the War she won an advanced degree in bacteriology from Columbia University, becoming one of the 1st women doctoral candidates. She worked with Rachel Fuller Brown for the New York State Department of Health through long-distance collaboration to develop the world’s 1st useful antifungal antibiotic, nystatin. She was inducted into the National Women’s Hall of fame in 1994. Nystatin is used world wide to treat everything from Dutch elm disease to rescuing water-damaged works of art from molds.

Ellen Sullivan Woodward (1887-1971) was born on July 11, 1887 in Oxford, Mississippi to a family descended from Irish and Scottish immigrants. Her father was a Mississippi Legislator and a US Senator who involved his children in his career. Ellen graduated from Sans Souci College in Greenville, South Carolina. She married an attorney in 1906, and later ran her husbands successful campaign for Mississippi legislature. After her husbands sudden death in 1925, Woodward ran for the legislature in his place and won but stepped down a year later to
take a position as a director of the Mississippi State Board of Development. In 1932 Woodward worked aggressively for Franklin Roosevelt’s presidential campaign, and after his election she was appointed to direct the women’s work programs of the WPA in Washington, D.C. and then later to the Social Security Board. She remained active in women’s organizations until her death on September 23, 1971 in Washington, D.C.

Cid Ricketts Sumner (1890-1970) born Bertha Ricketts in Brookhaven, Mississippi. She was such a calm baby that her family called her Placid then shortened it to Cid. She was homeschooled in elementary school then attended Jackson, Mississippi, High School and Millsaps College where she majored in Chemistry and English. She received her B.S. Degree in 1909. An excellent student, she won the D.A.R. essay medal, the scholarship prize at the end of her 1st two years, and the senior essay medal. She received a master’s degree from Columbia University in 1910, then taught English at Jackson High School. Her first love is writing. She has published poetry and short stories, but her most important work has been her novels. She published Ann Singleton, Quality (which was called “Pinky” in its motion picture adaptation), Tammy Out of Time, But Morning Will Come, Sudden Glory, and The Hornbeam Tree.

Marie Atkinson Hull (1890-1980) Born in Summit, Mississippi, the painter Marie Atkinson Hull studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Pennsylvania; the Art Students League, New York City; and with George Elmer Browne, John F. Carlson, and Robert Reid. Winner of many awards and honors, Hull was the recipient of a gold medal at the Mississippi Art Association (1920). Her work is represented both in private and public permanent collections.

Burnita Shelton Matthews (1894-1988) was born in Burnell, Mississippi. She was the only girl in a family of five children. In her younger years she showed an aptitude for debate by winning several contests. When a noted Mississippi attorney once remarked to her father, “You ought to make a lawyer out of that girl,” her father’s reply was “monumentally negative”. She possessed musical talent as well and was sent to the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music to study piano and voice in preparation for teaching or concert work—her father thought she would be “happier doing what women did down there in Mississippi.” She acquired a taste for the courtroom in her formative years accompanying her father, who was a tax collector and court clerk, to the courthouse and on political campaigns. While at the conservatory, she studied legal volumes, some of which she obtained from her cousins, which were lawyers. “Thinking to discourage this flighty 18 year-old girl,
they sent back their biggest, dustiest, and most technical law books. “Fascinated” by the tomes, she continued her unguided law reading for several years after leaving the conservatory, while teaching music in public schools. After two years of teaching, she went to Washington, D.C. to study law at night and work in the Veteran’s Administration by day. She completed her Masters degree in 1920 and was admitted to the District bar that same year. In 1924 she was admitted to the bar of the Supreme Court and she is also a member of the Mississippi Bar Association. She was a member of the National Woman’s Party and took part in the fight for the passage of the suffrage amendment. She wrote an article entitled “Legal Discrimination Against Women Existing in the United States today,” which appeared in the Congressional Digest in March 1924. In it she discussed injustices in the law relating to guardianship of children, inheritance rights, public positions, jury duty, citizenship rights, burdens of illegitimate parenthood, married women’s disabilities, and the restriction of women’s property rights. She was instrumental in getting legislation passed which stopped discrimination against women in so many areas. She was appointed Federal District Judge for the District of Columbia in 1949. She fought for the equality of all women and women’s rights throughout her life time.

Muna Lee (1895-1965) was born January 29, 1895, in Raymond Mississippi. When she was seven her family moved to Oklahoma, but she returned to Mississippi to attend Blue Mountain College, where she fell under the tutelage of teacher and poet David Guyton. She eventually graduated from the University of Mississippi with a B.S. in 1913, at the age of 18. Over the course of her career she would write in a number of forms. She got the attention of William Faulkner despite her poetry being criticized as nothing new.

Lucy Somerville Howorth (1895-1997) was born in Greenville, Mississippi. She studied law at the University of Mississippi Law School and received her law degree in 1922 magna cum laude with honors. While studying in New York, Miss Somerville became a gauge inspector when the United States entered World War I, and during 1919-1920 she was engaged in industrial research for the national board of the YWCA. After being admitted to the bar of Mississippi, she practiced law in Cleveland, MS for 5 years. In 1928 she served as chairman of the Mississippi State Board of Law Examiners, and from 1927 to 1931 she was United States Commissioner for the Southern Judicial District of Mississippi. She was also treasurer of the Central Committee for the Economic Survey of Mississippi from 1928 to 1930, and a member of the Reasearch Commission of Mississippi from 1930 to 1934. In 1931 Mrs. Howorth was elected to the Mississippi State Legislature as a representative from Hinds County, in this office, in which she served until 1936, she was chairman of the House Committee on Public Lands. She
served on the staff of the Veterans Administration for 16 years. During World War II, as a representative of the American Red Cross, she organized the 6,000 employees of the VA in Washington in carrying out a program of wartime activities. As vice-president and director of the VA’s Employees Credit Union from 1937-1949, she also gave voluntary general service as financial adviser to Government employees. She was assistant general counsel for the War Claims Commission since its activation in 1949. She was admitted to practice before the Supreme Court in 1935 and before the District of Columbia bar in 1950. In 1944 she was keynote speaker at the White House Conference on Women in Postwar Policy Making. She has spear-headed public policy changes for women in several organizations and clubs throughout her career.

**Susan B. Riley** (1896-) was born in Brookhaven, Mississippi. After spending her early childhood in Kentucky, Texas, and Mississippi, Susan Riley attended high school in Jackson, Mississippi, to complete the required number of college entrance units in three years and proceeded to college without graduating. She went to Blue Mountain College. After several years of teaching highschool she returned to teach there. She went own to earn her doctorate at George Peabody College in 1934. She held a leadership role for over twenty years in the American Association for University Women.

**Charlemae Rollins** (1897-1979) was born in Yazoo, Mississippi. She studied at Columbia University and the University of Chicago. Rollins was a tireless worker in the struggle to end the stereotypes of blacks that were so widespread in children’s books. Her most notable accomplishment in the endeavor was *We Build Together*, published by the National Council of Teachers in English, a guide to children’s literature in which blacks were depicted accurately and honestly. Rollins worked for 36 years in the Chicago Public Library. She taught children’s literature at Roosevelt University, Fisk University and Morgan State college. She was the first black person to receive the Grolier Award and an honorary doctorate from Columbia University. She was also the first black elected president of the Children’s Services Division of the American Library Association.

**Stell Andersen** (1897-) was born in Iowa, Mississippi. She began to study piano early but it was some years before her talent started to show. When her gifts became apparent she was sent to Chicago to study with Silvio Scionti. After graduating from the American Conservatory in Chicago, she undertook a concert tour with her teacher in the performance of music for two pianos. In 1922, she made her debut as a soloist in New York. In 1937, she was the only American Soloist invited to perform at the Paris Exposition. Immediately afterward she was invited to perform for the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. In 1938, Stell was paid honor in this country when she was invited to be the first artist to perform on the newly installed piano in the East Room of the White House.
ACTIVITIES

Suffrage Booklet:

Using the internet, visit this web address: http://www.bry-backmanor.org/woman6.html Print, color and cut out the pages. Staple it together on the left edge in two places.

Women of Achievement Mobile

Materials needed:

Construction paper, glue tape or stapler, curling ribbon, patriotic stickers or foil star stickers, crayons, hole punch, pictures of the women of achievement worksheet found on the next page of this booklet.

Directions:

1. Cut pictures out of worksheet
2. Glue to piece of construction paper
3. Decorate with additional stickers or color your own designs on the sheet.
4. Glue, tape or staple the paper in the shape of a tube.
5. Attach ribbon streamers to the bottom end.
6. Punch 2 holes opposite each other to attach a ribbon to the top to form a handle to hang the mobile from.
Mississippi's Women of Influence: 19th Century.

Ida B. Wells
Nellie Nugent Somerville
Lugenia Burns Hope
Elizabeth Lee Hazen
Lucy Somerville Howorth
Charlemae Rollins
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Marie Atkinson Hull
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Margaret James Murray Washington

“Pearl Rivers”
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Word Search

A LE L I A W A L K E R                      B E L L E K E A R N E Y
B U R N I T A M A T T H E W S                      C H A R L E M A E R O B B I N S
E L I Z A B E T H H A Z E N                           E L L E N R A V E N S C R O F T E
E L L E N W O O D A R D                           F L O R A J O N E S
F R A N C E S G A U D E T                      F R A N C E S W I T H E R S P O O N
I D A W E L L S                          K A T H E R I N E B E L L A M A N N
L U C Y C A M P B E L L                        L U C Y S O M E R V I L L E Y
L U G E N I A H O P E                       M A D A R E T W A S H I N G T O N
M A R I E H U L L                            M I L D R E D T O P P
M U N A L E E                                 N E L L I E N U G E N T
P E A R L R I V E R S                    S T E L L A N D E R S O N
S U S A N R I L E Y
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Meet the Suffragists, Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, http://www.sims.berkeley.edu/academics/final-projects/suffragists/SuffragistsSpeak/Meetthesuffragists.htm


About the Author

Jessie Williams is a 15 year old homeschooled Sophomore. She tutored College Art History students in 2000. She was honored as a freshman in the 2003-2004 Who's Who Among American High School Students. In 2004, she won the Outstanding Historian Award for outstanding works and exhibits of History throughout the community, and was honored for her Art Exhibit at Corinth Library in March 2004, and acknowledged for her replicas of Ancient Historic Artifacts found in Egypt, Israel, and Mesopotamia by the EAGLE Homeschool Association. She was Educational Assistant for the Tishomingo County Courthouse Museum in early 2004, where she developed curriculum and workshops for teaching the county's history, and decorated the State History room that included a timeline display of the county's development from inception to the present day. She was Assistant Director for the EAGLE Homeschool Lending Library from 2002-2004, helping to decide which books to purchase and cataloging those books in a coherent system to better meet the needs of local homeschoolers.

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