The history of March as Women's History Month

Officially, one month a year is set aside to honor women’s history in the United States. The observance started as a week’s worth of local events in Sonoma County, Calif., in the late 1970s to coincide with the annual International Women’s Day, which is March 8.

Two years later, President Jimmy Carter designated March 2-8 as National Women’s History Week with a message that noted, in part:

“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.”

He continued, “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.”

And he concluded with a plug for the Equal Rights Amendment: “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.”

Three years later, Congress followed President Carter with a resolution that established Women’s History Month, and in 1987 expanded the observance to a full month.
Given the abundance of “herstory” events jamming the calendar during this centennial of the 19th Amendment, as well as the 55th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act, we — like the fishers in “Jaws” — are going to need a bigger boat, a bigger “month” to accommodate the size and scope of activities in March, April, May ... and throughout the year.

That’s why we’re here. That’s why you’re here, too, to find out what’s going on, and when and where, and how you can join us.

We’ve added a logo that organizations sponsoring suffrage-related events can run with news of their activities, to show that they are part of making “herstory,” too. Thanks to Bandy Carroll Hellige for the great logo!

And circling back to President Carter’s 1980 message, which ended with the ERA: In January 2020, Virginia became the 38th state to, at long last, pass the amendment. This USA Today story examines the legal questions and ramifications of that passage, and what might happen next.

Big doings during this Women’s History Month!

Please see the suffrage calendar for listings throughout the month and year, but we want to highlight several March events here.

**March 12 — The opening of BallotBox,** a contemporary art exhibit examining past and present voting rights and the intersection of the 19th Amendment, the Voting Rights Act and this big election year. The exhibit will run through Dec. 4 at Louisville Metro Hall, 527 W. Jefferson St., but on opening day public tours will start from noon to 1 p.m. An opening reception, which will include the announcement of winners of the “What Is a Vote Worth” commemorative poster contest, starts at 5 p.m. followed by a 6 p.m. welcome and a conversation between participating artist Brianna Harlan and her grandmother, civil rights activist Mattie Jones. The event is free and the public is invited to attend.

**March 13 — Women at Work exhibit opening.** The exhibit explores the diversity of women’s experiences in the public sphere in the late 19th century, when industrialization freed many women from the home to venture into the larger community. They organized as workers and in clubs, pursuing new roles as artists, educators, social reformers, and business owners. They also became conscious of their shared identity as women, convening women’s rights conventions and organizing mass movements, including the decades-long struggle for suffrage. The opening event is from 5 to 6:30 p.m., The Filson
March 19 — What Is a Vote Worth: Suffrage Then and Now Exhibit opens with ribbon cutting and panel discussion. The ribbon-cutting is at 10 a.m., and is open to the public, with dignitaries in attendance. An invitation-only discussion is at 5:30 p.m. with panelists Cheri Bryant-Hamilton, Cissy Musselman, Sharon Baker and Marsha Weinstein, and original spoken-word work by Hannah Drake as the exhibit opens. Special guests: curators and Dr. Carol Mattingly and Dr. Carolyn Bratt. The exhibit will be divided into sections including Life Before Suffrage, Prominent Kentucky Woman Suffragists, Marching for Equality, Lifting as We Climb: African American Women and Suffrage, The Anti-Suffrage Movement, The Voting Rights Act of 1965, and Suffrage: Then and Now. Frazier History Museum, 829 W. Main St., Louisville. Through Feb. 28, 2021. For more information: (502) 753-5663.

Again, check out the calendar for all the good things going on.

Save the Dates!

Here’s a look ahead at 19th Amendment-related events already planned for this year. See the calendar for details when and where available. We will have more details on other events, the closer we get to them.

March 19 — Ribbon cutting and opening of What is a Vote Worth: Suffrage Then and Now, a Suffrage Voting Rights Act Exhibit at the Frazier History Museum; panel and tours.

March 26, 27 — Two-day event with the University of Louisville History Department; guest speaker is Ellen DuBois, a professor of history and gender studies known for her pioneering work in the same fields.

April 21 — Trailblazers panel discussion with local women who have made a difference, at the Frazier.

April 30 — The Pegasus Parade with a Celebration of Women

May 21 — Angela Dodson, author of “Remember the Ladies,” appears at the Frazier
June 2 — Elaine Weiss, author of “The Woman’s Hour,” appears at the Filson

June 8-11 — Suffrage Play Festival at the Frazier

July 14 – Louisville Storytellers Project presents “Perseverance and Hustle,” a special event commemorating the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, featuring true, first-person stories from Kentucky women who are impacting our state. Join us at the Frazier History Museum; doors open at 6 p.m., and storytelling starts promptly at 7 p.m. For tickets, which are $12 for general admission and $8 for students, go to https://tickets.storytellersproject.com/ and click on the words Louisville Storytellers Project 2020. Then click on Louisville Storytellers Project: Women of the Century.

Aug. 22 — Women’s Equality Day programs, Louisville. Save the date. More details to come.

Aug. 21 and 22 — Tina Cassidy, author of “Mr. President, How Long Must We Wait?,” appears at Women’s Equality Day events in Louisville

Please check our calendar for even more events! https://fraziermuseum.org/womenvoteevents

Honoring Dolores Delahanty

On Feb. 24, the Political Women’s Council of Louisville honored longtime activist Dolores Delahanty with its first Gutsy Woman Award. A full house of attendees and speakers, including former Lt. Gov. Crit Luallen, saluted Delahanty’s lifetime commitment to equality and equity throughout Louisville, Kentucky and the nation. Here, Delahanty, second from left, is pictured with Sidney Garner, left, Women 4 Women Student Board President; Finn DePriest, American Association of University Women at U of L, and Jamieca Jones, U of L Women’s Center. Members of Delahanty’s equally politically active family also were present.

Her outstanding accomplishments are too numerous to mention here, but her influence has been felt from credit laws, to housing, to political activation, to the welfare of children, to better representation of women in all aspects of life, including at political conventions. No wonder the award, going forward, will be called The Dolores after its inaugural recipient. Check out her Wikipedia entry.
Remembering Katherine Johnson

“Hidden Figures” was a popular 2016 film which introduced most of America to three, real-life African-American women trailblazers in NASA’s overwhelmingly white and male workforce of engineers and mathematicians in the 1960s.

Hidden no longer, it told the triumphant story of Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan and Mary Jackson as they overcame barriers and prejudices to bring their brilliance to the groundbreaking work of the space program. President Barack Obama awarded Ms. Johnson the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2015,

At the time of her award, Deputy NASA Administrator Dava Newman said of Ms. Johnson, “The reach of Katherine Johnson’s leadership and impact extends from classrooms across America all the way to the moon. Katherine once remarked that while many of her colleagues refrained from asking questions or taking tasks further than merely ‘what they were told to do,’ she chose instead to ask questions because she ‘wanted to know why.’

“For Katherine, finding the ‘why’ meant enrolling in high school at the age of 10; calculating the trajectory of Alan Shepard’s trip to space and the Apollo 11’s mission to the moon; and providing the foundation that will someday allow NASA to send our astronauts to Mars. She literally wrote the textbook on rocket science.”

After her own stellar life, which brought the heavens closer to Earth, Ms. Johnson died on Feb. 24. Read her NASA biography here.

Speaking of movies and ‘unhiding’ figures ...

Smithsonian magazine has put together a fascinating list of women who deserve the biopic treatment as recently (and belatedly) afforded Katherine Johnson and Harriet Tubman.

Here's their list. Who would you add?

Women composers scale the music mountain
Have you heard about Project 19, the New York Philharmonic’s effort to add the work of women composers to its performances? In honor of the 19th Amendment, the orchestra is honoring suffragists by commissioning 19 women composers to write pieces. The Philharmonic recently performed the first piece, called “Stride.”

Composer Tania Leon told NPR about her piece: “‘Stride’ encompasses many things for me and is an idea that I realized by studying a little bit of the life of Susan B. Anthony. She was a force. She didn't take 'no' for an answer. She was determined. She had the intention of making changes. And she created a movement, in a way. And she made it happen.”

To read the story, go here.

‘Incredible heroines’ now new Barbies

First Rosa Parks and Sally Ride. Now Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Jean King and Florence Nightingale.

Heroines, yes. And now Barbie-fied dolls, too.

The times, they have a-changed.

Be part of the calendar!

If you want to be part of the calendar, please send your information in this format to Pam Platt at pammerz@att.net with SUFFRAGE CALENDAR in the subject line. Please use this format:

DATES:
NAME AND BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF EVENT:
PLACE:
SPONSORING ORGANIZATION:
CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION:

If your event is coming up soon, please send the info by the 20th of the month prior to the event, in order to make the calendar in all its iterations!

In the near future, suffrage events will be added to Louisville Tourism’s gotolouisville.com calendar, so stay tuned for details about that, too.
From history.com: On March 31, 1776, future first lady Abigail Adams wrote to her husband, Founding Father and future President John Adams for him and the Continental Congress to “remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.”

Wise Words

“You can waste your lives drawing lines. Or you can live your life crossing them.”

Shonda Rhimes