



The Office of Senate President Karen E. Spilka

Women's History Month

There are so many women who have shaped Massachusetts, here are 88 from past and present whose work, advocacy, and legacy live on.



An accurate
illustration of
Zipporah Potter
Atkins does not exist.

Zipporah Potter Atkins

1645-1705

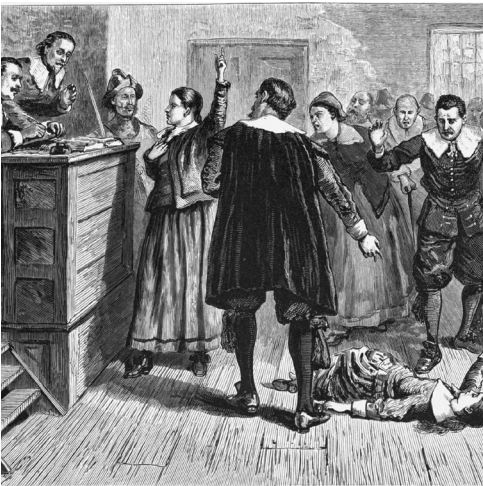
Atkins was the first African-American landowner in Boston.



Weetamoo

1676

As Sachem of Wampanoags in Plymouth, she led forces to drive out European settlers, and was eventually killed by English colonists.



Victims of the Salem Witch Trials and Sarah Clayes

1638-1703

Fourteen women were tried, sentenced, and executed in the Salem Witch Trials in 1692. They are: Bridget Bishop, Martha Carrier, Martha Corey, Mary Eastey, Sarah Good, Elizabeth Howe, Susannah Martin, Rebecca Nurse, Mary & Alice Parker, Ann Pudeator, Wilmot Redd, Margaret Scott, and Sarah Wildes. Sarah Clayes fled the Salem Witch Trials to establish a safe haven in Framingham for other accused women.



Elizabeth Freeman

1742-1829

Also known as Mum Bett, she was the first enslaved woman to file and win a freedom suit in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruling in Freeman's favor found slavery to be unconstitutional, according to the 1780 Massachusetts State Constitution.



Abigail Adams

1744-1818

Along with being the second First Lady of the United States, Adams was an abolitionist and advocate for women's rights. She is from Weymouth and moved to Quincy, MA.



Phillis Wheatley

1753-1784

Wheatley was an enslaved poet from Senegal or Gambia working in Boston who corresponded with George Washington.



Deborah Sampson

1760-1827

Injured in battle in the Revolutionary War, and disguised as a man, she suffered injuries that she managed to heal herself so that doctors would not discover her gender. She was from Middleboro, MA.



Sophia Smith

1796-1870

Born in Hatfield, MA, Smith is the founder of Smith College.



Sojourner Truth

1797-1883

Truth was an African-American abolitionist and women's rights advocate. She worked in Massachusetts, joining the Northampton Association of Education and Industry. She also was the first speaker at the National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester.



Elizabeth Peabody

1804-1894

Peabody started kindergarten in the U.S. and advocated for free kindergarten to Congress. She was born in Billerica and worked in Boston and Salem.



Sarah Bagley

1806-1889

Bagley was a labor leader whose campaigns included establishing 10 hour maximum workday. She mainly advocated for the Lowell textile workers.



Margaret Fuller

1810-1850

Fuller was an American journalist, women's rights advocate, and associated with transcendentalism. She worked in Jamaica Plain as the first full-time American female book reviewer in journalism.



Mary Ellen Pleasant

1814-1907

Born into slavery, Pleasant became a Gold Rush-era millionaire and a powerful abolitionist. She started her life as an indentured servant on Nantucket.



Maria Mitchell

1818-1889

Mitchell is the first professional female astronomer and the first woman elected to the Academy of Arts and Sciences. From Nantucket, Mitchell is known for "Miss Mitchell's Comet."



Lucy Stone

1818-1893

Stone is from West Brookfield, MA and the first Massachusetts woman to graduate from college (Oberlin). She was also an abolitionist and suffragette.



Susan B. Anthony

1820-1906

From Adams, MA, Anthony was a suffragette and abolitionist.



Mary Baker Eddy

1821-1910

Baker Eddy founded the Church of Christ, Scientist and made Boston the church's national headquarters.



Clara Barton

1821-1912

Born in Oxford, MA, Barton founded the American Red Cross in 1881.



Sarah Parker Remond

1826-1894

A black woman born free in Salem, Massachusetts, Parker Remond was an outspoken abolitionist as a teenager. She moved to Italy to study medicine.



Eliza Ann Gardner

1831-1922

Gardner was an African-American abolitionist and religious leader who founded the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ). She worked in Boston.



Louisa May Alcott

1832-1888

Alcott was a prominent novelist and poet, best-known for her works, such as “Little Women,” chronicling life in Concord, MA.



Charlotte Forten Grimke

1837-1914

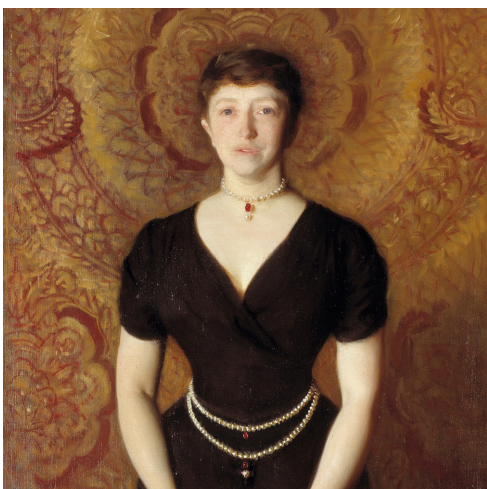
An anti-slavery activist, poet, and educator, Grimke was the first Black student to enter and graduate from Salem Normal School on March 13, 1855.



Margaret Knight

1839-1914

Knight was an inventor with 87 patents, including the tin can, paper bag, and a silent auto engine just before her death at age 65. She was a lifelong resident of Framingham.



Isabella Stewart Gardner

1840-1924

Gardner was from Boston, and a world traveler, collector of rare books and art masterpieces, established world-renowned art museum after her husband's death.



Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin

1842-1924

Ruffin led the Federation of Afro-American Women in Boston, MA. She was a suffragist and intellectual who focused on black women workers, students, and activists.



Mary Mahoney

1845-1926

Mahoney was the first African-American woman to study and work as a professionally trained nurse. She lived in Boston.



Dr. Susan Dimock

1847-1875

Rejected by Harvard Medical School because of her gender, she earned her medical degree in Europe, was a Boston surgeon and founded the country's first professional nursing school. She was from Hopkinton.



Maria Louise Baldwin

1856-1922

Baldwin was an educator and civil rights leader. She became the first female African-American school principal in Cambridge, MA.



Katharine Lee Bates

1859-1929

Lee Bates was a writer, poet, and activist. She is best known for writing the lyrics to “America the Beautiful.” She was from Falmouth, and moved to Needham before graduating from Wellesley College.



Coralie Franklin Cook

1861-1942

She was an American educator and government official. She is also remembered as the first descendant of slaves from the Monticello estate to graduate from college. She studied elocution in Boston and Philadelphia.



Anne Sullivan

1866-1936

Born in Agawam, Sullivan was a champion of rights for the blind, and best-known as Helen Keller’s teacher.



Emily Greene Balch

1867-1961

Greene Balch was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946 for her work with the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. She was a lifelong resident of Boston.



Louise Parker Mayo

1868-1952

Parker Mayo was a suffragette from Framingham, MA. She went to picket the White House in 1916, and was sentenced to jail. She was pardoned two days later by President Wilson.



Margaret Abbott

1878-1955

Abbott was the first American woman to win an Olympic championship. Born in Calcutta, Abbot was the daughter of Charles and Mary Abbott. Charles died when Margaret was very young and after his death, the family moved to Boston.



Meta W. Fuller

1878-1968

A resident of Framingham, Fuller is internationally recognized African-American sculptress who used groundbreaking theme of slavery.



Angelina Weld Grimke

1880-1958

Grimke was born in Boston. She was a poet, journalist, teacher, and playwright who wrote on the African-American experience.



Frances Perkins

1880-1965

Perkins was the U.S. Labor Secretary under Presidents Roosevelt and Truman. She was also the first woman to serve in a President's cabinet. She advocated for adopting Social Security, child-labor laws, a federal minimum wage, and unemployment insurance. She was born in Boston.



Helen Keller

1880-1968

Keller was an American author, political activist, and lecturer. She was the first deaf-blind person to earn a bachelor of arts degree. Went to Perkins Institute for the Blind, the Cambridge School for Young Ladies, and Radcliffe College at Harvard University.



Mother Mary Joseph Rogers

1882-1955

She founded the Maryknoll Sisters, the first US Catholic congregation of religious women dedicated to a global mission. She was born in Roxbury.



Dr. Miriam Van Waters

1887-1974

Dr. Van Waters was a prison reformer, noted author of books on juvenile crime, progressive superintendent of MCI-Framingham.



Sybil Holmes

1889-1979

Holmes was the first woman elected to the Massachusetts State Senate in 1936. She was from West Bridgewater and represented the Norfolk and Suffolk District.



Alice Burke

1893-1974

Burke was the first woman elected mayor in Massachusetts and New England. She was Mayor of Westfield from 1940-1943, 1954-1959 and 1962-1963



Melnea Cass

1896-1978

Known as the “First Lady of Roxbury,” she was a civil rights and women’s rights advocate in Boston. She founded the Boston local of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP).



Amelia Earhart

1897-1937

Earhart was the first woman to fly across the Atlantic Ocean solo. She lived in Medford and learned to fly in Quincy.



Dorothy West

1900-1998

West was a Harlem Renaissance writer best known for the novel, "The Living is Easy." She was born in Boston.



Bette Davis

1908-1989

Actress in Hollywood and Broadway plays. Davis is originally from Lowell, MA, and attended Cushing Academy in Ashburnham, MA.



Muriel S. Snowden

1916-1988

Snowden founded Freedom House in Roxbury with her husband. She was an activist figure. She also founded an international baccalaureate school in Boston.



Elma Ina Lewis

1921-2004

Lewis was an American Arts Educator, for whom the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts is named. She was one of the first recipients of the MacArthur Fellows Grant and received a Presidential Medal for the Arts in 1983. She lived her entire life in Boston.



Eunice Kennedy Shriver

1921-2009

Shriver was the founder of Special Olympics, and a champion of people with intellectual disabilities. She was born in Boston and lived in Hyannis.



Susan Fitzgerald and Sylvia Donaldson

1923

Susan Fitzgerald and Sylvia Donaldson were the first women elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1923. Fitzgerald represented two wards in Boston and Donaldson represented three wards in Brockton.



Shirley Chisholm

1924-2005

Chisholm was the first black woman elected to U.S. Congress in 1968 and the first black candidate for a major party's nomination for President of the United States in 1972. She taught at Mount Holyoke College from 1983 to 1987.



Michi Weglyn

1926-1999

Weglyn wrote about the Japanese internment camps during WWII and was an advocate for civil rights. She graduated from Mount Holyoke College.



Coretta Scott King

1927-2006

Scott King was the first lady of the civil rights movement, life-long social justice advocate. It was while studying at the New England Conservatory of Music where she met Martin Luther King, Jr. in Boston.



Rita Rossi Colwell

1934-

Rossi Colwell is a microbiologist and the first woman to head the National Science Foundation. She spearheaded STEM for females and minorities, and was born in Beverly.



Tenley Albright

1935-

Albright is a surgeon, a leader in blood plasma research, and the first U.S. woman to win a gold medal in Olympic figure skating. She is from Newton.



Edith Nourse Rogers

1881-1960

From Lowell, she was the first woman elected to Congress from MA. She served from 1925-1960, and once held the record as longest serving Congresswoman. She chaired the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.



Buffy St. Marie

1941-

St. Marie is a Native American activist in the 1960s. Regular on Sesame Street! She graduated from UMass Amherst.



Doris Kearns Goodwin

1943-

Kearns Goodwin is an historian and biographer of several US presidents, Pulitzer Prize winner. She is from Concord.



Margaret H. Marshall

1944-

In 2003, she became the first female justice of the MA Supreme Judicial Court. Wrote decision legalizing gay marriage.



Elaine Noble

1944-

Noble was the first openly lesbian or gay candidate elected to a state legislature. She served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives for two terms, from 1975 to 1979, representing areas in Boston.



Judi Chamberlin

1944-2010

A lifelong advocate for psychiatric survivors, Chamberlin worked for better treatment of those with disabilities in Boston at Boston University. Her own experiences of being involuntarily held at a psychiatric institute in the 1960s influenced her advocacy work.



Shirley Ann Jackson

1946-

Dr. Shirley Jackson is an American physicist who received her Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1973. She was the first African-American woman to earn a doctorate in nuclear physics at MIT.



Temple Grandin

1947-

Grandin is a Boston-born animal-sciences innovator and author who revolutionized the study of autism.



Kathrine Switzer

1947-

In 1967, Switzer is the first woman to run the Boston Marathon by refusing to disclose her gender as women were not allowed to run then.



Razia Jan

1947-

Jan is the founder and president Razia's Ray of Hope Foundation. Born in Afghanistan, Jan's work has focused around humanitarian efforts to provide education for Afghani girls. She is a resident of Duxbury, MA.



Christa Corrigan McAuliffe

1948-1986

McAuliffe was the first teacher chosen to be an astronaut, and tragically perished in the Challenger Disaster. She had perviously taught at Framingham State Univeristy.



Joyce London Alexander

1949-

London Alexander is the first African-American to be appointed Chief Magistrate Judge in the United States. From Massachusetts, her first job was as a legislative aide to U.S. House Speaker Tip O'Neill.



Elizabeth Warren

1949-

Warren is the first woman elected to U.S. Senate from Massachusetts. She helped created the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and perviously taught at Harvard University. She lives in Cambridge.



Fernande Duffly

1949-

Duffly is a former Associate Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. She is the first Asian-American to serve on the court.



Barbara Lenk

1950-

Lenk, in 2011, became the first openly lesbian Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court.



Maria Lopez

1953-

Lopez became the first Latina female judge in Massachusetts in 1978.



Ruth Ozeki

1956-

Ozeki is an author on social issues, environmental politics, race, religion, war, and culture. She teaches at Smith College.



Indira Talwani

1960-

In 2014, Talwani was nominated by President Obama and became the first Asian Pacific American female judge of the U.S. District Court in Massachusetts.



Yvonne Spicer

1962-

Spicer is the first African-American woman elected mayor in Massachusetts. She currently serves as Mayor of Framingham.



Debra Shopteese

1962-

In 2011, Shopteese became the First Native American judge in Massachusetts.



Cheryl Coakley-Rivera

1964-

Coakley-Rivera was the first Latina elected to the House of Representatives in 1999. She represented Springfield until 2014.



Jane Swift

1965-

Swift is the first female governor of Massachusetts. She was Acting Governor from 2001 to 2003. She is from North Adams.



Sabita Singh

1965-

In 2006, Singh became the first South Asian judge in Massachusetts.



Jhumpa Lahiri

1967-

Lahiri is a Pulitzer Prize-winning author known for her short stories. She earned several masters degrees and a doctorate in Renaissance Studies from Boston University.



Hauwa Ibrahim

1968-

Ibrahim is the first Muslim woman in Nigeria to be a lawyer, and was awarded the Sakharov Prize in 2005 for her work protecting those condemned under Sharia Laws in Nigeria. She is a fellow at the Human Rights Program and the Islamic Legal Studies Program at Harvard University, where she also teaches.



Rocio Saenz

1970-

Born in Mexico, she is a longtime advocate for workers' rights. In 2013, she became first Latina VP of SEIU International. In August 2001 she moved to Boston to organize property service workers, was SEIU Local 615 President, Massachusetts in 2007.



Pardis Sabeti

1975-

Sabeti is an Iranian-American biologist and geneticist studying at MIT and Harvard Medical School, and she teaches at Harvard University. Her work includes pinpointing the source of the Ebola outbreak in 2013.



Lisa Wong

1979-

Wong is the first Asian American Mayor in Massachusetts. She was elected in 2007 as Mayor of Fitchburg and served until 2015.



Yari Golden-Castano

1988-

Golden-Castano is a finalist for the first human settlement on Mars. She is a graduate of Smith College and MIT, where she is a systems engineer. Golden-Castano has also been honored as one of El Mundo Boston's Latino 30 under 30.



Christina Qi

1992-

Qi is one of the youngest women in financial technology. She is the partner at a hedge fund and a graduate of MIT. She has been selected many times for Forbes 30 under 30.



Evelyn Murphy

1940-

Murphy was the first woman elected Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts under Gov. Dukakis from 1987-1991. She is also the first woman to hold state-wide office.



Therese Murray

1947-

Murray is the first female Senate President of Massachusetts.



Harriette L. Chandler

1937-

Chandler is a state senator representing the First Worcester district. She has served in the Senate since 2001 and previously served in the House of Representatives from 1995 to 2001. She was the second female Senate President of Massachusetts.