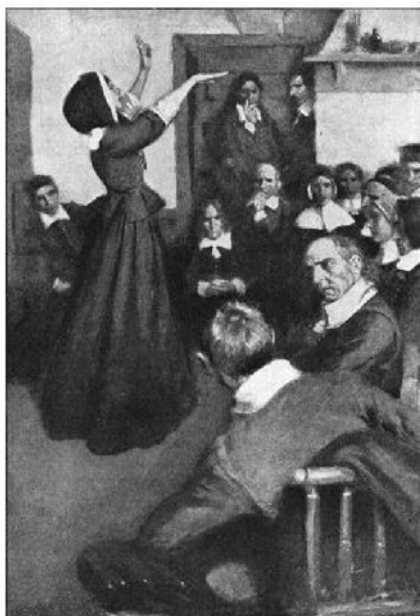




It's hard to believe that it is December already and time to prepare for the holidays that will be celebrated this month! As we think about the various holidays, we are reminded that women helped establish religious traditions and religions in the U.S. In addition, women helped to fight for religious freedom – and were even executed for the cause! Sit back, relax, and drink your eggnog as you read about these fascinating women.

One of the many reasons why men and women emigrated to what ultimately became the United States (but was then called the New World) was so they could freely practice their religion. Many people in England had been persecuted for their faith and they were determined to make a good life here, and observe their religious beliefs in peace. It is painful to report that that did not happen in our early U.S. history.



Anne Hutchinson ranks as one of the leading voices of religious dissent in early New England. She and her family immigrated to Massachusetts Bay in 1634. She was intrigued by theological issues and began to hold weekly discussion groups in her home on Sundays after church. These discussion groups, for men and women, were very popular and included many of the colony's leading citizens. However, her religious views were not appreciated by all members of the local government,

some of whom believed that women could do irreparable damage to their brains by pondering deep theological issues.

Hutchinson was charged with heresy and brought to trial before the General Court of Massachusetts in 1637. One of her “firsts” is that she became the first female defendant in a Massachusetts court. She was found guilty and expelled from the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1638. She and much of her family joined other religious dissenters in establishing Portsmouth, Rhode Island. Hutchinson is an important early figure to recall, for she is remembered as both a female religious leader and a firm believer in religious freedom.



One person who came to Anne Hutchinson’s side in support of her expression of her religious views was **Mary Dyer**. Dyer and her husband had immigrated to Boston in 1635 and had become interested in Hutchinson’s spiritual thinking. After Hutchinson’s expulsion from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Dyer and her husband moved to Rhode Island with others of Hutchinson’s supporters. In 1650, the Dyers went to London to advocate for a royal charter for Rhode Island. While in England, they attended Quaker meetings and arrived back in Rhode Island as practitioners of that faith.

The Puritans in Massachusetts viewed the Quaker religion as a threat and enacted

laws in 1658 to punish anyone who aided a Quaker and to torture or kill those who were followers of the Quaker faith. Mary Dyer was determined to protest those laws. As a result, she was imprisoned in Massachusetts because of her religious beliefs and expelled from the New Haven colony in 1658 for preaching about them. In 1660, she was hanged in Massachusetts.

The irony in Dyer's death cannot be overstated. Dyer was executed for practicing a religion that preaches peace, tolerance and inclusion. She became the only woman in U.S. history to die for religious freedom. Her death led to Rhode Island becoming the first place where citizens were insured a right to freely practice any religion. There is now a statue in Mary Dyer's memory on the grounds of the State House in Boston.

About 100 years after Dyer's death, **Mother Ann Lee** established the "Shakers" religious movement in New York State in 1774 after emigrating from England. An offshoot of the Quaker religion, Shakers are pacifists who lived a communal life based on common ownership of property and goods. Mother Lee advocated for equal rights and responsibilities for women and men, an equalitarian order, and the dignity of labor.

Ann Lee was not the only woman to found a church. **Ellen White** and her husband co-founded the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1860. The scriptural interpretations White received through the approximately two thousand visions she had contributed toward the establishment of the church and its health and educational institutions. During her lifetime, Ellen White wrote more than 5,000 periodical articles and 40 books; but today, including compilations from her 50,000 pages of manuscript, more than 100 titles are available in English.

Ellen White is the most translated woman writer in the entire history of literature, and the most translated American author of either gender. Her writings cover a broad range of subjects, including religion, education, social relationships, evangelism, prophecy, publishing, nutrition, and management. Her views on health, especially her opposition to coffee, tea, meat and drugs, are incorporated into Seventh-



ELDER AND MRS. JAMES WHITE



day Adventist practices.

Finally we want to remind you of the contributions of **Mary Baker Eddy** who was an influential American author, teacher, and religious leader, noted for her groundbreaking ideas about spirituality and health. Eddy's healing system was based on her readings and findings from the Bible. When existing Christian churches would not embrace her discovery, she established the Christian Science Church (1879). In 1888, a reading room for her writings and other publications was opened in Boston. In 1895, she published a church manual and established guidelines that are followed to this day. Eddy continued her writing and teaching work until her last days. At age 87, she started *The Christian Science Monitor* in response to the tabloid news of her day. *The Monitor* was designed "to injure no man, but to bless all mankind."

As we each individually (and freely) practice our own religion this December, let us be proud of the women on whose shoulders we stand; they helped to make this freedom and these traditions possible for us.

Charlotte Waisman and Jill Tietjen

Charlotte S. Waisman, PhD, is a national champion and advocate for women as a professor and keynote speaker. As an executive coach, Waisman coauthored *50 Activities for Developing Leaders* and *The Leadership Training Activity Book*. She is a principal with a consulting company specializing in leadership and workforce excellence initiatives.



Charlotte S. Waisman

Jill S. Tietjen, PE, is an author, speaker and an electrical engineer. Her books include the *Setting the Record Straight* series. Tietjen is a top historian on scientific and technical women. She is President/CEO of *Technically Speaking*, a consulting company that specializes in improving career opportunities for women in technology.



Jill S. Tietjen

Write to us at jill@herstoryatimeline.com and charlotte@herstoryatimeline.com and tell us your stories.

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