

Women's

History

In the 1970s, a small group of committed feminist activists in California began an organization they called the National Women's History Research Project (later called the National Women's History Project or NWHP—see www.nwhp.org). Why is this important? Because the participants in this group successfully lobbied Congress for a National Women's History Week! This was no small feat. But they had even grander ideas! In 1987, a National Women's History Month (March) was established after they successfully petitioned the U.S. Congress. These efforts over thirty years ago helped launch both an acknowledgement of the roles of American women and their many significant accomplishments in this country's growth, as well as a re-focusing of interest on the recovery of many women's lost and/or forgotten efforts to help change the course of our country's history.



Ida Husted Harper

It is fitting that we have chosen to begin our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America* with a quote from anthropologist, Margaret Mead that reads:

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." The NWHP operates today as an active, vibrant group that continues to serve as a national clearinghouse for information and resources on U.S. women who have made a difference in our country. You, too, dear reader, can make a difference as you are educating yourselves on some of the key women who have been instrumental in making a difference in the history of our country. Our column this month profiles some of the women *HISTORIANS* from our book. Not only are their personal life stories intriguing, so are the stories about what they did to document women's roles in our country's history. These women historians can also be described as a small group of thoughtful and committed citizens who clearly helped change the world.

Social activist **Maud Wood Park** was a school teacher for eight years before she enrolled as a student at Radcliffe College in the late 1890s. She found herself surrounded by anti-suffragists; her class of 1898 voted 70 to 2 against the vote for women. Despite (or perhaps because of) the public position of her classmates, Park became active in civic work, welfare issues for women and children, and the suffrage movement. Her particular focus was on enlisting young women to become

engaged in the suffrage cause. She spoke at many different colleges and universities imploring her audiences to take an active role in the votes for women movement. She was a vibrant speaker who understood social politics well.

After the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, in 1920, the national suffrage association re-launched itself as the League of Women Voters (LWV). Park, like others who were prominent in the suffrage movement, saw the need to continue working publicly. The focus of the LWV became encouraging women to become educated regarding public policy issues and to use their voting privilege. Park served as the first president of the organization. She worked for several years with the LWV and with the Women's Joint Congressional Committee. Park then turned her attention to archiving important papers that were influential in the women's right movement. With a former colleague in the Boston suffrage movement, Park gathered a large body of materials that was donated to Radcliffe College in 1943. These materials became the nucleus of the Women's Rights Collection of the Schlesinger Library.

In the late 1890s, journalist, writer and poet **Ida Husted Harper** was asked by Susan B. Anthony to become Anthony's official biographer. Harper had already been documenting the history of the suffrage movement as the historian for the National American Woman Suffrage Association, so it was a natural fit for her to concentrate her efforts on one of the major suffrage figures. Harper worked on three volumes of Susan B. Anthony's life and collaborated with Anthony on the fourth volume of the *History of Woman Suffrage*. In 1916, at the urging of another prominent suffragist, Carrie Chapman Catt, Harper became the head of the Leslie Bureau of Suffrage Education and issued many letters, articles and pamphlets that figured prominently in the successful campaign for the passage and ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. In 1922, she published the fifth and sixth volumes of

History of Woman Suffrage, documenting events through 1920. Thus, Harper became one of the major historians of the suffrage era.



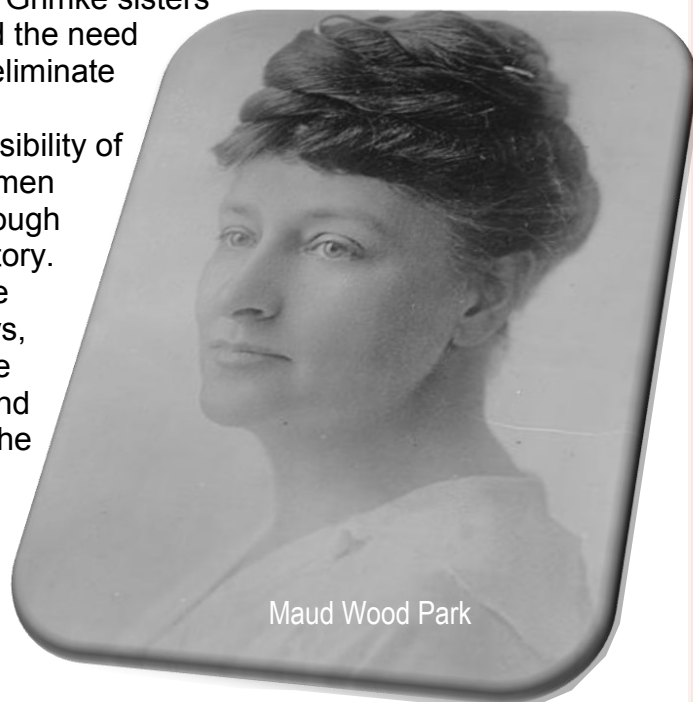
Mary Ritter Beard

Both Park and Harper were historians, yet they did not have the formal training of **Mary Ritter Beard**.

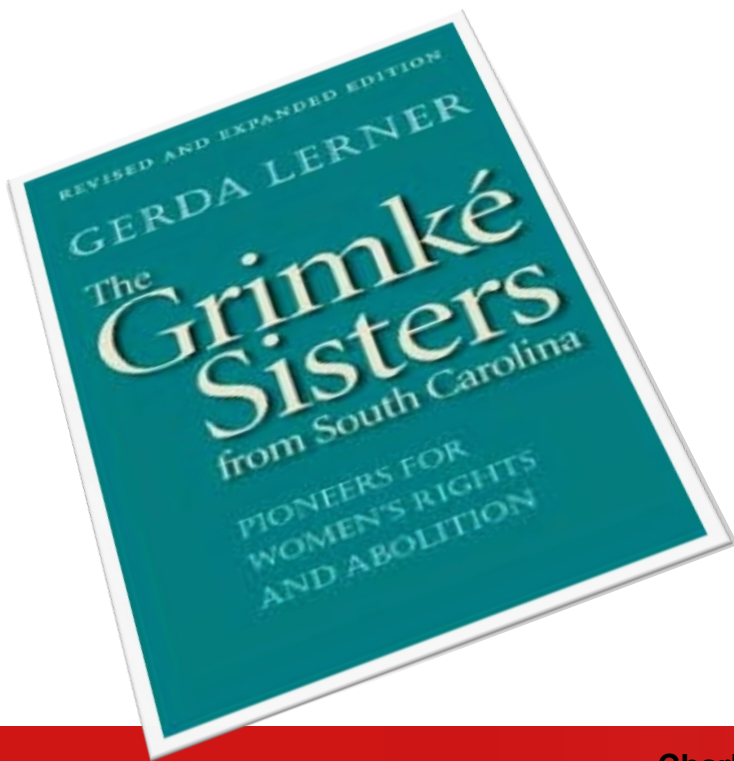
Beard's work provided an academic foundation for women's history. As a historian, she believed that women's contributions were central to human society. Beard held that because women were primarily responsible for the care of life, they had been and should be on the front lines for enacting social change. Her most important book, written when she was seventy, *Woman as Force in History*, was published in 1946.

It would well serve feminist scholars in the women's movement of the 1960s.

Finally we want to bring **Gerda Lerner** to your attention. In 1981, Lerner became the first woman in fifty years to become president of the Organization of American Historians. She is acknowledged as one of the foremost scholars in the field of women's history. One of her many accomplishments was to establish the study of women's history as a formal academic area of discipline. Dr. Lerner published ten books on women in history encompassing topics such as the Grimke sisters and the need to eliminate the invisibility of women through history. She says, "We stand at the



Maud Wood Park

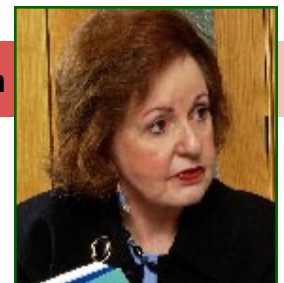


beginning of a new epoch in the history of humankind's thought, as we recognize that . . . woman, like man, makes and defines history.

All of us can be historians! We can document the lives and accomplishments of our families, our friends and the organizations to which we belong. It is important to write ourselves and others, particularly women, into the history of this country!

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.

Sign up for our ENewsletter at www.herstoryatimeline.com

Download our education resources at http://www.herstoryatimeline.com/hs_education_resources.htm