

the longitude of their home.

On October 1, 1847, she sighted a new telescopic comet and calculated its exact position. It was almost a year before it was established that she had calculated the position first; she was then awarded a Gold Medal from the King of Denmark. In 1848, she became the first woman elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 1865, she accepted positions at Vassar College as director of the observatory and professor of astronomy. She influenced generations of women who were her students and is cited as one of the best known and also one of the greatest of Vassar's teachers. As the most prominent American woman scientist of her time, she dedicated herself to opening up the scientific professions to women. Among her students who became scientists, 25 appeared in *Who's Who in America*. Maria Mitchell was an amazing mentor!

Another woman who is cited as being a remarkable mentor is geologist **Florence Bascom**. After earning her bachelor's and master's degrees at the University of Wisconsin, Bascom applied to enter the PhD program at The Johns Hopkins University. She faced immense obstacles in applying for that doctoral program. Johns Hopkins University had not yet allowed a woman to officially complete a degree program. Seven months after she applied for admission, the Geology Department allowed her to attend without being officially enrolled as a student. She was charged only for laboratory fees and her seat was located in a corner of the classroom – hidden behind a screen. When she applied formally to the PhD program two years later, she was accepted secretly. Her dissertation was described as brilliant.

Bascom began teaching at Bryn Mawr in 1895. She grew the geology program from one course to a full major in less than a decade. Through her strenuous efforts, a graduate program in geology was established, as she had secured laboratory space, a mineral collection, and equipment for research and instruction. Bryn Mawr became a major center of American geology. In fact, it is cited as the locus of training for the most accomplished female geologists of the early 20th century. Bascom was a very popular teacher and a mentor. In 1937, eleven women were Fellows of the Geological Society of America: eight of them were Bryn Mawr College graduates.





Ruth Fulton Benedict was America's first woman anthropologist and for many years, the country's leading specialist in the field. She helped to popularize anthropology for wider audiences. Moreover, Benedict proved women had unique and fresh perspectives that enlarged the world of science. In a field dominated by men until the early 20th century, Benedict left an indelible impact on her successors. She left behind a body of work that is still widely read and studied by anthropologists as well as the general public.

Her seminal work, *Patterns of Culture*, was published in 1934. It reflected her findings that each culture fosters one dominant type of personality. She identified these differences in Native American cultures and noted that societies

sometimes revere persons who are considered outcasts in other cultures. Controversial in the anthropological community and in society as a whole, the book was translated into 14 languages; it was still used as the standard introduction to anthropology 25 years after it was published. In addition, her research led her to combat racism in the 1940s. Her book, *Race: Science and Politics* (1940) and her 1943 pamphlet "The Races of Mankind" both spoke out heavily against racism.

Importantly, Ruth Benedict served as a mentor to anthropologist **Margaret Mead**, who studied at Columbia University. We used a Margaret Mead quote to start the introduction to our book: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." With her myriad of accomplishments in the field of anthropology, protégé Margaret Mead certainly did her mentor proud!

Most of the women we profile in our book had mentors and were mentors. Mentoring helps in all fields of endeavor. Another mentor of note was modern dance pioneer **Ruth St. Denis** and her husband (Ted Shawn). They opened and ran the



Denishawn school of dance. It was here that **Martha Graham** studied and made her first professional appearance in 1920 as a lead dancer in Shawn's highly successful *Xochitl*, a modern ballet derived from Aztec legend. Graham is now considered the principal founder of modern dance in the U.S. Again, you can see the importance of mentoring for personal and career success.

Many 21st century women, too, have benefited tremendously from the advice and counsel of a trusted mentor. Acknowledge your mentors during January – National Mentoring Month. Thank them for all of their efforts. Strive to be a mentor to others – to help bring them along. Reach a hand back and lift your hand up. For as the first female Secretary of State **Madeleine Albright** (who wrote the foreword to our book) says: “There is a special place in hell for women who do not help other women.”



Charlotte S. Waisman, PhD, co-author of *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America* (HarperCollins), 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.

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