



## Women in Ohio

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Learn about the struggles, accomplishments and daily life of Ohio women and their influence both locally and nationally.

### **Home and Work**

In early Ohio, much of a woman's day consisted of arduous and time-consuming tasks of cleaning, cooking, laundry and making clothing. Each of these was a far more drawn-out process than it is today. Food preparation required planting and cultivating a garden, harvesting a crop, preserving, drying, milking, cooking and baking. Making clothes involved processing raw wool, spinning thread, weaving, dyeing and cutting cloth, then sewing by hand.

Between 1820 and the Civil War, the growth of new industries, businesses and professions helped to create in America a new middle class. Families in the middle and upper classes hired servants and purchased commercially-produced clothing and food, relieving some of the drudgery of pioneer life. This helped to give rise to a new ideal of womanhood and a new ideology about the home termed the "cult of domesticity." The new ideal included four characteristics any good and proper young woman should cultivate: piety, purity, domesticity and submissiveness.

By the 1850s, women's place in society began to change. The industrial revolution created the need for unskilled labor and women found new opportunities to earn their living in factory jobs. Some women became pioneers in male-dominated skilled professions. African American women generally benefited less than white women from these economic shifts, although they were more likely to be the primary wage-earners for their families. Recent immigrants from non-English-speaking countries also had fewer opportunities than native-born women.

The industrial revolution also resulted in numerous labor-saving devices, such as sewing machines, washing machines and carpet sweepers, which allowed wealthier women to have more leisure time. Although women enjoyed some new measure of independence, their legal position remained inferior to men's. It was illegal for married women to own property and they had no legal standing to make decisions concerning their children's welfare. World War I created a labor shortage that encouraged women to go to work. After the war, and particularly during the Great Depression in the 1930s, women were forced out of the job market. Most of the Depression-era relief programs excluded women as well. Again in 1941, the entry of the United States into a world war gave women the chance to work; although they generally received lower wages than the World War II soldiers they replaced, war work was more lucrative than traditional female occupations. Also, women's branches of the armed forces were established, allowing women to serve in the military in times of war. In 1948, they gained the right to serve during peacetime. Civilian women were urged to support the war effort by practicing restraint in their use of rationed goods and volunteering for organizations such as the Red Cross and the U.S.O.



In the late 1940s and 1950s, men reclaimed their high-paying jobs and women returned to their homes. The Baby Boom generation was born during that time. While birth rates were climbing, divorce rates were as well, perhaps in reaction to the independent women gained during the war. Technology also impacted home life, as ownership of televisions, refrigerators, washers and dryers, and automobiles jumped.

### **Women's Clubs**

Clubs served an important role in women's lives, particularly those of the upper middle class. Many of the first clubs were bible societies. Women were encouraged to expand their church activities by attending weekly meetings for bible readings. The women's club movement began to change during the 1860s. The clubs' pursuits expanded from religion into literature. At these meetings, club members heard lectures and discussed papers they had researched or written. Membership soared in literary societies following the Civil War.

Women's clubs reflected the cultural ideals of the times and the goals of moral and domestic perfection. The clubs also provided forums for efforts to uphold or alter gender roles. In a society that encouraged women to stay at home and strive for moral and domestic perfection, club membership represented an acceptable activity, unlike campaigning for women's right to vote. While clubwomen did not band together to demand the vote—in fact many were against it—by attempting to improve society, they did extend the women's sphere outside of the home. In the 1870s through 1890s, women's clubs expanded into art, drama, music and other cultural studies. Some turned their attention to community issues such as medicine and education reform.

### **Reform Movements**

Some women noticed the parallels between themselves and slaves in legal status, since neither women nor African Americans were permitted to vote or control property and both encountered limited educational and occupational opportunities.

Many of the women politicized by their participation in abolition endeavors joined the women's rights movement, which had as its three main goals securing economic progress, equality in legal status, and, most importantly, women's right to vote. The first women's rights convention in the United States was held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. The second was held in Salem, Ohio, in April 1850, and was largely comprised of anti-slavery radicals. Betsy Mix Cowles presided over the convention, the immediate purpose of which was to petition the Ohio Constitutional Convention for equal rights. Another convention was called in Akron, Ohio, in 1851 to encourage lawmakers to legally extend the rights provided to women under Ohio's constitution. This convention was the scene of Sojourner Truth's eloquent "Ain't I a Woman?" speech. Annual conventions were held for several years afterwards and the legislature of 1856-1857 voted some slight changes. But it was not until 1861 that married women were given the right to own real estate and to maintain personal property. For a variety of reasons, however, including a general hostility to social reforms, by 1860, women were no nearer to gaining the right to vote.

In Ohio, grass-roots suffrage organizations were formed, including the Toledo Woman Suffrage Association in 1869 and the Ohio Woman Suffrage Association in 1885. Suffragists



narrowly failed to generate enough support to pass a suffrage amendment to the Ohio Constitution in 1874. Women had gained the right to vote in 12 western states by 1913. However, women in Ohio had to wait until 1920, when Ohio ratified the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which guaranteed all American women the right to vote. In 1912, a state constitutional convention approved an amendment that would extend the franchise to women, but in the general election the change was rejected. A similar defeat followed in 1917, when the governor signed a bill allowing women to vote in presidential elections, but it was not approved in the subsequent election. The suffrage movement did gain some ground, however, when municipal charters in East Cleveland, Lakewood, and Columbus were changed to give women the chance to take part in local elections. Suffrage supporters in Ohio and nationwide rejoiced in 1919 and 1920, when the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was passed and ratified and voting rights became universal for all citizens.

The temperance crusade was another reform in which women played an important role. Temperance was a movement to limit or ban the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Some supporters wanted to limit drinking to meal times, while others felt alcohol should be used for medicinal purposes only. In 1873, the women of Hillsboro, Ohio, set out on a crusade to restrict drinking of alcoholic beverages. Women marched and demonstrated, praying in local saloons to embarrass saloonkeepers and customers. This proved effective in Hillsboro and Washington Court House. The effort was difficult to sustain, however; membership declined but activities did continue. In 1874, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was founded in Cleveland. It was considered the best-organized temperance group until the formation of the Anti-Saloon League, which was launched in Oberlin in 1894.

The 1960s sparked a new women's movement, concerned with political, educational and social equality. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 barred employers from discriminating by sex, race, color or ethnicity and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission was created to enforce the legislation. This measure fell short of the ultimate goal of complete equality between men and women. The National Organization for Women, established in 1966, was one group committed to improving the status of women in the areas of education, employment and reproductive freedom, among other issues. Toledo native Gloria Steinem founded *Ms.* Magazine in 1971 and worked to bring attention to women's issues. Another effort to secure legislative guarantees of women's rights was the Equal Rights Amendment. Although passed by the Senate in 1972, the ERA was ratified by only 35 states, 3 fewer than were needed to enact the amendment. Despite that failure, a landmark event did occur in 1972: the passage of the Higher Education Act. Title IX of the act prohibited discrimination based on sex in educational institutions that receive federal funds. One of the most visible results of Title IX has been the rise in athletic programs and scholarships for women. In 1972, all athletic scholarships went to men. By 2003, 30% of scholarship funds went to women.

### **Notable Ohio Women**

**Mary Ann Ball Bickerdyke** (1817-1901) was born in Knox County, Ohio. After the outbreak of the Civil War, she volunteered to help in the relief of wounded soldiers. She soon attached herself to the staff of General Ulysses S. Grant and set up hospitals as they were needed. Under her supervision, about 300 field hospitals were built with the help of U.S. Sanitary Commission agents.



**Erma Bombeck** (1927-1997) of Dayton became a popular syndicated columnist, writing about her life as a homemaker and a woman in a light and humorous style. By the time of her death, her column was published in more than 500 different newspapers weekly.

After **Hallie Quinn Brown** (1849-1949) was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, her family returned to Wilberforce, Ohio. Years later, Hallie enrolled at Wilberforce University, receiving her B.S. degree in 1873. She taught for several years in other communities before returning to Wilberforce as a trustee and professor of elocution. She spoke on the tours designed to promote interest in and raise money for the school and lectured on such subjects such as the "Progress of Negro Education," "Status of the Afro-American Woman Before and After the War," and "Negro Folklore and Folksong." She served as president of the Ohio State Federation and the National Association of Colored Women. She was active in politics for a number of years and in 1920 she spoke at the 1924 Republican convention.

**Alice Cary** (1820-1871) and her sister **Phoebe** became noted poets and writers in the mid-nineteenth century. Cary was born in Mt. Healthy, Ohio, near Cincinnati. Alice published her first poems in a Cincinnati newspaper when she was 18. Edgar Allen Poe praised Alice's poem "Pictures of Memory" as "one of the most musically perfect lyrics of our language." Both sisters wrote columns for New York newspapers and published books. In 1869, they started a club for women called the Sorority of Sisters (Soros), the purpose of which was to secure more rights for women.

**Betsy Mix Cowles** (1810-1876) was born in Connecticut, but her family moved to Ohio in 1811. She became one of Ohio's leading female educators and also played a prominent role in the abolition and suffrage movements in Ohio. Cowles became involved in the anti-slavery movement in Ashtabula County, and organized the Ashtabula County Female Anti-Slavery Society in 1835. She counted as close friends notable abolitionists such as Frederick Douglas and Abby Kelley Foster. Suffrage was also important to Cowles. She presided at the Woman's Rights Convention in Salem, Ohio in 1850, and gave a report on labor and wages at the 1851 Akron Woman's Rights Convention. In 1858, Cowles became one of the first female superintendents of schools in Painesville, Ohio.

**Frances Dana Gage** (1808-1884) was born in Marietta, Ohio. Gage became a leader in the three great reform movements that reshaped American life in the years before the Civil War: the temperance movement, the women's rights campaign, and the anti-slavery crusade. Gage helped to organize women's right conventions in McConnellsville, Mount Gilead, and Chesterfield. At an 1850 convention, Gage and others drafted a request to remove the words "white" and "male" from the Ohio constitution where they referred to qualifications for voting. Gage served as chairwoman of a convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851 that was called to encourage the people who were re-writing Ohio's constitution to include more rights for women.

**Anne O'Hare McCormick** (1880-1954) was born in England but moved to the United States as a child. Educated at St. Mary of the Springs in Columbus, McCormick enjoyed a long and



successful career with the *New York Times*, mainly covering foreign affairs. In 1937, she became the first woman to win a Pulitzer Prize in journalism.

**Toni Morrison** (b. 1931) was born in Lorain, Ohio. She is considered one of the most significant novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1993, Morrison won the Nobel Peace Prize for Poetry and the National Book Foundation's Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters. Morrison's fifth novel *Beloved* (1987), about the legacy of slavery, won a Pulitzer Prize in 1988. Her most successful novel, *Song of Solomon*, written in 1977, sold 3 million copies and was on the *New York Times* bestseller list for 16 weeks. The novel re-emerged on the bestseller list in 1996 when Oprah Winfrey chose it for her television book club.

**Annie Oakley** (1860-1926) was born Phoebe Anne Oakley Mozee in Darke County, Ohio. Her father died when she was four years old. By age nine, Oakley was providing food and money for her family by shooting game. When she was 17, she traveled to Cincinnati to take part in a shooting match. She defeated Frank Butler, the world's best shot, by one shot. They married, joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and toured as performers from 1885 to 1902. She was able to hit the thin edge of a playing card, shoot a dime tossed into the air and shoot a cigarette out of her husband's mouth. At the height of her career, she was one of the most famous cultural icons in the United States. The musical "Annie Get Your Gun" by Irving Berlin recounted Oakley's life.

**Alice Schille** (1869-1955) was born in Columbus, Ohio. As a teenager, she attended the Columbus Art School. Schille moved to New York in 1897 to study at the New York Art School. Afterward, she traveled to Europe, eventually settling in Paris. By 1920, critics viewed her as one of the best American female painters. Among other accomplishments, she won a gold medal at the Panama Pacific Exposition and was invited to display of her work at the world-famous French *Societe Nationale des Beaux-Arts*. Beginning in 1906 Schille divided her time between Columbus and Paris. For almost 40 years, she taught art at the Columbus Art School. Some of her most notable watercolors include "Mother and Child in a Garden," "Storytime," and "Poplars."

**Lily Martin Spencer** (1822-1902) was born in England, but her family settled in Marietta, Ohio. Spencer studied art as a child. An early exhibit of her work caught the attention of Nicholas Longworth, who helped secure art training for her in Cincinnati with such notable artists as James Henry Beard and John Insko. She married Benjamin Spencer in 1844. With Benjamin employed as business manager, Lily and her artwork were the family's main source of support. Spencer's paintings offer a unique portrait of 19<sup>th</sup> century domestic life.

**Harriet Beecher Stowe** (1811-1896) arrived in Cincinnati in 1832, when her father, Lyman Beecher, became president of Lane Theological Seminary. Stowe came to know slavery first hand from visits to nearby Kentucky. She also heard many accounts of fleeing slaves being chased by their masters. In 1852, her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published. It told the story of a fictional character escaping from a cruel slave owner. Her work was so influential that President Lincoln is reported to have said upon meeting Stowe during the Civil War: "So you're the little woman who started the big war."



**Harriet Taylor Upton** (1853-1945) was born in Ravenna, Ohio. Susan B. Anthony took her to her first woman's suffrage convention and converted Upton to the cause. In 1892, Upton was named treasurer of the National Woman's Suffrage Association, and served in that office for 15 years. She also remained active in the state association, serving on its executive committee for 20 years. In 1920, the Ohio Republican Women elected her chairman. Then she was chosen vice chairman of the National Republican Executive Committee. Upton was the first woman in the United States to hold such a position in any political party.

**Victoria Claflin Woodhull** (1838-1927) was born in Homer, Ohio. Woodhull married Dr. James Woodhull in 1853, but divorced him eleven years later. After the marriage, Woodhull and her sister settled in New York City, where they made a small fortune buying and selling stock. In 1870, they began publishing a newspaper called *The Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*. Woodhull was the first suffragist to be granted a hearing before Congress. In 1872, the Equal Rights Party nominated Woodhull and she became the first woman to run for president of the United States. Another Ohioan, Ulysses S. Grant, won the election.

### **Ohio First Ladies**

Biographies of Ohio First Ladies are available at the White House web site:  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/first-ladies>

**Anna Tuthill Symmes Harrison** (1775-1864):  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/first-ladies/annaharrison>

**Julia Dent Grant** (1826-1902):  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/first-ladies/juliagrants>

**Lucy Ware Webb Hayes** (1831-1889):  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/first-ladies/lucyhayes>

**Lucretia Rudolph Garfield** (1832-1918):  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/first-ladies/lucretiagarfield>

**Caroline Lavinia Scott Harrison** (1832-1892):  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/first-ladies/carolineharrison>

**Ida Saxton McKinley** (1847-1907):  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/first-ladies/idamckinley>

**Helen Herron Taft** (1861-1943):  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/first-ladies/helentaft>

**Florence King Harding** (1860-1924):  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/first-ladies/florenceharding>



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