

Rachel Findlay

ca. 1750–after August 17, 1820 | Wythe County
PRINCIPAL IN A FREEDOM SUIT

Rachel Findlay was born into slavery early in the 1750s in the part of Virginia that later became Powhatan County. Her maternal grandmother was an illegally enslaved Indian woman and her mother probably had both Indian and African ancestry. Virginia law dictated that the children of enslaved women were also slaves, so Rachel and her children were born enslaved. In May 1773 Rachel, her brother Samuel, and her young daughter sued their owner, Thomas Clay, on the grounds that because their grandmother’s enslavement was illegal, they were also illegally enslaved. The General Court ruled that they were free, but the Clay family sent Rachel and her daughter west before the court reached its verdict and in 1774 sold them to John Draper. He and his family held them in slavery in Wythe County.

In 1813, Rachel Findlay, as she was then known, filed suit in the Wythe County Court to obtain the freedom to which she had been legally entitled but had never enjoyed. After seven years of delays and difficulties and the transfer of the case to the Powhatan County Court, she again won freedom for herself on May 13, 1820. Findlay’s approximately forty children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren were therefore legally entitled to become free, too. Several of them successfully sued for their freedom, but others may have never known about the suit and its outcome. Findlay became free, but how long she lived as a free person is not known.

Mary Berkeley Minor Blackford

1802–1896 | Fredericksburg
ANTISLAVERY ACTIVIST

Antislavery activist **Mary Minor Blackford** (December 2, 1802–September 15, 1896) grew up in a slaveholding family in Fredericksburg. Profoundly affected by the tragedies she saw on a daily basis in Virginia’s slaveholding society, Blackford developed strong antislavery opinions. She considered colonization a path to end slavery, and with her husband, William Blackford, she participated in the activities of the American Colonization Society.

In 1829 Blackford founded the Fredericksburg and Falmouth Female Auxiliary and raised funds to assist free African Americans and recently freed slaves in immigrating to Liberia. During the 1830s she reorganized the auxiliary to become the Ladies’ Society of Fredericksburg and Falmouth, for the Promotion of Female Education in Africa, which helped fund an academy for girls in Liberia.

In the aftermath of Nat Turner’s rebellion, the Virginia General Assembly received a number of petitions to end slavery in the state. Blackford drafted a petition during the winter of 1831–1832 on behalf of Fredericksburg’s female residents. In it she called on legislators to make provisions for gradual emancipation. She ultimately decided not to submit her petition. In 1832 she began keeping a journal entitled “Notes Illustrative of the Wrongs of Slavery,” in which she recorded her personal feelings about the horrors of slavery. Blackford later moved with her family to Lynchburg, where her public work largely ended and she became increasingly alienated from the state’s proslavery sectionalism before the Civil War.

Naomi Silverman Cohn

1888–1982 | Richmond
CIVIC ACTIVIST

The daughter of Polish immigrants, **Naomi Silverman Cohn** (April 15, 1888–October 20, 1982), settled in Richmond with her husband in 1909. She plunged into community work, assisting new immigrants through her involvement with the local chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women. She was a

charter member of the Richmond League of Women Voters in 1920 and later held office in the state league. She consistently urged women to exercise their right to vote. The mother of three children, Cohn believed strongly that women, especially mothers, should participate in political activity to improve life for all Virginians.

In 1923 Cohn cofounded the Virginia Women’s Council of Legislative Chairmen of State Organizations (later the Virginia Council on State Organizations) to monitor bills in the General Assembly that were of special interest to women. Named executive secretary of the Virginia Consumers’ League in 1936, she worked for legislation to improve labor conditions for workers in the state. Her lobbying led to the passage of a state law in 1938 limiting women’s paid work in many occupations to forty-eight hours a week rather than the previously allowed seventy hours. The next year she became director of the Division of Women and Children for the Virginia Department of Labor and Industry.

For her advocacy, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* named Cohn to its “Virginia Honor Roll of 1938,” and the Virginia Business and Professional Women’s Foundation named her among its first honorees on the Women of Virginia Historic Trail in 1993.

Christine Herter Kendall

1890–1981 | Bath County
ARTIST AND PATRON OF THE ARTS

Christine Herter Kendall (August 25, 1890–June 22, 1981) was born into a musical and artistic family that regularly hosted evenings of chamber music and Sunday afternoon organ concerts in their New York City home. She studied art in New York and Paris before enrolling at Yale University where she earned a BA in 1915. She received the National Arts Club’s John G. Agar Prize for one of her paintings in 1922. At Yale she studied with portraitist William Sergeant Kendall, whom she married. The couple moved to Bath County, Virginia, purchased a 114-acre estate, and built their home, Garth Newel, where they hosted small concerts, and continued to paint and exhibit their work.

After her husband’s death in 1938, Kendall remained active in the local arts community. She cofounded the Bath County Regional Art Show in 1964. In 1973 Kendall and members of the Rowe String Quartet established the Garth Newel Music Center for the study and performance of chamber music.

She bequeathed her home to the music center, which provides the only residential program in Virginia for the study and performance of chamber music. Today, the Garth Newel Music Center offers more than sixty concerts a year as well as an annual Virginia Blues and Jazz Festival. It is also the home of the Allegheny Mountain String Project, a music education program, and the Young Artists Fellowship Program, an intensive four-week chamber music study and performance experience for string players and pianists.

Nominated by Lee Elliott and Michael Wildasin, Garth Newel Music Center, Warm Springs.

Mildred Delores Jeter Loving

1939–2008 | Caroline County
PRINCIPAL IN A 1967
CIVIL RIGHTS TURNING POINT

Growing up in Caroline County, **Mildred Jeter Loving** (July 22, 1939–May 2, 2008) fell in love with Richard P. Loving. In 1958 they married in Washington, D.C., because he was white and she had African American and Native American ancestry. A few weeks afterward, the couple was arrested at their home for violating Virginia’s law against interracial marriage. They were each sentenced to one year in jail, with the sentence suspended so long as they lived outside the state and did not return together.

The Lovings moved to Washington and had three children, but Mildred Loving did not like living away from her home. In 1963 she wrote to the U.S. attorney general for help. At his suggestion, she contacted the American Civil Liberties Union, which filed a motion in the county court to vacate the sentence and allow the Lovings to live in Virginia as husband and wife. The local judge refused and the ACLU filed subsequent unsuccessful suits in state and federal courts. The United States Supreme Court heard their case, and its unanimous ruling on June 12, 1967, overturned Virginia’s law, stating that the freedom to marry a person of another race was an individual civil right that a state could not deny.

Loving and her family returned to Caroline County, where they lived quietly in the home they built together. She often demurred that “all we ever wanted was to get married, because we loved each other,” but Loving’s courage ensured that interracial couples no longer faced legal discrimination against marriage.

Elizabeth Ashburn Duke

1952– | Virginia Beach
BANKER

Recipient of the VABPW Foundation Business Leadership Award

Portsmouth native **Elizabeth Duke** majored in dramatic arts at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, but when she needed a job after graduation she began working as a part-time bank teller. As she gained experience, Duke took on more responsibilities and eventually became chief financial officer of the Bank of Virginia Beach. While working, she also earned an MBA at Old Dominion University in 1983. Two years later she helped establish the new Bank of Tidewater, becoming its president in 1987 and chief executive officer in 1991. She was named chief operating officer of TowneBank in 2005.

Duke has taught bank management at banking schools around the country and is active in banking associations. From 1998 to 2000 she sat on the board of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond. In 1999, the Virginia Bankers Association elected her the organization’s first female president. Duke achieved another first in 2004 when she became the first woman to chair the American Bankers Association.

President George W. Bush nominated Duke to fill an unexpired seat on the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System in May 2007 and she took her oath of office in August 2008. During the subsequent economic crisis, she focused on issues related to housing and mortgage markets, foreclosures, and neighborhood stability, working to balance new regulations and continued access to homeownership. She also promoted community banks as vital contributors to the nation’s banking system. Her term ended in 2012, although Duke continued to serve through August 2013.

Deborah A. “Debbie” Ryan

1952– | Albemarle County
BASKETBALL COACH AND
CANCER TREATMENT ADVOCATE

Raised in New Jersey, **Debbie Ryan** graduated from Pennsylvania’s Ursinus College in 1975. She then arrived at the University of Virginia, serving as an assistant coach for the women’s basketball and field hockey teams. In 1977 she became the basketball squad’s head coach, seven years after the university became fully coeducational, armed with only one scholarship split between two players.

Ryan pushed hard for better facilities and resources. The Cavaliers reached postseason play for the first time in her third season. Ryan’s teams reeled off eleven consecutive appearances in the NCAA Sweet Sixteen from 1987 to 1997, including three straight Final Four appearances. Ryan earned national coach of the year honors for the 1990–1991 season, when the Cavaliers racked up a 31–3 record and reached the NCAA final. She compiled a total of twenty-three seasons with at least twenty wins.

In August 2000, Ryan learned that she was suffering from pancreatic cancer, a disease with a survival rate under 10 percent. She became friends with Virginia state senator Emily Couric when both underwent treatment, and they focused on how they would design a patient-care facility and raise funds. Remarkably, Ryan finished treatment in six weeks. After Couric’s death, Ryan continued to campaign for the facility they envisioned, and the Emily Couric Clinical Cancer Center was dedicated in 2011. That same year Ryan retired from coaching with 739 wins, then the tenth-highest number of all-time victories in NCAA women’s basketball. The Women’s Basketball Hall of Fame inducted Ryan in 2008.

1. Rachel Findlay
2. Mary Berkeley Minor Blackford
3. Naomi Silverman Cohn
4. Christine Herter Kendall

Stoner Winslett

1958– | Richmond
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
AND CHOREOGRAPHER

In 1980, when she was just twenty-one years old, **Stoner Winslett** became artistic director of the Richmond Ballet after injuries ended her own dance career. More than thirty years later, she remains one of only a few women to serve as artistic director of an American ballet company. Under Winslett’s guidance, the Richmond Ballet in 1984 became Virginia’s first professional ballet company, and in 1990 was designated the State Ballet. The company has presented programs in New York and London, and the dance critic for the *New York Times* recently lauded Winslett’s choreography of *The Nutcracker* while describing her as “one of the pioneering women of American regional ballet.”

Thanks to Winslett’s vision, the Richmond Ballet also trains artists and educates the community in order to preserve the art form’s heritage and explore new directions for ballet. *Minds in Motion*, a Richmond Ballet educational initiative, introduces fourth graders in more than twenty schools to the joy and discipline of dance.

An advocate for the importance of dance, Winslett has served as a vice chair for the national service organization Dance/USA. She was recognized locally by the Richmond YWCA in 1988 as Woman of the Year and by *Style Weekly* in 2000 as one of the 100 most influential Richmonders of the twentieth century. In 2008 Winslett and the Richmond Ballet received the Governor’s Award for the Arts for their contributions to the cultural life of Virginia.

5. Mildred Delores Jeter Loving
6. Elizabeth Ashburn Duke
7. Deborah A. “Debbie” Ryan
8. Stoner Winslett



Instructional materials and nomination forms for the 2015 project are available at www.lva.virginia.gov and vawomen@lva.virginia.gov.

Learn more about Virginia women in the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography* (Richmond: The Library of Virginia, 1998–2006), *Changing History: Virginia Women Through Four Centuries* (Richmond: The Library of Virginia, 2013) and on the Library of Virginia’s website, www.lva.virginia.gov and www.virginiamemory.com.



VIRGINIA WOMEN^{IN} HISTORY 2014

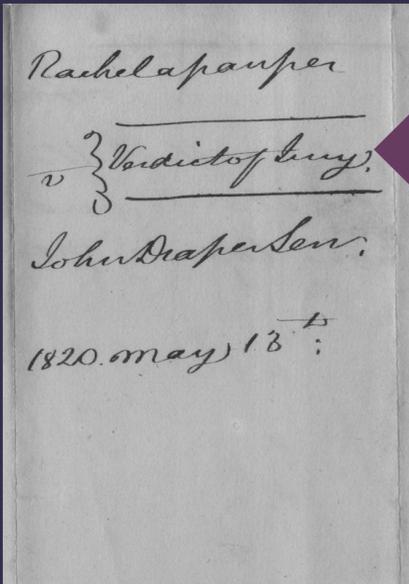
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ca. 1750–
after August 17, 1820
Wythe County
PRINCIPAL IN A
FREEDOM SUIT
The granddaughter of
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Findlay successfully
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and ensured
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her descendents.

Mary Berkeley Minor Blackford

1802–1896
Fredericksburg
ANTISLAVERY
ACTIVIST
Appalled by the
violence of slavery and
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Mary Minor Blackford
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Naomi Silverman Cohn

1888–1982
Richmond
CIVIC ACTIVIST
Activist Naomi
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ARTIST AND PATRON
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An accomplished
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1939–2008
Caroline County
PRINCIPAL IN A 1967 CIVIL
RIGHTS TURNING POINT
As a plaintiff in the
1967 Supreme Court
case *Loving v. Virginia*,
Mildred Jeter Loving
helped legalize interracial
marriage in Virginia and
the United States.

Elizabeth Ashburn Duke

1952–
Virginia Beach
BANKER
As a member of the
Federal Reserve's Board
of Governors, banker
Elizabeth Duke helped
implement the Federal
Reserve System's response
to the financial panic
of 2008.
Recipient of the VABPW Foundation
Business Leadership Award



Deborah A. "Debbie" Ryan

1952–
Albemarle County
BASKETBALL COACH
AND CANCER
TREATMENT
ADVOCATE
Debbie Ryan turned the
University of Virginia
women's basketball
team into a national
power and currently
campaigns for research
into pancreatic cancer.

Stoner Winslett

1958–
Richmond
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
AND CHOREOGRAPHER
As artistic director
and choreographer,
Stoner Winslett has
built the Richmond
Ballet into a nationally
recognized professional
dance company.



VIRGINIA WOMEN IN HISTORY 2014

Women have played an integral part in Virginia from its beginnings, yet their contributions have often been overlooked in the history books. Until well into the twentieth century, written histories tended to focus on the historically male-dominated fields of government and politics, the military, and large-scale property ownership to the virtual exclusion of all other venues of leadership or achievement. They ignored women's critical roles as educators, nurses, lay leaders and missionaries, farmers, artists, writers, reformers, pioneers, business leaders, laborers, civic activists, and community builders.

Today, we recognize and celebrate women's accomplishments in all walks of life, particularly in March, which Congress has designated as National Women's History Month. The Library of Virginia presents the 2014 Virginia Women in History project to honor eight women, past and present, who have made important contributions to Virginia, the nation, and the world. We encourage you to learn more about these extraordinary women who saw things differently from their contemporaries, developed new approaches to old problems, served their communities, advanced their professions, strove for excellence based on the courage of their convictions, and initiated changes in Virginia and the United States that continue to affect our lives today.

www.lva.virginia.gov/vawomen

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