

Dear Reader,

While producing YESTERDAY in Florida, I have become aware that, historically, women's contributions in Florida have been mostly ignored. Written histories of the accomplishments of women pioneers and heroines are rare. So often women not only make up half of the human experience, they are responsible for two-thirds of the work. Few have remarked on this fact.

Surprisingly, historian William Fowler wrote in 1876: "The story of women's work in great migrations has been told only in lines and passages where it ought instead to fill volumes. Here and there incidents and anecdotes scattered through a thousand times give us glimpses of the wife, the mother, or the daughter as a heroine or as an angel of kindness and goodness, but most of her story is a blank which never will be filled up. And yet it is precisely in her position as a pioneer and colonizer that her influence is the most potent and her life story most interesting."

Florida's founding mothers were often immigrants who performed miracles through unending, backbreaking labor to provide food, shelter, clothing, education and medical care, all the while giving birth every year to yet another mouth to feed. On the frontier of Florida, women had to contend with a barrage of clashing cultures, languages and customs, sometimes working in humiliating conditions. Additionally, poisonous snakes, alligators, panthers and hordes of mosquitoes preyed on their families night and day. Women did all this while wearing long sleeves and long skirts, tortuous corsets and high-necked blouses in Florida's terrible humidity.

Subtropical Florida's lightning storms, hurricanes, fires and floods provided dangerous conditions as did threats of Indian attacks, yellow fever and TB. Still, it was the women who nurtured and gave hope to otherwise meaningless lives. They made homes, established schools, libraries and hospitals; held religious services and organized service and social clubs; brought art and music into the public realm; and even worked in the factories when men were sent to war, only to graciously step aside upon their return.

YESTERDAY in Florida has been commended for including women's history in every issue, which often means a lot of digging. As the month of March is considered a time to honor women's accomplishments nationwide, this issue is dedicated to the women of Florida who conserved, promoted, protected and tolerated. It is a privilege to tell you about Florida pioneer women such as Lily Bow (p.9), the lighthouse keepers (p. 17), retailers (p.16) and even pie makers (p.12).

In this issue, I am pleased to introduce guest author Pam Freni, who tells the surprising story of 13 women of NASA on pages 20 through 23. I'd like to think that historians today are doing a better job of memorializing women's accomplishments. I'll try to do my part.

Mary Lou Merritt

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Publisher



Mary Lou

Special thanks to historians Tom Hambrich and the Key West History Museum and Robert Fisk and the St. Cloud Historical Society for their help on this issue. Thanks, also, to Pam Freni (p.20), Merritt Dekle (p.31), Ken Brooks (pgs. 37, 47) and Glen Nobles (p.35) for their wonderful contributions.



Ninety-five years old, Mario Sanchez still carves and paints whole stories in wood. His folk art is displayed at the Key West Museum of Art and History, the Customs House, and at East Martello Tower in Key West.

15

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The Little White House 6

President Harry Truman wrote, "This place is what I hoped it would be and what I was certain it would not be..."

Before the first shot 13

An obscure army captain took it upon himself to seize Key West's Fort Taylor before the first shot was fired in the War Between the States.

The Space Program's missing chapter 20

Despite their best efforts and the assurances of those highest in office, the first women tested for the space program were destined to be disappointed.

Thumbs up to green 39

Today, the primary nesting grounds of the green sea turtle lie along the east coast of Florida, where they are protected from curious humans and hungry animal scavengers. But it wasn't always that way.

More stories & activities

A bow to Lily Bow	9
Beauty is in the details	15
Jennie turned out the light	17
Find Florida Facts	18
Tell 'em Dillinger did it!	24
Home to sugar and soldiers	25
A scrapbook of the Russ family	31
The forgotten battle	34
Partying, country style	35
From slave to icon	37
Push da button	38
Sponge Bob, the early version	42
Assembly in the Land of Sun	45
Kids' Page	49



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