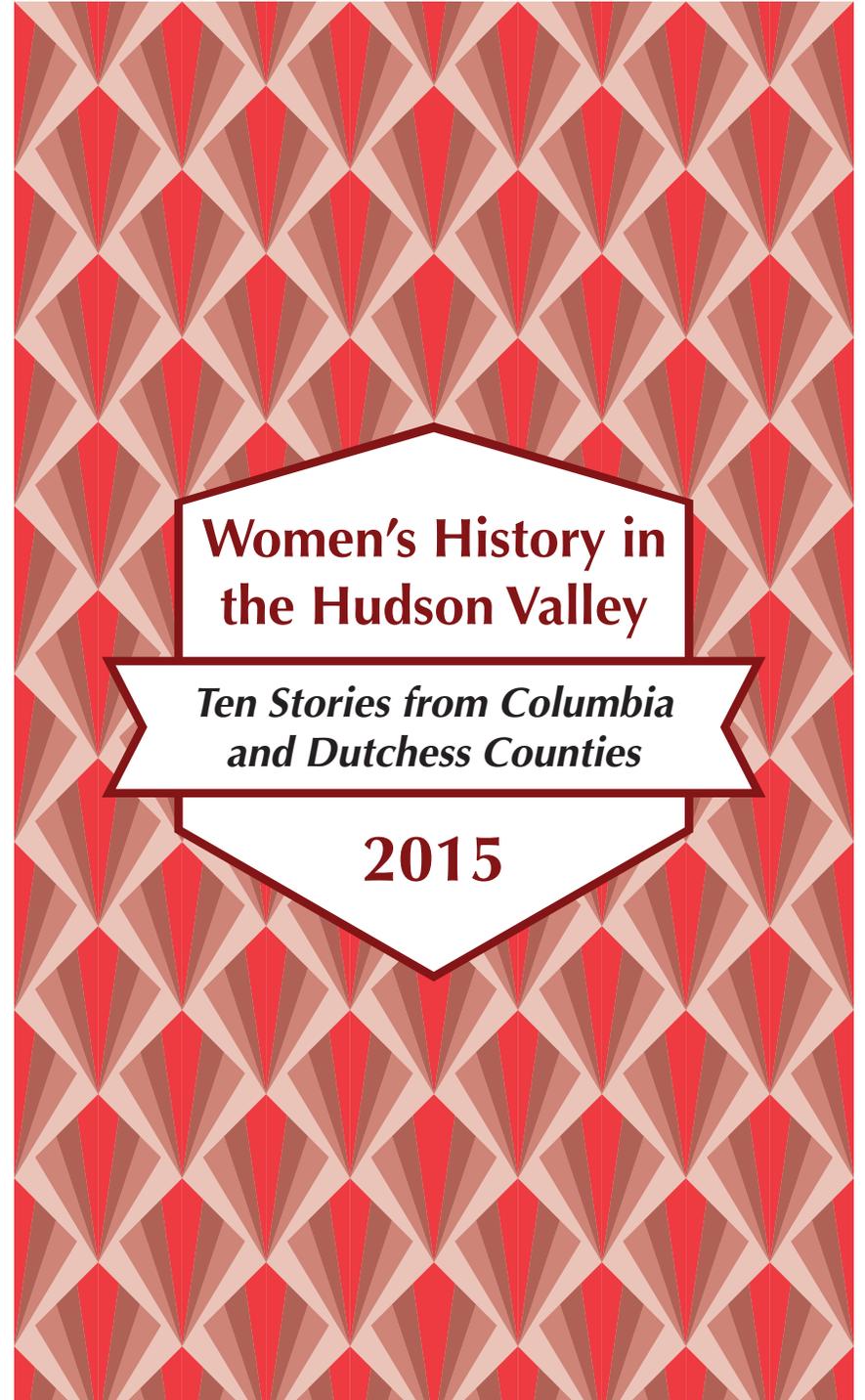


Courtesy of

Assemblymember Didi Barrett

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**Women's History in
the Hudson Valley**

*Ten Stories from Columbia
and Dutchess Counties*

2015



Dear Friend,

"History is not just what happened in the past. It is what later generations choose to remember," wrote historian and Harvard professor Laurel Thatcher Ulrich in her book *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History*.

For too many years, the important roles women played throughout American history were not what later generations chose to remember. Historians, novelists, playwrights, filmmakers – who happened to be mostly men and mostly white – chronicled the exploits of mostly white men. Women's stories remained buried in attics, inked in diaries and letters and pressed in dusty period publications. They patiently waited to be found, explored and ultimately retold by women historians, novelists, playwrights and filmmakers.

In celebration of Women's History Month 2015, and in collaboration with the Mid-Hudson Library System, our office is proud to present our second volume of *Women's History in the Hudson Valley: Ten Stories from Columbia and Dutchess Counties*. We are committed to ensuring that the lives and deeds of the bold, smart, visionary women who came before us are remembered here today and passed on to fuel the dreams of future generations.

In this volume we have shared the stories of ten remarkable women with ties to our region who, well-behaved or not, made history. They were writers, editors, activists, scientists and public servants. They include: Sybil Ludington, born in 1761, who at the age of 16, rode her horse for over 40 miles (farther than Paul Revere) through the night to alert the local regiments to the approaching British troops; pioneering birth control advocate and social reformer Margaret Sanger who as a young woman, in 1896, came to Columbia County to attend Claverack College and the Hudson River Institute; and Franny Reese, who in the 1960s led the charge to protect our magnificent Hudson River Valley from Con Ed's plans to build the world's largest power plant on the face of iconic Storm King Mountain, at the same time helping launch the modern environmental movement.

Please visit your library and ask for a copy of the 2015 *Women's History in the Hudson Valley: Ten Stories from Columbia and Dutchess Counties* to read about the extraordinary contributions these women have made to our community and country. And please share with us the names of other women in local Hudson Valley history for future volumes.

Check with your library, as well, to learn about local events that will celebrate the women of our region and Women's History Month this March. For more information on this or any other issue, please feel free to contact my office at 845-454-1703 or barrettd@assembly.state.ny.us.

Sincerely,

Didi Barrett
Member of Assembly, 106th District



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Jane Bolin

City of Poughkeepsie
1908-2007

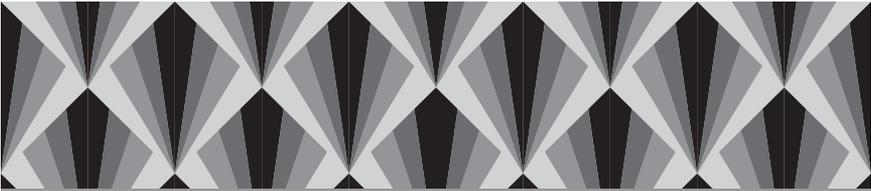
America's First Female African-American Judge

Jane Bolin was born in the City of Poughkeepsie in 1908. Her parents, Matilda Emery, who passed when Jane was just a child, and Gaius Bolin, an attorney who headed the Dutchess County Bar Association and cared for the family after his wife's untimely death, were one of the rare

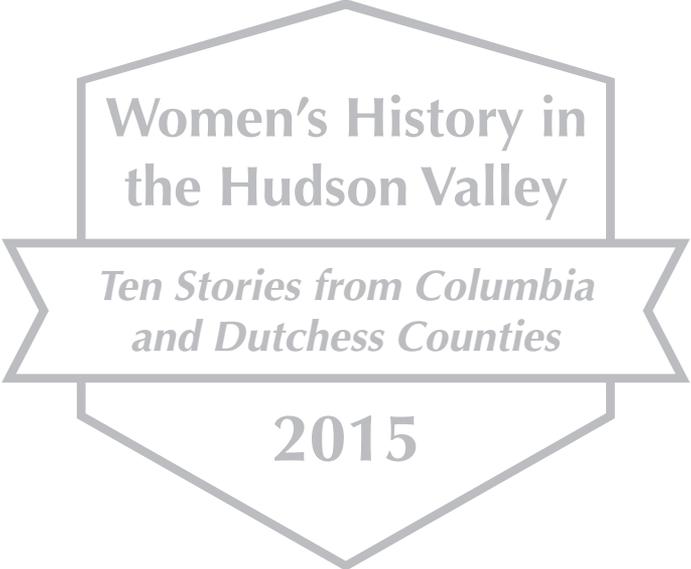
interracial couples of their time. Jane attended Wellesley College in Massachusetts and became the first African-American woman to graduate from Yale Law School, as well as the first to join the New York City Bar Association.

She began her law career in Poughkeepsie after graduation, where she spoke out against segregation and fought for civil rights. Jane then moved to New York City, where she worked as assistant corporation counsel. In 1939, New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia appointed Jane to her first ten-year term as judge, beginning her historic four decades on the bench.

As judge, she ended the practice of assigning probation officers on the basis of race as well as the placement of children in child care agencies. Bolin also worked with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt in



supporting the Wiltwyck School, a comprehensive program to fight juvenile crime among boys. After retiring in 1978, she volunteered in New York City public schools and was appointed to the Regents Review Committee.¹



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¹gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CREC-2007-01-19/html/CREC-2007-01-19-pt1-PgE155-2.htm
Photo source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs division, reproduction number LC-USF344-007933



Eileen Hickey

City of Poughkeepsie
1945-1999

**Member of the New
York State Assembly**

Eileen Hickey was born in the City of Poughkeepsie and devoted her life to public service. A registered professional nurse, Eileen served as Assemblywoman for the 97th District from 1992 to 1994, as well as a Dutchess County legislator from 1979 to

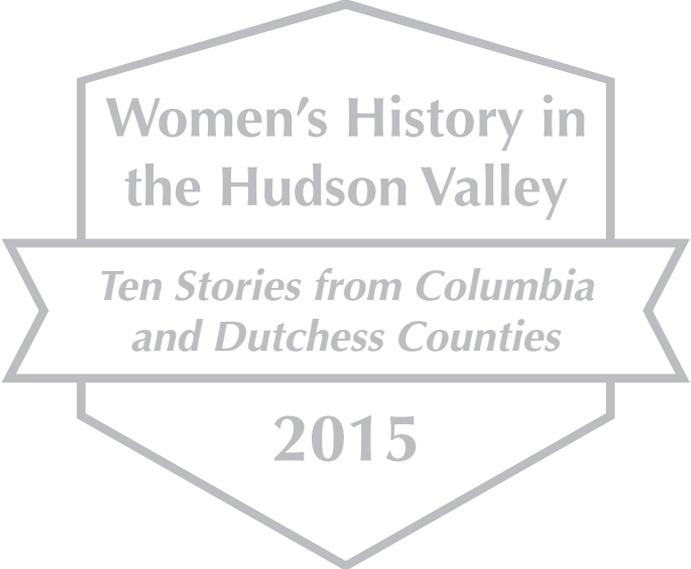
1981.

Eileen's only brother fought and died in Vietnam, which led to her passion for helping veterans. She was instrumental in the creation of the Mid-Hudson Vietnam Veterans Outreach Center in Dutchess County. She volunteered extensively with the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, the Hyde Park Rowing Association, the Junior League, and Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church. Eileen and her husband, Dan, began serving Thanksgiving Dinner at the Family Partnership Center more than 30 years ago, a tradition now named for her that continues to this day.

To honor Eileen's memory, her family and the Dutchess County Regional Chamber of Commerce created the "Eileen Hickey Nursing Scholarship." The scholarship is available to



any resident of the Mid-Hudson Valley who is pursuing a career in nursing at Mount Saint Mary College in Newburgh.^{2,3}



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²findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=41674843

³chamberfdn.org/scholarships/eileen-hickey-nursing-scholarship

Photo source: The Red Book, 1993



Helen Kenyon

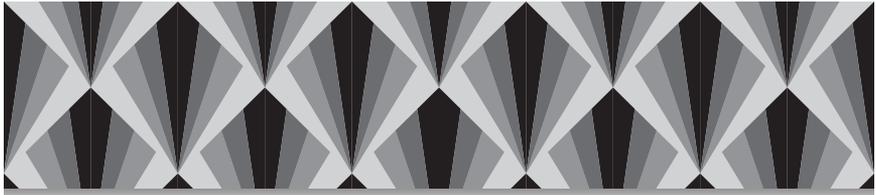
Town of Poughkeepsie
1884-1978

Vassar's First Female Chair of the Board of Trustees

Helen Kenyon was born in Brooklyn and attended Vassar College in Poughkeepsie. After graduation, she moved to New York City where she served on the executive board of the Willoughby Settlement House.

In 1915, she returned to Poughkeepsie and gave back

to her alma mater as chair of the accommodations committee, which focused on accommodating returning alumnae with any housing needs. Soon after, Helen became a member at large of the Vassar Associate Alumnae Executive Board and later was elected Associate Alumnae President, leading numerous fundraising campaigns for the college. In 1921, she became treasurer of the Salary Endowment Fund. Her experience and success led her to serve on the Board of Trustees in 1923. In 1928, Helen was elected Chair of the Board of Trustees, becoming Vassar College's first female chair.⁴



Women's History in the Hudson Valley

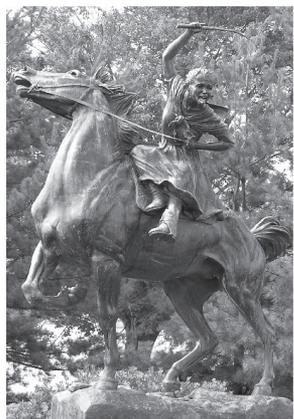
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⁴vcyclopedia.vassar.edu/alumni/helen-kenyon.html

Photo source: vcyclopedia.vassar.edu/alumni/helen-kenyon.html





Sybil Ludington

Town of Kent
1761-1839

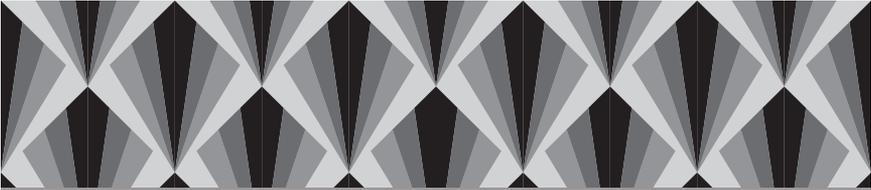
Revolutionary War Hero

Sybil Ludington was born in 1761 in what is now Kent to Abigail Ludington and Colonel Henry Ludington, commander of the 7th Regiment of the Dutchess County Militia, who later became an aide to General George Washington.

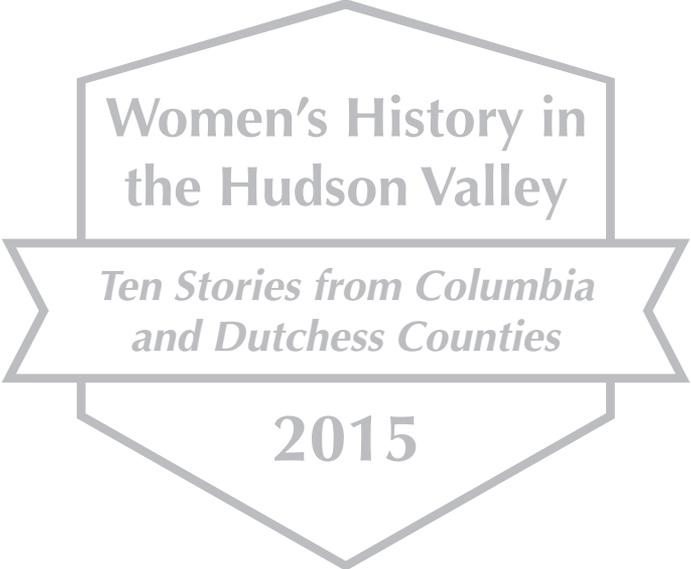
During the Revolutionary War, British soldiers attacked

the nearby town of Danbury, Connecticut. An exhausted colonist alerted Colonel Ludington at his home and pleaded for the local regiment's help in fighting off the attack. However, the regiment's men were disbanded for planting season and were all miles away. Since the colonist was too exhausted and the Colonel had to prepare for the battle, he sent 16-year-old Sybil to ride through the night on her horse and alert the Colonel's men to prepare for the battle in Danbury.

Sybil rode for 40 miles through the driving rain, a much longer distance than Paul Revere's more famous ride. By daybreak, Sybil succeeded in gathering almost the entire regiment to fight the British. The colonists were able to push back the British advance and cause them to retreat. After the battle in Danbury, General



Washington arrived at the Ludington home and personally thanked Sybil for her heroic actions.^{5,6}



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⁵nwhm.org/education-resources/biography/biographies/sybil-ludington

⁶historicpatterson.org/Exhibits/ExhSybilLudington.php

Photo source: Statue of Sybil Ludington on Gleneida Avenue in Carmel, New York by Anna Hyatt Huntington



Elinor Mettler

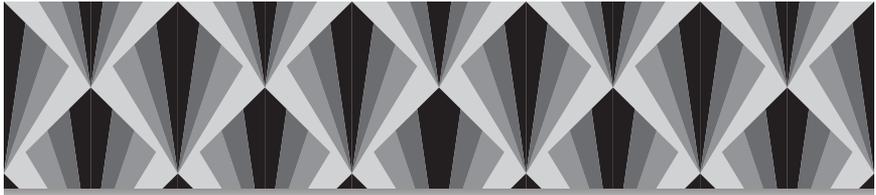
Town of Copake
1926-2011

Reporter & Historian

Elinor Mettler was born April 10, 1926, in Brooklyn. She started visiting the Hudson Valley with her family at a young age and moved to Columbia County in her twenties when she married local veterinarian John Mettler. After training as a journalist, she founded the Roe Jan Independent newspaper in 1973, which covered the rural towns of Hillsdale, Ancram, Copake, Taghkanic

and Gallatin. She sold the newspaper in 1986 but continued writing for it for many years. Believing local history was very important, Mettler was proud to be one of the founding members of the Roe Jan Historical Society, twice serving as president.

Inspired by her memories of long walks during her youth in Brooklyn, Elinor had the idea to create the Harlem Valley Rail Trail. She published editorials and news stories about how it was possible to convert the rail bed of the Harlem Valley railroad into a trail for walking (and now biking). After persistent lobbying, the Harlem Valley Rail Trail Association was launched, and 27 miles of rail were purchased in 1989.^{7,8,9}



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⁷registerstar.com/obituaries/article_7a87168d-77e5-5159-96b7-bbf50e0dc4cf.html

⁸registerstar.com/news/article_6be290f1-b7ac-57e9-a60d-18f71ea2c3f5.html

⁹columbiapaper.com/2011/05/by-diane-valden-319

Photo source: registerstar.com/obituaries/article_7a87168d-77e5-5159-96b7-bbf50e0dc4cf.html





Janet Livingston Montgomery

Town of Red Hook
1743-1828

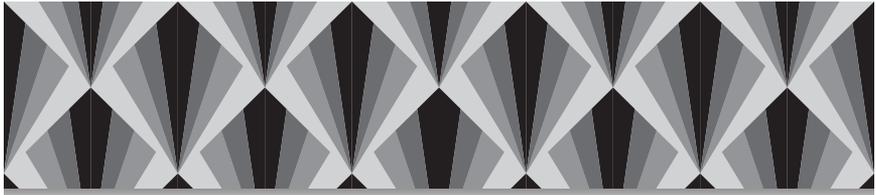
Estate Builder & Agricultural Entrepreneur

Janet Livingston Montgomery was a member of the famous Livingston family of New York and a sister of Chancellor Robert R. Livingston, who later served on the committee that drafted the Declaration of Independence. Janet was a

member of the Hudson Valley gentry, an estate builder and an agricultural entrepreneur.

Her family built their wealth in the Hudson Valley, all while increasing the economic and social capital of the region, by renting out their land to tenant farmers on the stipulation that it be reserved for the purposes of cultivating wheat on a commercial scale.

In 1802, Janet purchased a 434-acre working farm and built a new federal-style house of fieldstone, which she named Montgomery Place. The property is an ode to the Hudson Valley estate life and characterizes the changing American attitudes toward nature, landscape and home design in that period.^{10,11}



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¹⁰womenhistoryblog.com/2009/03/janet-livingston-montgomery.html

¹¹american-arcadia.hudsonvalley.org/content/janet-intro

Photo source: Cora Livingston. Gift of J. Dennis Delafield, Historic Hudson Valley





Frances "Franny" Reese

Town of Wappinger
1917-2003

Environmental Leader

Franny Reese was born Frances Stevens in Manhattan in 1917. She went to Barnard College, studying playwriting and English and attended Yale Art School.

In 1964, Franny and several other concerned local citizens banded together to fight the Con Edison power utility's attempt to build the world's largest pump storage facility at Storm King Mountain in the

Hudson Valley. Her new group was named the Scenic Hudson Preservation Committee, and in 1965, they were able to get legal standing to sue the public utility in federal court. It took 17 years of legal fighting, but Reese's group was ultimately able to prevail.

With Franny Reese at the helm, Scenic Hudson helped secure passage of other important environmental legislation, like the Clean Water Act of 1977 and the 1980 Superfund Law. She served as Scenic Hudson Board Chair from 1966 until 1984, and in her time as chair, the group helped create dozens of riverfront parks and preserves from New York City north to the Adirondacks. She led numerous environmental campaigns, including a successful fight to halt the massive coal-fired St. Lawrence Cement plant proposal for the City of Hudson and Town of Greenport.^{12,13,14}



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¹²nytimes.com/2003/07/09/nyregion/frances-reese-85-defender-of-hudson-valley.html

¹³hudsonrivervalley.org/library/pdfs/fannyreese.pdf

¹⁴scenichudson.org/aboutus/pressroom/franny-reese-backgrounder

Photo source: Scenic Hudson



Margaret Sanger

Town of Claverack
1879-1966

Women's Rights Activist

Margaret Sanger was a birth control activist, nurse and social reformer. She was born Margaret Higgins in Corning, the sixth of 11 children in a working class, Irish-Catholic family.

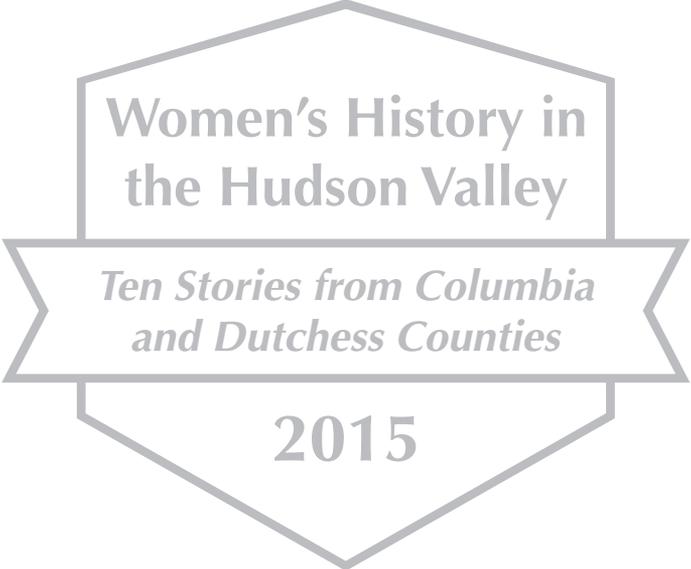
In 1896, Margaret left Corning to attend college in the Hudson Valley at the Claverack

College and Hudson River Institute. After graduating, she entered the nursing program at White Plains Hospital in Westchester in 1900.

Sanger started a feminist publication called *The Woman Rebel* in 1914 to promote a woman's right to birth control. She did so despite threat of prosecution from the federal government under *The Comstock Act of 1873*, which prohibited the circulation of "obscene and immoral materials." She was eventually prosecuted after opening the first birth control clinic, resulting in 30 days in jail. Margaret appealed her conviction and later won an exception for doctors to prescribe contraception to their female patients for medical reasons. By 1921, Margaret had founded the *American Birth Control League*, a precursor to the *Planned*



Parenthood Federation, serving as its president until 1928. While with the league, she opened the first legal birth control clinic in the United States, the Birth Control Clinical Research Bureau.^{15,16}



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¹⁵nyu.edu/projects/sanger/aboutms/index.php

¹⁶pbs.org/wgbh/amex/pill/peoplevents/p_sanger.html

Photo source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs division, reproduction number LC-USZ62-29808



Margaret "Daisy" Suckley

Town of Hyde Park
1891-1991

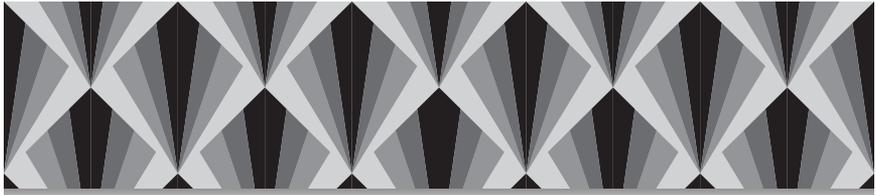
Adviser to the President

Margaret "Daisy" Suckley was born in Rhinebeck. She attended Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania from 1912 to 1914, but her mother forbade her from graduating. During the First World War she served on Ellis Island as a nurse's

aide and sold war bonds in Rhinebeck during the summer.

Suckley met Franklin Roosevelt in 1922 in Hyde Park. The two became good friends, and in 1933, Roosevelt invited Suckley to his first Presidential Inauguration. She would later become a trusted advisor and confidant to the president and was present for some of the most important events of his presidency, including the visit to Hyde Park of the king and queen of the United Kingdom and the visit of Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

In 1941, FDR appointed Ms. Suckley as an archivist and librarian at the newly founded Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library in Hyde Park. Ms. Suckley worked with FDR on organizing and selecting documents to be kept at the library and remained at the museum until she retired in 1963.¹⁷



Women's History in the Hudson Valley

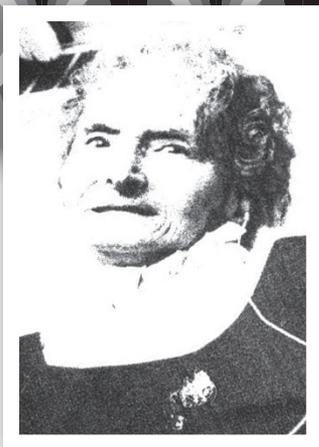
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¹⁷fdrlibrary.marist.edu/aboutfdr/daisysuckley.html

Photo source: Franklin D. Roosevelt Library & Museum, Hyde Park, NY





Louise Tompkins

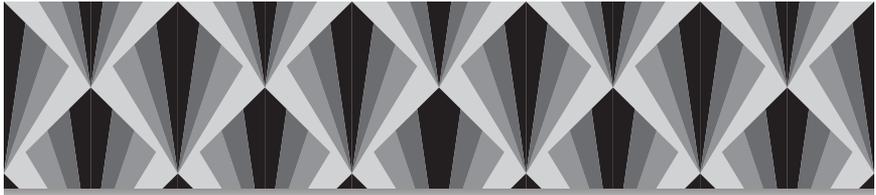
Town of Washington
1907-1991

Writer & Storyteller

Louise Tompkins, one of Dutchess County's most famous residents, was born in Lithgow. Originally, she had dreams of becoming a gym teacher; however, at the age of 18, she was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. Due to the debilitating nature of her disease, Louise was admitted to the Dutchess County

Infirmary where she would live for 50 years. Despite her limited mobility, Louise was determined to make the best of her situation.

Confined to her hospital bed, Louise began to write. She would write a weekly column for the Millbrook Round Table. The columns consisted of stories of her life growing up on a farm and the rich history of the town. They were gathered into a book called *Memories of Early Days in Millbrook: A collection of stories*. Her writings and tales inspired her many visitors who would leave impressed by her attitude and fortitude.¹⁸



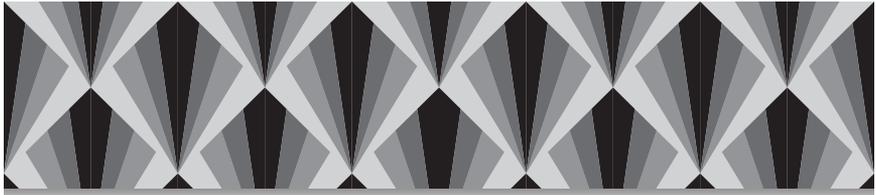
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¹⁶themillbrookindependent.com/news/demolition-planned-county-infirmary
Photo source: *Images of America: Taconic Pathways*





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