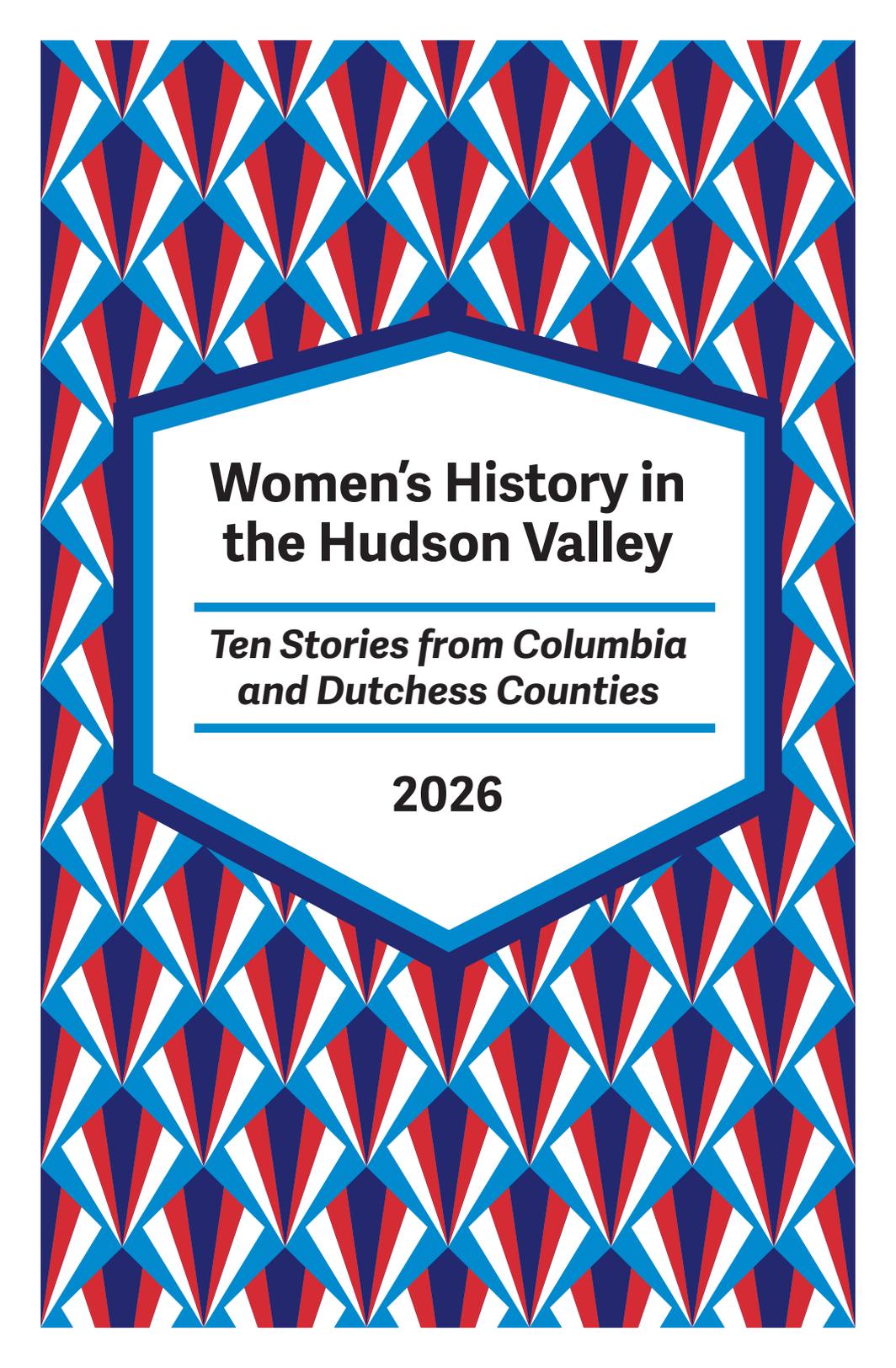




2026

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



Women's History in the Hudson Valley

***Ten Stories from Columbia
and Dutchess Counties***

2026

Dear Friends,

In 2026, as we celebrate the 250th birthday of our nation, it is especially timely to shine a light on the countless women who fought for our rights, made their voices heard and changed the fabric of American society. Women continue to break barriers to this day, yet despite their extraordinary achievements, far too many of their stories have been overlooked. While their names may not yet appear in history books, we are proud to recognize the remarkable contributions of these Hudson Valley pioneers annually and to share the difference they have made.



The 2026 volume of Women's History in the Hudson Valley: Ten Stories from Columbia and Dutchess Counties features the stories of Lucy Graves, civil rights activist; Angelica Singleton Van Buren, White House hostess; Laurie Quinn, a recovery leader; Eunice Mauwee, the knowledge keeper of her tribe; and many more.

My office is honored, once again, to produce and distribute Women's History in the Hudson Valley in partnership with the Mid-Hudson Library District as part of Women's History Month. The 10 women highlighted in this year's edition made significant strides toward equality, helped others in times of need and shaped the Hudson Valley communities we call home. Please enjoy their stories and find inspiration in their strength, determination and passion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Didi Barrett". The signature is fluid and cursive.

***Didi Barrett
Member of the Assembly, District 106***



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Frances “Fanny” Chester White Hartley

*Hudson
1833 – 1909*

Philanthropist

Frances “Fanny” Chester White was born on March 3, 1833, to Dr. and Mrs. Samuel White in the Robert Jenkins House on lower Warren Street — a landmark of early Hudson and the home of her maternal grandfather, Robert Jenkins, one of the city’s founding proprietors. One of eight

children, Fanny spent her early years surrounded by the legacy of the “Nantucket Navigators,” the enterprising families who settled Hudson in the 1780s and launched its storied maritime economy. Her grandfather, Robert Jenkins, and great-grandfather, Seth Jenkins, both served as early mayors of the young city, and the family’s civic leadership shaped much of Hudson’s early identity.

When Fanny was still a small child, the White family moved to New York City, where her father established a thriving medical practice. Fanny married Marcellus Hartley in 1855 at the prominent Madison Square Presbyterian Church. A woman of faith and community-minded spirit, she was active in the church’s mission work and charitable programs, developing the philanthropic sensibilities that would define her life.

Fanny watched from afar as Hudson continued to evolve, and her ties to her birthplace remained strong. Her family



kept ownership of the Jenkins House until 1858, preserving a physical link to the city she always considered home. In 1890, when the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) was founded, she became a charter member, aligning herself with a national movement dedicated to historical preservation, education and patriotism.

Her most enduring legacy to Hudson came only a few years later. In 1895, the Hendrick Hudson Chapter of the DAR was established, and its members quickly sought a permanent home to meet, foster community and, most importantly, expand the small public library they founded in 1897. In 1899, after learning of the chapter's capital campaign for a house, Fanny purchased the very house where she had been born.

In an impressive three-day event, Fanny transferred the Robert Jenkins House to the chapter, with the New York Times reporting that she hoped her gift would serve “the welfare of the citizens of [this] beloved city.” For half a century, her birthplace served as Hudson's only public library until the city opened its own in the 1950s. At that time, the DAR donated 10,000 volumes to help establish the new institution. Today, the chapter house still maintains a specialized library of genealogical and historical works, as well as the city's only public museum.

Fanny's generosity extended far beyond Hudson. A committed philanthropist, she supported religious, educational and historical causes throughout her life. In 1909, she donated \$50,000 to the Manor Church and Church House in New York City, a significant contribution that advanced community programs in one of the city's rapidly growing neighborhoods. She was also a lifetime member of the Nantucket Historical Association, maintaining her ties to the community from which the Hudson Proprietors had first set out.

Frances Chester White Hartley died on April 22, 1909, and is buried with her parents in the Hudson City Cemetery.

Information and public domain photo provided by Virginia Martin, PhD, Regent, Hendrick Hudson Chapter, NSDAR



Lucy Graves

*Poughkeepsie
1913 - 1999*

Civil Rights Advocate

Lucy Graves was born in 1913 to Dr. Allen B. Graves and his wife, Goldie. Raised alongside her sisters, Roselyn, Goldie and Allene, she grew up in a family deeply committed to civic life. Her father, a Dartmouth College graduate, built a respected medical practice in Harlem and was active in community organizations, including the YMCA. His example of service shaped Lucy's own lifelong dedication to social advocacy and educational opportunity.

A graduate of Hunter College and a trained social worker, Lucy first traveled to Poughkeepsie after learning that the city had very few Black teachers. Intending to join the public school system, she instead found a calling that would define her early career. In 1936, through an arrangement with the National Youth Administration — a New Deal program championed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt — Lucy became the third Executive Director of the Catharine Street Community Center.

The Catharine Street Community Center, founded through the vision of retired teacher Mrs. Clara Maynard Buck, sought to provide educational, cultural and recreational programs for Poughkeepsie's youth. Under Lucy's leadership, the center flourished. She oversaw a wide range of offerings, including athletic programs, tennis and fencing tournaments, picnics, campfires and courses on Black history. She invited distinguished speakers, including poet Langston



Hughes and activist Channing Tobias, who later became Chairman of the NAACP. In 1940, Lucy welcomed First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt to the center, a testament to the institution's growing prominence under her direction.

Lucy's work in Poughkeepsie extended beyond programming. She emerged as a forceful advocate for civil rights. In 1942, after Cecilia Magill was denied employment at Schatz Manufacturing Company solely because she was Black, Lucy petitioned the federal government to investigate both Schatz and the Federal Bearing Company for discriminatory hiring practices. Although the case was ultimately postponed, the companies committed to employing workers "without regard to race," setting an important precedent in the region's push toward equitable labor practices.

That same year, Lucy stepped down from her role at the Catharine Street Community Center. She returned briefly to New York City before relocating to Atlanta, where she taught for 22 years. Later, she returned once more to New York City, spending an additional three decades teaching elementary students and serving as a school librarian in Central Harlem. She retired in 1976 after a long and influential career in education.

In a 1988 interview with the Poughkeepsie Journal, Lucy fondly reflected on her years in Poughkeepsie and her work with the Catharine Street Community Center. She was proud of the children that attended the center and the lives they had created for themselves in adulthood, saying, "I look back on those years [in Poughkeepsie] as some of the happiest in my life."

Lucy Graves died in 1999. Today, more than eight decades after her early work in the Hudson Valley, the City of Poughkeepsie continues to benefit from Lucy's leadership, advocacy and vision. Her commitment to learning, equity and community uplift has left a lasting legacy that continues to shape generations.

Photo provided by the Dutchess County Historical Society



***Laura “Laurie”
Jean Rice
Demmerle Quinn***

*Hudson
1963-2021*

Recovery Leader

Laura “Laurie” Jean Rice Demmerle Quinn was born on September 11, 1963, in Syracuse, New York, to Carol Breed Rice and Steven A. Rice. After spending her early years in Central New York, Laurie moved to Chatham in 1998, where she built a rich life rooted in family, community and

service. Two years later, in June 2000, she married Carl Quinn.

For nearly two decades, Laurie and Carl owned and operated Technology 4 All, Inc. They eventually chose to redirect their energy toward a mission that reflected their compassion and social conscience by helping those affected by substance use disorder and the opioid epidemic. Laurie became a driving force in local recovery efforts, helping to establish Columbia County Pathways to Recovery, an organization dedicated to supporting individuals and families navigating addiction.

Building on that work, Laurie co-founded Our Wellness Collective with her close friend and business partner, Cortney Lovell. Together, they created educational programs and training resources for the recovery community, both locally and nationally. Through her tireless advocacy, Laurie helped train numerous Certified Recovery Peer Advocates, empowering them to support others on their healing



journeys. Laurie was also a passionate supporter of harm reduction and led a beloved Tuesday night Family Support Group that provided understanding, compassion, and hope to families of those struggling with addiction.

Beyond her professional and advocacy work, Laurie devoted herself to “Service Above Self” through her deep involvement with Rotary International. A committed Rotarian, she served as District 7210 Secretary, chaired numerous committees and brought her humor and spirit to every event she touched, earning affectionate nicknames such as “Queen of Everything” and “Shenaniganator Extraordinaire.” Laurie’s infectious laughter and joy made her a beloved figure within the Rotary family.

Laurie passed away peacefully on November 22, 2021, at the age of 58. Laurie’s final act of generosity was her decision to be an organ donor, ensuring that her spirit of service lived on through the lives she helped save.

Photo provided by Laurie Jean Rice Demmerle Quinn’s family





Mary Wilson Ingalls

Pine Plains
1757 – 1843

Fighter for Widow's Pension

Mary Wilson was born around 1757, likely in the Oblong Valley of Dutchess County — a narrow strip of land once claimed by Connecticut and ceded to New York in 1683 to settle a longstanding boundary dispute. Though the identity and fate of her mother remain unknown, evidence suggests that Mary was the daughter of Ebenezer Wilson (1734 – 1760) and the granddaughter of Samuel Wilson (1689 – 1762) and Jemima Lewis Wilson, a

family whose roots lay in Connecticut before settling in the Oblong.

Mary's early life was marked by loss. Orphaned at the age of three and named in her grandfather Samuel's 1760 will, she and her sister Ester were each bequeathed 15 pounds to be received at age 18. Little is known of Ester's fate, and the historical record falls silent regarding who cared for the young sisters following their father's death. Mary was likely cared for by relatives until circumstances required her to be placed elsewhere. By her early teens, she entered the household of Elijah and Olive Park of Amenia as an indentured servant, a circumstance substantiated decades later through Olive Park's deposition supporting Mary's application for her husband's Revolutionary War pension.

The Wilson and Park families appear to have been acquainted—Samuel Wilson's Lot 60 bordered the Parks' Lot 59—making it likely that the Parks were aware of Mary's situation and took her in. Although indentured servitude was a demanding and often restrictive arrangement, the lasting bond between Mary and Olive suggests



a relationship rooted in mutual respect and companionship. When Olive gave her deposition on Mary's behalf at the age of 90, her testimony reflected years of shared experience that went beyond that of employer and servant.

On August 6, 1777, Mary married Lt. Elihu Ingalls of Rehoboth, Massachusetts, in a ceremony performed in Pine Plains by Justice of the Peace Jonathan Landon. Elihu, nine years Mary's senior and from a long-established New England family, served in the Dutchess County Militia's 6th Regiment alongside Elijah Park—likely the connection that introduced him to Mary. Despite some initial reluctance from Mary's acquaintances, the couple married after an extended courtship and continued to reside with the Park family after the birth of their first child, Huldah, in 1778.

Following the Revolutionary War, Mary and Elihu established their own farm in Pine Plains, where they raised eight children: Huldah, Anthony, Jonathan, Mary, Rebecca, John, Leah and Harriet. Their family life held both joy and sorrow: one daughter, Rebecca, ran away from home and was never heard from again.

After Elihu died in 1823, Mary lived with her son John and his family in Gallatin, Columbia County. In 1841, learning of the newly enacted Pension Act of 1836—legislation designed to provide support to widows of Revolutionary War veterans—she applied for benefits based on Elihu's service. Her case was complicated by the loss of Elihu's records, reportedly stolen by an agent who had previously assisted him with an earlier pension application, and by a devastating 1800 fire at the War Department that destroyed many original military documents. Lacking written proof of her marriage and relying heavily on sworn testimony from former soldiers, Mary nevertheless persevered. However, discrepancies between the dates of her marriage and Elihu's verified service periods caused her claim to be suspended.

Mary Wilson died in 1842, only weeks after the death of her son John and shortly after submitting her application. In her will, she left her modest estate—and the pension she hoped would be approved—to her widowed daughter-in-law, Hannah. After two years of review, likely aided by the involvement of a New York congressman, the pension was finally granted. The ultimate resting places of Mary and Elihu Ingalls remain unknown.

*Information provided by Dyan Wapnick
Public domain photo, used in Little Nine Partners Historical
Society of Pine Plains, NY's production of "Widow's Weeds"*



Henriette Reiss

Philmont
1889 – 1992

Internationally Respected Artist

Henriette Reiss was born on May 5, 1889, in Liverpool, England. She was the daughter of accomplished Swiss grain broker Hans Bernhard Lüthy and his wife, Carey. At the age of 11, Henriette's family moved back to her father's country of origin, Switzerland, settling in Vevey.

Henriette had an artistic spirit like her father, and she studied various creative mediums, including

painting, sculpture and design. Her studies extended beyond Switzerland to Munich, Germany and Liverpool, England. In her childhood, she became fluent in multiple languages, including English, French and German.

In Munich, Henriette met Winold Reiss, a fellow art student. In 1912, Henriette and Winold married and a year later relocated to the United States. After 11 years of marriage, Henriette and Winold divorced in 1923. Afterward, Henriette dedicated herself to her passion; she established a career in New York City as a designer, operating her own studio and employing several artists.

Henriette was recognized for her variety of specialties, including modern textile and rug designs, book jackets and advertising layouts. She worked for *Putnam*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Scribner's* and *Doubleday*. Her work has been featured in numerous galleries, museums and institutions, including the Museum of Modern Art,



the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum.

Her expertise evolved into an academic career spanning 40 years. Henriette's admiration for music shone through her artwork, and she often intertwined the two subjects. She developed a practice known as the "Henriette Reiss Method of Rhythmic Design," providing courses and instruction at institutions throughout New York State, including all five New York City boroughs. In 1964, at 75 years old, Henriette retired from teaching at the Fashion Institute of Technology.

From the late 1940s, Henriette spent most summers at her home in Woodstock and eventually relocated permanently to Philmont. She called Columbia County home for 25 years. After a long, illustrious career, Henriette passed away at the age of 103 on July 17, 1992. In 1993, the Henriette Reiss Award was established in her honor by family friend Elizabeth Hughes Papas. The award was created to support seniors and alumni of the Hawthorne Valley Waldorf School in Philmont pursuing artistic endeavors. Henriette's influence continues to support and inspire generations of students.

Public domain photo





Charlotte Rotunno

*Millbrook
1906 - 2013*

Distinguished Dressmaker & Businesswoman

Charlotte Rotunno was born on March 25, 1906, in Millbrook, New York. She was the daughter of Alberto and Teresa Velletri Rotunno. Charlotte came from a large family, including her brothers Noreda, Albert, Andrew, Frank and Augustine, and her sisters Mary, Nicolina, Katherine, Theresa and Madeline. Charlotte attended

Millbrook schools and remained a lifetime resident of the village.

Charlotte's journey with fashion began while she was working as a dressmaker and milliner at Mrs. Moore's Hat Shop. Charlotte learned the craft for about six years before deciding to take the next step. On March 2, 1929, after borrowing \$500, the first location of Charlotte's business was established at her residence, at the corner of Franklin Avenue and Church Street. In 1941, the business was installed at its permanent location.

Charlotte's Hat and Dress Shop functioned during one of the most tumultuous economic periods in U.S. history: the Great Depression. Throughout this hardship, Charlotte and her business remained resilient. An article in the Millbrook Round Table (1979) describes Charlotte and her family's major effort to maintain her shop. Charlotte reported that her entire family contributed to maintaining the business. Her younger sisters,



Theresa, Madeline, Katherine and Nicolina, would work for free after school. It has been said that Charlotte took on a maternal role for her siblings after their mother passed away, cementing herself as a pillar of her family.

Charlotte's business was well-loved by members of her community. She also welcomed well-known and affluent clients such as: Alice Roosevelt Longworth (daughter of President Theodore Roosevelt), Margaret Sullivan (American stage and film actress), Louise Whitfield Carnegie (wife of philanthropist Andrew Carnegie), Frances Cagney (wife of actor James Cagney), Felicitas Selter Thorne (wife of businessman Oakleigh Thorne) and Zsa Zsa Gabor (socialite and actress).

In 1995, after 66 years in business, Charlotte's Hat and Dress Shop closed its doors. Longtime customers expressed their appreciation for the business and recalled fond memories of its owner and her family.

Charlotte contributed to several local charities over her lifetime and was a longtime parishioner of St. Joseph's Church in Millbrook. She passed away on June 26, 2013, at the age of 107.

Photo courtesy of Charlotte Rotunno's family





Eunice Mauwee

Dover

1756 – 1860

Knowledge Keeper

Eunice Mauwee, born around 1756, was a descendant of prominent Mahican and Pequot leadership lines. She was the daughter of Joseph “Chuse” Mauwee and the granddaughter of Gideon Mauwee, Sachem of Schaghticoke near present-day Kent, Connecticut. Through Gideon, she traced her lineage to Mahican Sachem S’quons and to his wife, the granddaughter of the Pequot Sachem Sassacus. Eunice spent her early years in

Derby, Connecticut, where her father had been placed in a white household for schooling, as was often custom at the time. Today, this experience is often described as “walking in two worlds,” blending Indigenous knowledge with Western science and education.

Shortly before the Revolutionary War, Eunice married John Sutnux, of the Narragansett people, and settled at Schaghticoke. Sutnux served with the Connecticut militia during the 1777 Battle of Saratoga, one of 100 Indigenous men reportedly recruited from the tribe for the war effort. Although many never returned, he ultimately did, and he and Eunice had nine children, all of whom predeceased her. After his death, the exact date of which is unknown, Eunice married Peter Sherman around 1803; his first wife, Sibbil, had died the year prior. While the names of Eunice’s children have been lost to history, the names of her grandchildren – Abigail, Alma, Charles, Elihu, Jacob, Joseph, John, Julia, Lavina, Martha, Nancy, Parmelia, Patty and Rachel – have been preserved. Descendants of Abigail and Parmelia Mauwee still live in New York and Connecticut today.



In the Mahican and Schaghticoke traditions, where written language did not exist, historical events and genealogical lines were memorized by knowledge keepers in each generation. Eunice served as a respected knowledge keeper, safeguarding the stories, lineage and cultural traditions of her people. She traveled throughout the region making and selling baskets, and she willingly shared her knowledge with interviewers and historians documenting Indigenous history.

Her connections to the Hudson Valley were significant. In 1859, representatives of the Moravian Historical Society, accompanied by noted New York historian Benson J. Lossing, visited Eunice during their journey to dedicate monuments at the sites of two early Moravian missions: Shekomeko in Pine Plains, New York, and Wechquadrach near present-day Millerton, New York. These missions had long-standing ties to Mahican communities, and Eunice's knowledge offered invaluable insight into their history. Earlier, in 1852, historian David T. Lawrence had described her as an esteemed culture keeper of the Schaghticoke people, respected by all who knew her. Later, around 1881, historian Charles Burr Todd interviewed her granddaughter Lavina Carter, further preserving the oral traditions Eunice had carried forward.

As the knowledge keeper of her generation, Eunice was responsible for preserving the history of the beloved Dover Stone Church. This sacred cavern is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Eunice's great-great-grandfather, Sassacus, led his people to the site towards the end of the war against the Pequot in 1637, in an act of safety and reprieve.

Among the memories Eunice safeguarded was a story passed down from her great-grandfather S'quons, who recalled accounts of the first European ships sailing up the Hudson River—an event predating his own lifetime and recounted to him in childhood. When Eunice died in 1860 at the age of 104, she left an extraordinary legacy. Through her steadfast dedication to storytelling and cultural preservation, she ensured that generations of Mahican and Schaghticoke history—including those deeply rooted in the Hudson Valley—would endure.

*Information provided by Valerie LaRobardier
Photo courtesy of John Cilio*



Sarah ***“Angelica”*** ***Singleton Van*** ***Buren***

Kinderhook
1818-1877

White House Hostess

Sarah “Angelica” Singleton Van Buren was born February 1818 in South Carolina to a prominent and wealthy family. She received her education in both her home state and in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Through her cousin, former First Lady Dolley

Madison, Angelica was introduced to President Martin Van Buren and his eldest son, Abraham, at a White House dinner shortly after the President’s inauguration. Following their meeting, Abraham began courting her, and they married on November 27, 1838.

After their marriage, Angelica moved into the White House, where Abraham served as his father’s private secretary. Because President Van Buren was a widower, Angelica took on the responsibilities of the White House hostess, effectively serving as the administration’s First Lady.

Her debut in this role came with the 1839 New Year’s Day Reception, which established her as Washington’s newest social leader. Angelica later became the first active White House hostess to travel abroad, visiting Great Britain and France to help reassure European leaders of America’s financial stability in the wake of the Panic of 1837.

Inspired by her time in Europe,



Angelica introduced new customs to White House social events, including the practice of greeting guests while standing on a raised platform surrounded by her friends dressed in white. However, these displays drew criticism from the American public. Pennsylvania Whig Congressman Charles Ogle mocked the opulence of the Van Buren administration in his lengthy “Gold Spoon Oration,” accusing the president of extravagance and misuse of government funds for White House renovations. His remarks fueled the perception that Van Buren was an out-of-touch elitist, which, combined with the lingering economic troubles from the Panic of 1837, contributed to his defeat in the 1840 election.

After Van Buren left office, Angelica continued to host gatherings for him at his home, Lindenwald, in Kinderhook, New York. She and Abraham had one child, who died in infancy at the White House, followed by four sons born in New York. Angelica balanced her ties to her South Carolina family — whose wealth was rooted in plantation life — with the anti-slavery ideals of her father-in-law’s political allies. Later, she and Abraham relocated to New York City, where she devoted herself to charitable work and efforts to aid the working class during the Industrial Age. Angelica Van Buren died in December 1877 at age 59.

Public domain photo





Charlotte Shutts

*Hillsdale
1938 – 2022*

Community Leader & Philanthropist

Charlotte was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, on March 29, 1938, to Ralph and Sylva Shutts. Raised in a close-knit family, Charlotte was one of five children – Ralph Jr., who died in service during World War II, Alfred, Helen, and Evelyn. She graduated from Roeliff Jansen Central School in 1955 and later earned a degree from Siena College in 1984.

Charlotte began her professional life as a Proof Clerk at Farmers National Bank and went on to build a remarkable five-decade career in local banking. She retired in 2005 as Branch Manager of KeyBank in Copake, having served the institution and her community with reliability, warmth, and an unwavering work ethic.

Faith was an essential cornerstone of Charlotte's life. A longtime member of the Hillsdale United Methodist Church, she later joined the Craryville United Methodist Church, where she served as Financial Secretary. Her commitment to service extended far beyond the walls of her church. In 1992, moved by the quiet struggles of local families, Charlotte co-founded the Christmas Friends of the Roeliff Jansen Christian Community with Judi Mills. What began as an effort to ensure that every child could experience the joy of Christmas grew into a multi-denominational project supported by eight area churches – an



enduring testament to Charlotte's belief in compassion across communities that continues to assist a significant number of families each year.

Charlotte's civic contributions were just as far-reaching. She joined the Friends of the Roe Jan Library in 2005 and became one of its most steadfast champions. After serving five years as secretary, she was elected treasurer and then president in 2011. Her seven-year tenure—the longest of any Friends president—helped guide the organization through a period of growth, community engagement, and financial stability. Under her leadership, the Friends raised and distributed more than \$125,000 in support of library programs and services. Charlotte also poured her creativity and enthusiasm into organizing the beloved annual “Cookies, Soup, and Books” holiday sale, a tradition that brought neighbors together in celebration of learning, food, and fellowship.

In 2019, the Roe Jan Library honored Charlotte at its annual gala for her extraordinary impact and contributions to the Library and the community. In her final gesture of generosity, Charlotte issued a philanthropic gift which enabled the Library to retire the remaining mortgage on its 2012 building. She also designated the remainder of her estate to create an outdoor pavilion, envisioned as a gathering place for programs, performances, and community events.

Charlotte passed away on December 25, 2022, at the age of 84. She lived a life shaped by purpose, guided by kindness and grounded in faith. Her dedication and vision will continue to benefit the education and well-being of her community for years to come.

Photo courtesy of Jeanne Mettler



Alice “Jean” Jane Chandler Webster

Poughkeepsie
1876 – 1916

Bestselling Author

Alice “Jean” Jane Chandler Webster was born July 24, 1876, in Fredonia, New York. Alice was the eldest child of Annie Moffet Webster and Charles Luther Webster, and she grew up in a household shaped by activism and literary inheritance. Her great-grandmother was a temperance

advocate. Her grandmother was a suffrage and racial-equality supporter. Her mother was Mark Twain’s niece, and her father was Twain’s business manager and publisher of many of his books through Charles L. Webster and Company, founded in 1884. Her father, Charles, committed suicide in 1891 following the collapse of his business.

Alice attended the Fredonia Normal School, graduating in 1894, then studied at the Lady Jane Grey School in Binghamton, where she assumed the name “Jean” to distinguish herself from another student named Alice. In 1897, she entered Vassar College, majoring in English and economics, and took courses in welfare and penal reform. While at Vassar, she volunteered in settlement-house work in New York City and spent a semester abroad in Europe — experiences that profoundly influenced her later fiction.

After graduating in 1901, Jean returned to writing. Her first novel, *When Patty Went to*



College (1903), drew on her own collegiate experience, satirizing campus life while engaging serious themes. Her best-known work, *Daddy-Long-Legs* (1912), tells the story of Jerusha “Judy” Abbott, an orphan whose college education is funded by a mysterious benefactor. Published in serial form in the *Ladies’ Home Journal* and then as a novel, it became a bestseller and was adapted for stage and screen. The sequel, *Dear Enemy* (1915), continues the epistolary tradition while focusing on institutional reform, orphan care and the role of educated women in leadership.

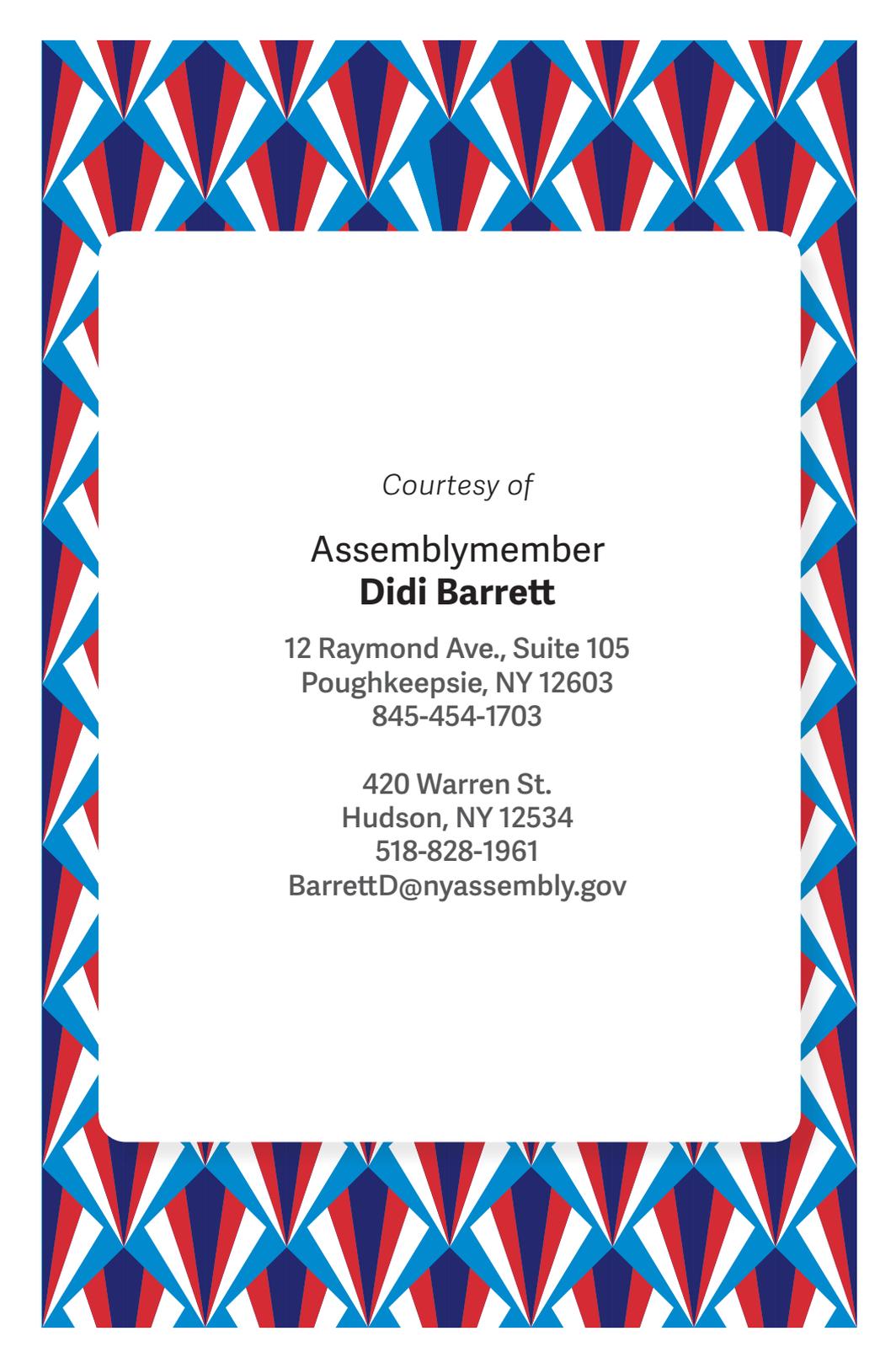
During this time, Jean Webster began an affair with her college friend Ethelyn’s brother, Glenn Ford McKinney. Glenn was in an unhappy marriage due to his wife’s struggle with mental illness – she was frequently hospitalized for manic-depressive episodes – and his child, John, was also showing signs of mental illness. McKinney often escaped his home life by going on hunting and yachting trips, as well as abusing alcohol and entering sanatoriums on several occasions as a result. While the McKinneys separated in 1909, divorce was uncommon and difficult to obtain at the time, and he was not divorced until 1915.

Following McKinney’s divorce in June 1915, Glenn and Jean married in a quiet ceremony in September in Washington, Connecticut. They honeymooned at McKinney’s camp near Québec City, Canada and were visited by former President Theodore Roosevelt, who invited himself, saying: “I’ve always wanted to meet Jean Webster. We can put up a partition in the cabin.”

After their honeymoon, Webster and McKinney returned to the U.S., traveling between New York City and McKinney’s Tymor Farm in Dutchess County. Jean soon became pregnant and, tragically, died on June 11, 1916, following childbirth, at the age of 39. Her daughter was named Jean (Little Jean) in her honor.

Public domain photo





Courtesy of

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