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

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

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**2024**

***Dear Friends,***

***Our history is filled with countless women who fought for their rights, made their voices heard and changed the fabric of American society. Many continue to break barriers to this day, yet, despite the extraordinary achievements of women, far too many of their stories have been overlooked. Because their names may not yet appear in history books, we are proud each year to recognize and share the invaluable contributions these Hudson Valley pioneers have made to make a difference in our lives and world.***



***The 2024 volume of Women's History in the Hudson Valley: Ten Stories from Columbia and Dutchess Counties features the stories of Alida Schuyler Livingston, who acted as a business partner and advisor to her husband despite restrictions under the English Crown's rule; Mabel Mercer, a world-renowned cabaret singer; Susan Elizabeth Frazier, a civil rights activist and the first person of color to teach white students in an integrated public school in New York; Kate Millett, groundbreaking feminist author, activist, and artist; and many more.***

***My office is honored to, once again, 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 ten women highlighted in this year's edition used their creativity to connect, 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 dark ink, appearing to read "Didi Barrett". The signature is fluid and cursive.

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





# ***Contents***

---

***Bernice Bussett*** **2**

---

***Alida Schuyler Livingston*** **4**

---

***Gretchen Fiske Longley Leopold*** **6**

---

***Mabel Mercer*** **8**

---

***Joan Steiner*** **10**

---

***Jan Gilmor*** **12**

---

***Julia Dean*** **14**

---

***Susan Elizabeth Frazier*** **16**

---

***Susan Peltz Hochhauser*** **18**

---

***Kate Millett*** **20**

---





## ***Bernice Bussett***

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*Copake  
1920-2021*

### **Community Volunteer**

Bernice “Bee” Bussett was born January 31, 1920, to parents Gladys and Albert Crane Bristol in Hudson. Her father, who was raised in Claverack, returned from serving in the Navy in 1918 and opened a lumber, coal and hay business, A.C. Bristol’s, Inc.

Bernice and her sister, Barbara, grew up in Copake in a house on

Main Street built by her family. The two girls would lovingly be known as the “Bristol Girls.” Bernice went to the Copake School from first to sixth grade. Then, while the Roeliff Jansen Central School was built, she attended classes in the Mount Washington Hotel. Bernice was in the inaugural freshman class at the newly opened school in 1933. Two years later, she transferred to the Emma Willard School in Troy and subsequently graduated in 1937.

Bernice attended Cornell University in Ithaca for two years. She then transferred to Katharine Gibbs Secretarial School in Boston for a year. When Bernice finished secretarial school, she returned to Copake to work at A.C. Bristol’s as a bookkeeper.

After the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor and the U.S. entering World War II in 1941, Bernice received training to recognize the sounds and silhouettes of various aircrafts. The training was provided at the Copake Grange to



staff an aircraft spotting tower built near the site of the present-day town hall.

Bernice was well known in the Copake community and was an active volunteer and member of the Roe Jan Historical Society, the Hendrick Hudson Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and Roe Jan Young at Hearters.

She was a parishioner of Copake United Methodist Church for 88 years. In 1963, she helped create the Copake Methodist Church Bargain Shop, which is still active today, to raise funds for the church to defray operational costs.

When Bernice was 99 years old, she was awarded a gold Grange pin, along with a certificate and flowers, for her over 55 years of membership and service to the Copake Grange. Then in 2020, family and friends celebrated Bernice's 100th birthday in Copake at the Methodist Church House.

Bernice passed away at 101 years old, in Sharon, Connecticut.

*Photo Citation:  
Picture Provided by Jeanne Mettler, previous Town of Copake Supervisor*





## ***Alida Schuyler Livingston***

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*Livingston*  
1656-1727

**Business partner and  
Advisor to her husband**

Alida Schuyler Livingston was born in 1656 to Philip Pieterse and Margarita Van Slichtenhorst Schuyler, one of Albany's foremost fur trading families of the time. At 19, she married Nicholas Van Rensselaer who would die just three years after their marriage in 1678. Less than a year later, Alida married Robert Livingston, Van

Rensselaer's former bookkeeper. Together, they had nine children.

Alida's background as a member of one of the most prominent families in Albany supplied Robert with many political and commercial connections, and her understanding of her family's fur trade would aid her husband in his own business ventures. Robert frequently left their home in Albany to deal with business affairs and in his absence, Alida took charge of his Albany operations. There are over 200 letters concerning business that Alida wrote to her husband suggesting that business absorbed much of her time. In addition to handling affairs while Robert was gone, Alida also advised him on trades and offers he received, playing a large role in advising his affairs.

When the couple moved from Albany to Livingston Manor in 1686, Alida supervised the extensive industrial and agricultural operations at the manor while Robert was away.



Alida continued her business responsibilities while maintaining status as an elite woman in the area, overseeing the household and the care of her nine children.

In the seventeenth century, the Province of New York was under Dutch control, and it was not uncommon for elite women to be well educated and involved in their husbands' businesses. However, this began to change in 1664 after the British takeover when New York was put under English common law, under which, women were not permitted to own property or sign binding contracts. Despite this legal limitation, Alida continued to be heavily involved in business. The Livingstons had political connections to the English Crown, and in 1710 about 1,200 German refugees settled on the land of Livingston Manor, making up a substantial portion of the families that settled in the Hudson River Valley. Alida filled out their contracts, requiring her husband's signature to make them legal, and supervised the work that the German refugees did on the Livingston property.

Alida also worked on expanding Livingston Manor's trading activities, developing the land to have a sawmill, gristmill, bakery, and brewery with Robert during their time there. Alida consistently headed new projects and kept her involvement with the family business despite the restrictions under English rule. As time went on, many men in colonial New York abandoned business partnerships with their wives, turning to their sons or male colleagues. In the 18th century, elite women stopped receiving formal education in favor of learning French, dance and music, assuming the responsibilities of hospitality and sociability. Alida rejected this, continuing to oversee workers and operations that were held on her property and act as a main adviser to her husband. She retired from the business in 1716.

Alida Livingston passed away in 1727 at the age of 71, and is buried at the Linlithgo Reformed Church Cemetery in Columbia County.

*Photo Citation:*  
*Public Domain*





## ***Gretchen Fiske Longley Leopold***

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*Hudson  
1890-1965*

### **Titanic Survivor and Socialite**

Gretchen Fiske Longley Leopold was born in Hudson on September 1, 1890, to Levi Longley, Hudson's former mayor and a lawyer, and Mary Deare Andrews. Gretchen's parents were both 40 years old when she was born and by age 12, she was left orphaned, going to live with her aunt, Kornelia Andrews, in Hudson and attending a ladies' school in Boston.

At the age of 21, after traveling in Italy and France with her aunts, Kornelia Andrews and Anna Hogeboom, the three women booked first-class return travel on the *Titanic*, at the cost of £77 per ticket — equivalent to nearly \$8,500 today. Gretchen and her aunts boarded the *Titanic* in Southampton, England, and stayed in cabins D-9 and D-7, respectively. Gretchen was said to be considered one of the most beautiful women aboard the *Titanic*, the band playing "Oh, You Beautiful Doll" when Gretchen entered the room.

While the *Titanic* was proclaimed to be "unsinkable," five days after it began its maiden voyage, the ship struck an iceberg. Feeling the disturbance, Gretchen went out into the hallway to investigate and was told by a steward that there was "no danger" and to return to her room. Unsatisfied, her aunt Kornelia found a steward they were better acquainted with who told them to go to the boat deck with their life preservers. Gretchen and her aunts donned their life preservers over their nightdresses and fur coats and rushed up to the deck where crew members were filling lifeboats. The



third lifeboat had room for Gretchen, but she would not leave her aunts. Gretchen and her aunts boarded lifeboat 10, which was equipped with only one seaman, requiring Gretchen to help row. She rowed until exhaustion.

At 2 a.m., the *Titanic*'s boiler exploded, the ship's lights went out, and the *Titanic* split in two, sinking into the darkness. The *RMS Carpathia* arrived about an hour and a half after the *Titanic* sank — nine and a half hours after the initial collision — and rescued the survivors of the *Titanic*, including Gretchen and her aunts. Gretchen and her aunts refused to stay in a cabin while there were others in a worse condition than them, instead sleeping in the lounge. Of the estimated 2,224 people on board of the *Titanic*, only 710 survived. Eight days after the disaster, the women were back in New York.

Eighteen months after the *Titanic*'s sinking, Gretchen married Dr. Raymond Leopold on October 21, 1913, at the Dutch Reformed Church in Hudson. Together, they had three children, Gretchen, William and Barbara. Gretchen and Raymond settled in Philadelphia where Gretchen ran an antique shop. She was widowed when her husband died on June 30, 1957.

In 1916, Gretchen boarded another ship, this time sailing to Bermuda, “just to see if I could do it.” She ultimately crossed the Atlantic 13 more times by boat. It was on one of these voyages on a cruise aboard the *SS Constitution* in Italy that Gretchen passed away due to a sudden illness.

Gretchen Leopold died on August 11, 1965, at 74 years old. She was buried with her husband in West Laurel Hill Cemetery in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania.

Photo Citation:  
Picture Provided by the Hudson Area Library History Room





## ***Mabel Mercer***

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*Chatham*  
1900-1984

### **Renowned Cabaret Singer**

Mabel Mercer was born in Staffordshire, England, on February 3, 1900. Her mother was a young, white English music hall performer, and her father was a black American musician who died before she was born. At the age of 14, she left school, touring and performing with her aunt in vaudeville and music hall engagements throughout Britain

and Europe. In 1928, Mabel became a member of the black chorus in the London production of *Show Boat*.

By the 1930s, Mabel had become the toast of Paris as a cabaret singer with famous admirers, including Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. When World War II began, she traveled to America to sing in the finest supper clubs in New York City. She released her earliest recordings, including a selection of *Porgy and Bess*, in 1942. However, it wasn't until the next decade that she began recording more consistently, releasing her first full-length albums, *Songs by Mabel Mercer, Volumes 1-3* between 1952 and 1954. By 1960, four more albums had followed. Today, her original and reissued albums are collector's items.

In her later career, Mabel was awarded Stereo Review Magazine's first Award for Merit for her lifetime achievement and for "outstanding contributions to the



quality of American musical life,” an award that would be officially renamed the Mabel Mercer Award in 1984. In 1981, she was honored by the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City with “An American Cabaret,” the first musical event of its kind in the museum’s history. She also received two honorary Doctor of Music degrees, one from Berklee College of Music and the other from the New England Conservatory of Music.

Mabel moved to the hamlet of Red Rock, near Chatham, in 1954. She was attracted to the area because it reminded her of her birthplace of Staffordshire, England. Mabel Mercer is the only person from Columbia County to have received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest award given to civilians. On awarding the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Mabel, President Ronald Reagan said, “Mabel Mercer is a legend if there ever was one. A singer’s singer. A living testament of the artfulness of the American Song.”

Mabel died April 20, 1984, at the age of 84. She is buried in the Red Rock Cemetery. Honorary pallbearers for her funeral included Tony Bennett, Sammy Davis Jr., Johnny Mathis and Frank Sinatra, who once said, “Mabel Mercer is the finest music teacher in the world, she taught me everything I know.” She left a generous bequest to the Morris Memorial, a youth recreational center in nearby Chatham, in love and gratitude to her community.

In 1985, the Mabel Mercer Foundation was established with the efforts of her long-time friend and professional associate, Donald F. Smith. This not-for-profit arts organization was formed to keep Mabel’s memory alive, and to contribute to the art of cabaret performing by supporting artists.

*Photo Citation:  
Picture Provided by the Mabel Mercer Foundation*





## ***Joan Steiner***

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*Claverack*  
1943-2010

### **Artist, Book Author and Illustrator**

Joan Steiner was born on October 10, 1943, in Brunswick, New Jersey, to Ignatz Emery, a merchant, and Klara Steiner, a homemaker. Although Joan was never formally trained in the arts, she created art her whole life and enjoyed drawing and needlework as hobbies.

After she graduated from Barnard College and pursued graduate

work at the University of Chicago, Joan began making pieces of wearable art. She started with small soft sculpture purses in the form of ice skates, a portable radio, a sandwich, and a “toaster” muff that included pop-up toast. These initial creations paved the way for vests that have detailed views of rooms of a house sewn or embroidered on them. These vests featured a well-equipped kitchen with a half-roasted chicken in a fabric oven, and a bathroom vest, which included a sliding shower curtain and tiny toiletries.

She created original crafts before turning to freelancing as an illustrator in 1978. Her work appeared in calendars, jigsaw puzzles, greeting cards and posters. Joan also produced work for *Sesame Street* and *Nickelodeon* magazines and a cover of *The New York Times Magazine*.

In 1998, Little, Brown Books for Young Readers published Joan’s first book, “Look-Alikes.” Joan created intricate dioramas that



turned everyday objects like gloves, pretzels, coffee pots and vegetables into scenes of cityscapes, street scenes, restaurants and parks. Each diorama took months to complete and, to ensure that her cats couldn't eat her work, she moved her projects to a studio in Hudson. This book, and three subsequent titles in the series, feature these three-dimensional dioramas. The books have readers look for roughly 100 different objects used on the page.

“Look-Alikes” was named one of The New York Times Book Review’s Notable Children’s Books and one of *Time* Magazine’s best children’s books of 1998. The book series expanded to include “Look-Alikes Jr.,” “Look-Alikes Christmas” and “Look-Alikes Around the World.” The four-book series has sold over a million copies worldwide and been translated into 16 languages. Joan saved and responded to all mail she received, even when entire classrooms of children wrote her individual letters.

Joan was an active member of the community in the Town of Claverack and was a member of the Board of Trustees of the Claverack Free Library.

Joan passed away on September 8, 2010, at her home in Claverack.

*Photo Citation:*

*Picture Provided by Michael Fredericks*





## ***Jan Gilmor***

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*Millerton  
1952-2021*

### **Artist and Business Owner**

Jan Gilmor was born on November 11, 1952, in Brooklyn to Phyllis, a fashion illustrator, and Donald Niederlitz, a freelance commercial artist and designer. Jan grew up in an artistic household. She attended Hollins College and later studied dance at the State University of New York at Purchase, commonly referred to as SUNY Purchase.

Jan was living and working in New York City when her father and stepmother began renovating a house in a Pine Plains crafts community, which has since become the Mashomack Fish & Game Preserve Club. There, Jan met John David Gilmor, who owned and operated John Gilmor Glassworks. The two were married at the Pine Plains Presbyterian Church on December 31, 1977.

Jan and John established Gilmor Glass in Pine Plains in the late 1970s, and soon were creating artisanal glass products and glass art. Their first joint efforts toured America, London, Paris, and Tokyo in the Corning Museum of Glass's prestigious "New Glass" exhibition. Jan co-owned and operated Gilmor Glass with John, and in 2000 they moved their studio and showroom to Main Street in Millerton.

Jan was the designer and approved the color palette and John was the glass blower for a wide range of products created at their studio. Jan and John used their creative



abilities collaboratively to imagine and produce amazing works of hand-blown glass art, including tumblers, stemware, bowls, ornaments with glass loops, decorative pitchers and vases and sandblasted works, not just in clear glass, but in colors such as blush, cobalt, emerald, ice blue, lavender, quince and red. Although they made labor-intensive and very delicate items, much of their glass work was made for everyday use and had them serving clients all over the world. Their designs can be found in shops and international collections, including those of several American presidents.

Jan was a founding member and supporter of TownScape, a revitalization initiative established by a group of business owners and citizens of the Village of Millerton and the Town of North East. TownScape supported business district enhancement projects such as annual holiday decorations, sitting benches, signage and seasonal floral décor.

Jan and John retired from Gilmor Glass in 2019, having creatively worked together for almost 40 years. They enjoyed traveling in their spare time and raising Labrador Retrievers.

Jan Gilmor passed away on July 26, 2021, at Mount Sinai Hospital in Manhattan only weeks after John unexpectedly passed on June 12, 2021.

*Photo Citation:*  
*Picture provided by Rural Intelligence*  
*ruralintelligence.com*



## ***Julia Dean***

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*Pleasant Valley*  
1830-1868

### **Actress**

Julia Dean was born on July 22, 1830, in Pleasant Valley, New York, to Edwin Dean, an actor and theater manager born in Poughkeepsie, and Julia Drake, an English-born actress who achieved a degree of notoriety on the American stage. Julia's mother died when she was just 2 years old, leaving her to be raised by her paternal grandparents until Edwin remarried eight or nine years later.

For several years, Julia did chores at the family-owned boarding house. She first appeared on stage at age 12 in a minor role in *Last Days of Pompeii*, which was presented in the theater managed by her father in Rochester in the early 1840s. In 1844, she became a bit player with Ludlow and Smith of Mobile, Alabama, for \$6 a week. She shared the stage with Joseph Jefferson, known for his portrayal of Rip Van Winkle on stage in the formative years of his career. With Ludlow and Smith, Julia became a popular attraction which prompted her father to bring her to New York City at the close of the 1844-45 season.

On May 18, 1846, at the age of 16, Julia made her New York debut at the Bowery Theatre in the principal role of Julia, in Knowles' comedy *The Hunchback*, and on October 26, 1846, she reprised the role at Boston's National Theater. Julia subsequently played the role in a successful Southern tour of *The Hunchback*. Julia played a number of leading roles in her



career, including Camille, Lady Macbeth, Lea in *Lea the Forsaken*, Parthenia in *Ingomar the Barbarian*, Marco in Charles Selby's *The Marble Heart*, Bianca in *Fazio*, and Pauline in *The Lady of Lyons*. She was also the original Norma in Epes Sargent's *Priestess*, and the first to play Leonor in George Henry Boker's tragedy about Eleanor de Guzmán.

Julia lived in the western U.S. for a number of years, primarily in San Francisco, California, and Salt Lake City, Utah Territory, where she gained notoriety. Her final noteworthy roles were Ann Catherick and Laura Fairlie in a dramatization of Wilkie Collins' novel, "The Woman in White."

On January 20, 1855, Julia married Dr. Arthur P. Hayne, the son of South Carolina Senator Robert Y. Hayne, in Galveston, Texas. Together, they had four children, only one of which lived to adulthood, dying at the age of 27. Her marriage was widely reported as a troubled one and she secured a divorce in the mid-1860s. Not long after her divorce, she married James G. Cooper, a native of New York, who served with the federal administration of the Utah Territory.

In the last several years of her life, Julia struggled with her health. On March 6, 1868, following the stillbirth of her fifth child, she died at her in-laws' house in New York City. She was 37 years old. Her funeral services were held at Christ Church on the corner of 5th Avenue and 35th Street and her remains were laid to rest at Laurel Grove Cemetery in Port Jervis, New York. Years later, her namesake niece, also an actress, found her unmarked gravestone and had it replaced with a more substantial marker.

Photo Citation:  
Public Domain



## ***Susan Elizabeth Frazier***

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*Rhinebeck  
1864-1924*

### **Educator and Activist**

Susan Elizabeth Frazier was born in New York City on May 29, 1864, to Louis and Helen Frazier, and was the great-granddaughter of Milan farmer, landowner and Revolutionary War Veteran Andrew Frazier.

Susan attended New York City

public schools and graduated from P.S. 81. She went on to graduate from the Normal School of the City of New York, later known as Hunter College, in 1888. She received a probationary license to work and was employed as a substitute elementary school teacher for children of color in New York City.

Susan was the first woman of color to be on the list for a full-time teaching position in New York. In October 1894, she was asked to interview for a position at P.S. 58. She was not hired for this position, as the 22nd Ward's board of trustees were concerned that having a woman of color teach white students in an integrated setting might cause issues with parents. Susan filed a suit and petitioned the New York State Supreme Court for an order to compel the board of trustees to hire her. Her case received national attention. In October 1895, the presiding judge rejected Susan's claim and determined that her rights had not been violated. While she lost the suit, she became the first person of color to teach white



students in an integrated public school in New York when the Fourth Ward board of trustees hired her in February 1896. Susan would continue teaching until 1923.

In addition to being an educator, Susan was an activist. On February 16, 1892, she delivered an address to an audience of the Brooklyn Literary Union about the importance of women of color's contributions to literature and poetry in the United States. It was later published as "Some Afro-American Women of Mark" in the AME Church Review. In 1893, she was a founder of the Women's Loyal Union, a women of color organization in Brooklyn. She was a contributor to *Woman's Era*, the first newspaper edited by African American women. Susan was also active in the Empire State Federation of Women's Clubs, the Woman's Civic Association of New York City, the Lincoln Neighborhood Club, and was a member of the congregation of St. Phillip's Protestant Episcopal Church, where she was a Sunday School teacher and president of the Church Missionary Society.

When the U.S. entered World War I in 1917, Frazier was president of the Women's Loyal Union. At the time, soldiers of color were recruited into segregated units and assigned menial duties. A fervent supporter of the rights of these soldiers, Susan founded the Women's Auxiliary for the 15th New York Infantry regiment to provide troops with books, comfort kits, and other supplies. The 15th New York Infantry regiment became the 369th U.S. Infantry, better known as the "Harlem Hellfighters," and became one of the most-honored American fighting units of the war.

Susan Frazier passed away on February 6, 1924. She is the first woman of color to be buried with full military honors in recognition of her support for soldiers and veterans. Susan was buried in a family plot in Rhinebeck. In 2018, local residents secured funding to place a memorial headstone at her then unmarked grave. On this headstone are the words, "Her voice endures."

*Photo Citation:*  
*Public Domain*



## ***Susan Peltz Hochhauser***

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*City of Poughkeepsie  
1941-2016*

### **Community Leader**

Susan Hochhauser was born to Anne and Jerome Peltz in 1941. Susan grew up in Poughkeepsie where she was an activist and demonstrated a lifelong commitment to education, her faith, her family and the community. Both of Susan's parents provided guidance and great examples in this regard.

Her father, Dr. Jerome Peltz, a local dentist, was one of only two dentists who did not have a segregated waiting room in his practice and her mother, Anne, was a certified dental assistant, a translator of books into braille, a member of the LaGrange Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary and an active member of the Jewish Community Center and the Temple Beth-El Sisterhood.

Susan attended and graduated from the State University of New York Teachers College with an Education Degree and earned a master's degree from Teachers College at Columbia University and, while working a full-time job and raising her family, she earned a master's degree from the University of New Rochelle.

Susan started her professional career as an educator in the Poughkeepsie School District and eventually became an Assistant Dean at Dutchess Community College in the Office of Community Services. Lifelong learning



was always a top priority for Susan, whether it was her own education or instilling the same value in others. Originally spearheading the then-nascent community computer program, she extended her reach and impact on the community with GED programs as well as partnerships and programs with New Horizons Resources, Inc. and Nubian Directions II, Inc., where she sat on the board of directors of both organizations.

Susan volunteered her time extensively to the Jewish community by serving as president of Temple Beth-El, president of the Temple Beth-El Sisterhood, and holding numerous committee chair positions. She was also Vice President of the League of Women Voters, ensuring that all women had a vote and a voice. Susan was also known for her achievements in cooking, knitting, sculpting and gardening.

As much as Susan was dedicated to her community, she was even more devoted to her family. After meeting Martin Hochhauser at a singles event at the Jewish Community Center, they were married for 49 years and created a caring, nurturing and loving home. Susan spent much of the last 20 years of her life traveling around the globe visiting her daughters and grandsons in Thailand, China, Hong Kong, San Francisco and Washington, D.C.

Susan Hochhauser passed away at the age of 75 years old.

*Photo Citation:  
Provided by the Hochhauser Family*



## ***Kate Millett***

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*LaGrange*  
1934-2017

### **Groundbreaking Feminist Writer and Activist, Founder of Women's Art Colony Farm**

Katherine (Kate) Murray Millett was born September 14, 1934, to James Albert, an engineer, and Helen Millett, a teacher and insurance saleswoman, in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Her father, an alcoholic, physically abused Kate and abandoned the family when she was 14, consigning them to a life of genteel poverty.

Kate graduated magna cum laude from the University of Minnesota with a

Bachelor of Arts in English Literature in 1956. In 1958, she gained an English Literature first-class honors degree from St. Hilda's College in Oxford; the first American woman to do so. Kate briefly taught English at the University of North Carolina post-graduation but left mid-semester to work in New York City as a kindergarten teacher and learned to sculpt and paint.

In 1961, Kate moved to Japan to study sculpture, where she met fellow sculptor, Fumio Yoshimura, to whom she was married from 1965 to 1985. She left Japan in 1963, moving to New York's Lower East Side. In 1964, Kate began teaching English and exhibiting her art at Barnard College, joining a group of young, radical, and untenured educators who wanted to modernize women's education. Her viewpoints and attack on Barnard's curriculum, along with a budget cut at the college, led to her being dismissed on December 23, 1968.

After 10 years as an educator and artist, Kate enrolled in the graduate school program for English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University and, while there, championed student rights, women's liberation and abortion reform. Journalist Liza Featherstone attributed the attainment of previously unimaginable "legal abortion, greater professional equality between the sexes and a sexual freedom" in part to Kate's



efforts. She completed her dissertation in September 1969 and was awarded her doctorate, with distinction, in 1970. The same year, Kate published her first book, “Sexual Politics,” and came out as a lesbian. However, later that year, she came out as bisexual.

In 1971, Kate used her earnings from “Sexual Politics,” with her future wife, photojournalist Sophie Keir, to buy and restore a 10-acre property in LaGrange, New York, which would later become the Women’s Art Colony. In an attempt to make the colony self-sustainable, Kate purchased 73 acres of neighboring land. In 1978, the Women’s Art Colony and Tree Farm was established, a community of women artists and writers financed by selling the Christmas trees grown on the adjoining land. Women applied to work at The Farm, paying a small fee for food, in exchange for room, board, and studio space. The Farm was also a space for feminist discussion and was described by *The New York Times* as, “a utopian women’s arts colony, and where bare-breasted women grew Christmas trees that Ms. Millett would sell on the Bowery each December. ‘In the early days,’ said Linda Clarke, an old friend, ‘neighbors would complain about the nudity and call the police, until Ms. Millett won them over.’” In 2012, The Farm was registered as a non-profit organization, and was renamed the Millett Center for the Arts.

After the success of “Sexual Politics,” Kate went on to publish nine more books between 1973 and 2001, all of which were motivated by her activism for women’s rights and mental health reform and several of which included autobiographical memoirs that explored her sexuality, mental health and relationships. In 2001, Kate won the Best Books award for “Mother Millett” from Library Journal. In 2011, she was awarded the Lambda Pioneer Award for Literature and was honored at a Veteran Feminists of America gala. In 2013, the U.S. National Women’s Hall of Fame announced that Millett was to be among the institution’s 2013 inductees. Beverly P. Ryder, co-president of the board of directors, said that Kate was a “real pillar of the women’s movement.” The induction ceremony took place on October 24, 2013, at the National Women’s Hall of Fame headquarters in Seneca Falls, New York.

Kate Millett died in Paris on September 6, 2017, from cardiac arrest, eight days before her 83rd birthday. Her longtime partner and wife, Sophie Keir, was with her at the time of her death.

*Photo Citation:*  
*The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints*  
*and Photographs: Photography Collection, The*  
*New York Public Library. (1987). Kate Millett. NYC.*  
*Retrieved from [https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/](https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/5e66b3e9-0bb4-d471-e040-e00a180654d7)*  
*items/5e66b3e9-0bb4-d471-e040-e00a180654d7*

