

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Unconventional Women in America's History

Ginger · Wednesday, September 22nd, 2021

When it comes to women's history, we already know the big names like Harriet Tubman, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Susan B. Anthony. But what about the equally important yet unconventional women who made history in more unusual, less acclaimed fields?

These are the women you haven't heard of — who have been influential to our country regardless.

Nannie Helen Burroughs

In 1909, Burroughs opened a [school for young Black women](#). Unlike any other school for women, it taught vocational skills like bookkeeping and academics. Upon graduation, women would have the opportunity to enter the workforce and pursue a career beyond domestic work.

Throughout her life, Burroughs devoted her life to the education of Black women and advocating for greater civil rights for all African Americans.

Carol Shaw

Women have been in the video game industry since its inception. With a background in computer science from UC Berkley, Shaw was one of the [first female video game developers](#) hired to work at Atari in 1978. She designed "3D Tic Tac Toe" later that year. Shaw also worked on "Super Breakout" and "Video Checkers."

In 1982, Shaw left Atari for Activision and later developed her most critically acclaimed game – "River Raid." The game was also a commercial success, selling over 1 million cartridges.

Laura Cornelius Kellogg

Kellogg was a leader in the Oneida Nation, activist, author, and orator. In 1911, she [founded the Society of American Indians](#). The Society of American Indians is unique in that it was the first national organization of its kind to be created by and run for Native Americans.

Throughout her life, Kellogg fought for the progressive treatment of Native Americans. Rather than have her people assimilate by sending their children to U.S.-sponsored boarding schools and forget their language and culture, Kellogg fought against such state-sponsored policies.

Willie Mae Thornton

You might not have heard of blues singer and songwriter Willie Mae Thornton, but you've likely heard her smash hit "Hound Dog," primarily popularized by Elvis Presley. Thornton's version of the song, released in 1953, [sold over 2 million copies](#) and stayed on the R&B charts for seven weeks. She became quite popular through the success of "Hound Dog."

Thornton continued to tour and perform the blues throughout the U.S., headlining at many festivals. The song "Ball 'n' Chain" later proved to be another massive hit for the artist.

Dolores Huerta

Huerta is a labor leader, civil rights activist, feminist, and co-founder of the National Farmworkers Association. Born in 1930, Huerta [learned about life as an activist](#) from her union activist father. She met and started working with César Chávez in 1962, which later led to the founding of the National Farmworkers Association and subsequent strikes and boycotts.

In 1973, Huerta organized a consumer boycott on grapes that led to the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act two years later. This law guaranteed farmworkers could form unions and bargain for better pay. Huerta still works in activism today.

Chien-Shiung Wu

Wu was a Chinese American physicist. She worked at Columbia University and assisted in the efforts of the Manhattan Project, specifically as they sought to separate uranium metal through gaseous diffusion. Wu also improved Geiger counters to measure radiation exposure.

Though thousands of people worked on the Manhattan Project, historians believe Wu to be the only [Chinese person](#). Beyond working for the Manhattan Project, Wu accomplished many feats throughout her lifetime, including the National Medal of Science, Wolf Prize in Physics, and Comstock Prize.

Alice Austen

As one of America's earliest photographers, Austen uniquely captured daily life with her camera. She took over [7,000 photographs highlighting America](#), including New York's immigrant populations, Victorian women, and the natural world.

Born in 1866, Austen lived an independent life that defied almost every social convention of the day. She was never married. Instead, she was deeply devoted to her partner of 53 years, Gertrude Tate. Her former home is now a museum dedicated to her memory and photographs. It's also a national site of LGBTQ history.

These women may come from different backgrounds or unusual fields, but that doesn't make their accomplishments less critical. Unconventional is inspirational.

This entry was posted on Wednesday, September 22nd, 2021 at 7:52 am and is filed under [Social Action](#)

You can follow any responses to this entry through the [Comments \(RSS\)](#) feed. You can leave a response, or [trackback](#) from your own site.

