



NEVERTHELESS SHE PERSISTED: Honoring Women Who Fight All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

As recently as the 1970's, women's history was virtually an unknown topic in the K-12 curriculum or in general public consciousness. To address this situation, the Education Task Force of the Sonoma County (California) Commission on the Status of Women initiated a "Women's History Week" celebration for 1978.

The week March 8th, International Women's Day, was chosen as the focal point of the observance. The local Women's History Week activities met with enthusiastic response, and dozens of schools planned special programs for Women's History Week. Over one-hundred community women participated by doing special presentations in classrooms throughout the country and an annual "Real Woman" Essay Contest drew hundreds of entries. The finale for the week was a celebratory parade and program held in the center of downtown Santa Rosa, California.

Mobilizing a Movement

In 1979, Molly Murphy MacGregor, a member of our group, was invited to participate in The Women's History Institute at Sarah Lawrence College, which was chaired by noted historian, Gerda Lerner and attended by the national leaders of organizations for women and girls. When the participants learned about the success of the Sonoma County's Women's History Week celebration, they decided to initiate similar celebrations within their own organizations, communities, and school districts. They also agreed to support an effort to secure a "National Women's History Week."

Presidential and Congressional Support

The first steps toward success came in February 1980 when President Carter issued the first Presidential Proclamation declaring the Week of March 8th 1980 as National Women's History Week. In the same year, Representative Barbara Mikulski, who at the time was in the House of Representatives, and Senator Orrin Hatch co-sponsored a Congressional Resolution for National Women's History Week 1981. This co-sponsorship demonstrated the wide-ranging political support for recognizing, honoring, and celebrating the achievements of American women.

A National Lobbying Effort

As word spread rapidly across the nation, state departments of education encouraged celebrations of National Women's History Week as an effective means to achieving equity goals within classrooms. Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, Oregon, Alaska, and other states developed and distributed curriculum materials for all of their public schools. Organizations sponsored essay contests and other special programs in their local areas. Within a few years, thousands of schools and communities were celebrating National

Women's History Week, supported and encouraged by resolutions from governors, city councils, school boards, and the U.S. Congress.

Each year, the dates of National Women's History Week, (the week of March 8th) changed and every year a new lobbying effort was needed. Yearly, a national effort that included thousands of individuals and hundreds of educational and women's organizations was spearheaded by the National Women's History Project.

National Women's History Month

By 1986, 14 states had already declared March as Women's History Month. This momentum and state-by-state action was used as the rationale to lobby Congress to declare the entire month of March 1987 as National Women's History Month. In 1987, Congress declared March as National Women's History Month in perpetuity. A special Presidential Proclamation is issued every year which honors the extraordinary achievements of American women.

Presidential Message 1980

President Jimmy Carter's Message to the nation designating March 2-8, 1980 as National Women's History Week.

"From the first settlers who came to our shores, from the first American Indian families who befriended them, men and women have worked together to build this nation. Too often the women were unsung and sometimes their contributions went unnoticed. But the achievements, leadership, courage, strength and love of the women who built America was as vital as that of the men whose names we know so well.

As Dr. Gerda Lerner has noted, "Women's History is Women's Right." – It is an essential and indispensable heritage from which we can draw pride, comfort, courage, and long-range vision."

I ask my fellow Americans to recognize this heritage with appropriate activities during National Women's History Week, March 2-8, 1980.

I urge libraries, schools, and community organizations to focus their observances on the leaders who struggled for equality – Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, Lucy Stone, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Harriet Tubman, and Alice Paul. Understanding the true history of our country will help us to comprehend the need for full equality under the law for all our people.

This goal can be achieved by ratifying the 27th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which states that "Equality of Rights under the Law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex."