

Chicago Women's Park & Gardens

CELEBRATING SIGNIFICANT CHICAGO WOMEN



Bertha Honoré Palmer



Margaret Hie Ding Lin



Maria Mangual



Lorraine Hansberry



Frances Glessner Lee



Etta Moten Barnett



Margaret T. Burroughs



Pearl M. Hart



Viola Spolin



introduction

Chicago Women's Park & Gardens honors the many local women throughout history who have made important contributions to the city, nation, and the world.

This booklet contains brief introductions to 65 great Chicago women—only a fraction of the many female Chicagoans who could be added to this list.

In our selection, we strived for diversity in geography, chronology, accomplishments, and ethnicity. Only women with substantial ties to the City of Chicago were considered.

Many other remarkable women who are still living or who lived just outside the City are not included here but are still equally noteworthy.

We encourage you to visit Chicago Women's Park and Gardens, where field house exhibitry and the Helping Hands Memorial to Jane Addams honor the important legacy of Chicago women.

FEATURED ABOVE

Maria Goeppert Mayer

Katherine Dunham

Frances Glessner Lee

Gwendolyn Brooks

Maria Tallchief Paschen

Addie Wyatt

★ The Chicago star signifies women who have been honored through the naming of a public space or building.



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leaders & activists



FEATURED

Addie Wyatt (1924–2012)
Civil rights activist and labor
reformer who worked closely
with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

[Read Wyatt's bio on page 13.](#)

Grace Abbott

Trailblazing social reformer Grace Abbott (1878–1939) was a champion for the rights of immigrants and children. She took up residency at Jane Addams' Hull-House in Chicago and earned a master's degree from the University of Chicago in 1909. Abbott wrote a series of weekly articles that brought attention to the exploitation of immigrants. She was also active on committees that advanced the cause of child welfare and other social issues. Serving in the Child Labor Division of the U.S. Children's Bureau alongside fellow Hull-House resident Julia Lathrop, Abbott was the bureau's director from 1917–1919 and 1921–1934. She was instrumental in incorporating social statistics into legislative policy-making, and she helped draft the Social Security Act of 1935.



Jane Addams ★

Jane Addams (1860–1935), one of the world's most influential social reformers, founded Hull-House in 1889 with Ellen Gates Starr. As America's first settlement house, Hull-House provided many services to immigrants on Chicago's West Side, including housing, child care, medical aid, and educational and vocational classes. Addams began serving on the Chicago Board of Education in 1905, and five years later, she became the first female president of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections. She helped enact child labor and compulsory education laws, as well as protective legislation for women and children. She held leadership positions in the Women's Peace Party and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. In 1931, she received the Nobel Peace Prize. Jane Addams Memorial Park and Jane Addams Park are both named in her honor.



Helen Alvarado

Bilingual education pioneer Helen Alvarado (1932–2014) began her career as a Spanish instructor at Wheaton College in the 1960s. She then went on to become a teacher at Cooper Elementary School in the early 70s. Located in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood, the school had a growing population of Latino students who spoke little or no English at home. In order to determine the student's varying levels of English proficiency, Alvarado conducted class-by-class assessments. Through these assessments, she developed study guides and lesson plans that later became models for bilingual programs across the state. In addition to teaching, Alvarado counseled and mentored hundreds of Latino women, including immigrants and young mothers.

Joan Fujisawa Arai ★

Joan Fujisawa Arai (1908–1976), a second-generation Japanese American, led a quiet life in Chicago until she was propelled into activism during WWII. In 1942, the federal government relocated her family to an internment camp in Colorado. While there, Arai set up activities for the camp's many children to keep them occupied and allay the fears of Japanese American parents who worried about their children missing years of schooling. After the war, Arai and her family settled in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood where she remained committed to community work. Arai volunteered at the YWCA and was instrumental in establishing a middle school in the neighborhood that now bears her name.



Ida B. Wells-Barnett

Born into slavery in Mississippi, Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862–1931) became the nation's most prominent anti-lynching crusader in the late 19th century. While working as a teacher in Memphis, Tennessee, she filed a lawsuit after being forcibly removed from her first-class seat on a train.

That experience propelled her to write powerful newspaper articles challenging Jim Crow laws. After three friends were lynched by a white mob in 1892, Wells began an investigation that resulted in the publication of *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*. A prolific writer and speaker, she brought national attention to the problem of white violence against African Americans. She settled in Chicago and married lawyer and editor Ferdinand L. Barnett. She campaigned for women's suffrage and helped launch several organizations, including the National Association of Colored Women and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.



Willie T. Barrow

Civil rights activist, co-founder of Operation PUSH, and reverend Willie T. Barrow (1924–2015) moved to Chicago's South Side with her husband in the early 1940s. She soon became active in the National Urban League and the National Council of Negro Women. In the 1960s, she

helped organize the Chicago Chapter of Operation Breadbasket, later renamed Operation PUSH. Nicknamed the "Little Warrior," Barrow fought tirelessly to improve the lives of minorities, including the LGBT community and particularly victims of HIV/AIDS. She advocated for fair labor practices and women's rights, and protested against the Vietnam War. Barrow was named Chicago's Woman of the Year in 1969.



Mary Bartelme ★

The first woman judge elected in Illinois, Mary Bartelme (1866–1954) was a tireless advocate for Chicago’s women and children. Born in Chicago, Bartelme taught public school before deciding to become a lawyer. She graduated from Northwestern University School of Law and was admitted to the Illinois Bar in 1894. Three years later, she became the first woman Public Guardian of Cook County. Along with other reformers, Bartelme helped establish the nation’s first juvenile court in 1899. As an Assistant Judge in the Juvenile Court, she restructured the court to better respond to the needs of girls. Bartelme became known as “Suitcase Mary” because she gave suitcases filled with respectable clothing to young women as they left the court system. She also established several “Mary’s Clubs,” group homes where girls could live safely and learn important life skills. Mary Bartelme Park is located at 115 S. Sangamon Street.



Myra Colby Bradwell

Myra Colby Bradwell (1831–1894) was one of America’s first woman lawyers. In 1868, she founded *Chicago Legal News*. The following year, she passed the Illinois bar exam with high honors but was prohibited from practicing law by the Illinois Supreme Court and U.S. Supreme Court, which stated in its 1873 decision that women had no right to practice law. Bradwell made it her mission to help women gain the right to pursue the profession of their choice. An advocate for the rights of children, the mentally ill, and inmates, Bradwell helped end Mary Todd Lincoln’s incarceration in 1875. Bradwell finally received her license to practice law in 1890.

Sophonisba Breckinridge

Social reformer and author Sophonisba Breckinridge (1866–1948) was a national leader of the social-work education movement. She earned a PhD from the University of Chicago in political science and economics in 1901 and, three years later, became the first woman to receive a Juris Doctor degree from the University of Chicago. After meeting Jane Addams in 1905, Breckinridge became active in many Hull-House causes. She joined the faculty of the University of Chicago and helped establish the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy to educate social workers. Serving as dean from 1908–1920, she played a significant role in moving the school to University of Chicago, where it became the School of Social Service Administration. A charter member of the American Association of Social Workers, she helped found the American Association of School Welfare and served as its president.

Carrie E. Bullock

Carrie E. Bullock (1887–1962) spent her life advocating for the professional advancement of African American nurses. After graduating from Chicago's Provident Hospital Training School in 1909, Bullock joined the staff of the Chicago Visiting Nurses Association. Because African American nurses were denied membership in the American Nurses' Association, the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses (NACGN) was formed. She soon became vice president of the organization, and in 1926, Bullock was elected president of the NACGN. Working to improve communication between black nurses, she founded a newsletter for the NACGN called the *National News Bulletin*. The NACGN awarded Carrie E. Bullock the Mary Mahoney Award for outstanding achievement in nursing and human services in 1938.



Jane Byrne ★

Jane Byrne (1933–2014) was Chicago's first woman mayor. In the 1960s, she held several high-level positions under Mayor Richard J. Daley. After Daley's death in 1976, Acting Mayor Michael Bilandic fired Byrne from her position as head of consumer affairs. She ran against Bilandic in 1979, and his administration's poor handling of winter snowstorms helped Byrne win by a large margin. More inclusive than previous mayors, Byrne hired the first African American woman to serve as Chicago's school superintendent. She also appointed many African American and Hispanic citizens to serve on the Board of Education. Byrne is remembered for moving into the Cabrini-Green housing projects to call attention to the violence and need for improvements there. In 2014, the City named the plaza around the historic Water Tower in honor of Byrne and renamed the Circle Interchange to the Jane Byrne Interchange.

Karen DeCrow

Born and raised in Chicago, activist and attorney Karen DeCrow (1937–2014) was deeply committed to equal rights. She joined the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1967. Soon after, she became its president. While serving, DeCrow oversaw an initiative to persuade the federal government to include sex discrimination in the Fair Housing Act. She returned to school in 1969 and was the only woman in the graduating class of Syracuse University College of Law in 1972. She devoted much of her career to promoting gender equality, eliminating age discrimination, and protecting civil liberties. DeCrow was a strong supporter of protecting the rights of men in child custody cases. She campaigned tirelessly for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, debating noted anti-feminist Phyllis Schlafly on the issue.



Helen Doria ★

Helen Doria (1951–2012) was a dynamic civic leader who enhanced the cultural vitality of Chicago. Doria began her career as a community organizer in Rogers Park. In the early 1980s, she served as Alderman David Orr's aide, working with community organizations on such projects as the creation of Berger Park. She went on to work for the City of Chicago Departments of Special Events and Cultural Affairs. In the 1990s, she joined the Chicago Park District and made arts and cultural programming a district-wide priority. In 2004, Doria became Millennium Park's first executive director. Several years later, she began working as a consultant on arts, culture, and public spaces, spearheading high-profile projects such as the 606. Born and raised on Chicago's Southwest Side, Doria lived on Columbia Avenue in Rogers Park for much of her adult life. Helen Doria Beach Park is located at the foot of Columbia Avenue.

Fannie Hagen Emanuel

Physician and reformer Fannie Hagen Emanuel (1871–1934) belonged to Chicago's African American elite. She used her position to support the Frederick Douglass Center, the city's first settlement house that served African Americans. In 1908, she studied social work at Chicago's Graham Taylor School of Civics and Philanthropy and soon opened her own settlement house. Known as the Emanuel House, the center was available to people of all races. Due to a lack of support, Emanuel had to close her settlement house after a few years. She decided to study medicine, and received her medical degree in 1915. She went on to build a medical practice dedicated to serving women and children. Emanuel also served as president of the African American women's branch of the YWCA and was a member of the Board of Directors for the Phyllis Wheatley Home for Girls from 1922–1927.

Lillian Herstein

Lillian Herstein (1886–1983) is best known as an organizer for the Labor Movement in Chicago. Herstein graduated from Northwestern University in 1907. In 1912, she became a teacher and joined the Women's Federation of High School Teachers, serving as the Federation's delegate to the Chicago Federation of Labor. When the Chicago Teacher's Union formed in 1937, Herstein represented the union in the Federation, serving as the only woman on its executive board for twenty-five years. She later became a union organizer when asked by the Women's Trade Union League to speak about the league's educational programs for workers. Herstein remained a passionate supporter of social justice until her death.

Nancy Jefferson ★

Nurse, social worker, and civic leader Nancy Jefferson (1923–1992) spent more than thirty years championing civil rights, advocating open and affordable housing, crusading for improved health care, and advocating for prison reform in Chicago. After volunteering at the Midwest Community Council on the city's West Side for several years, she became the organization's director in 1963. She remained involved with the civic organization for the rest of her life. Nancy Jefferson Park is located at 3101 W. Fulton Boulevard, only a few blocks from the Midwest Community Council's headquarters.



Mary Jane Richardson Jones ★

Abolitionist and philanthropist Mary Jane Richardson Jones (1820–1910) played an important role in Chicago's Underground Railroad. Born free in Tennessee, she married John Jones, the son of a freed slave. They moved to Chicago in 1845, joining the city's small African American community. They soon joined the Underground Railroad Movement that helped relocate runaway slaves from the South to cities in the North and Canada. Using their own home as a stop on the Underground Railroad, Jones and her husband risked imprisonment, a possible outcome for free blacks caught harboring slaves. Jones was also a suffragette and prominent civic leader in Chicago's growing African American community. Mary Jane Richardson Jones Park is located at 1220 S. Plymouth Court.

Florence Kelley

Social reformer Florence Kelley (1859–1932) helped protect the rights of children, women, and the working class. After graduating from Cornell University, she travelled to Europe and attended the University of Zurich. She married a socialist Russian medical student in 1884 and returned to America with her husband two years later. The couple separated in 1891 and subsequently divorced. Kelley then came to Chicago and moved into Jane Addams' Hull-House. In 1892, Kelley investigated the garment industry for the Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, and was later appointed Chief Factory Inspector of Illinois. She also produced a study on tenement conditions in Chicago. In 1899, Kelley became head of the National Consumers League in New York. Kelley also helped found the NAACP in 1909. She served as vice president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association and was a founding member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Her reforms in Illinois provided the basis for the federal Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938.

Julia Lathrop

Julia Lathrop (1858–1932) moved to Chicago in 1890 and joined other social reformers at Hull-House, where she campaigned to persuade Congress to pass legislation protecting children, as well as people with mental challenges and disabilities. While at Hull-House, Lathrop undertook an extensive survey of living conditions in the surrounding tenement districts. She also investigated numerous mental health organizations, orphanages, shelters, and soup kitchens on behalf of the Illinois State Board of Charities, visiting all 102 poorhouses in Illinois. In 1899, Lathrop collaborated with other reformers, including Mary Bartelme, to establish the nation's first juvenile court in Chicago. In 1912, Lathrop became the first chief of the federal Children's Bureau in the Department of Commerce and Labor. She held this position for nine years—doing groundbreaking work on infant mortality, juvenile delinquency, and child labor—before Grace Abbott succeeded her.

Eppie Friedman Lederer

Best known as Ann Landers, Eppie Friedman Lederer (1918–2002) was a famous newspaper columnist. She and her twin sister Pauline Esther Friedman (who later wrote Dear Abby) wrote a gossip column together in the school newspaper when they attended Morningside College in Sioux City, Iowa. Lederer settled in Chicago with her husband in 1954. When Ruth Crowley, creator of the “Ask Ann Landers” column, died the following year, Lederer won a contest to take over the *Chicago Sun-Times* advice column. Lederer quickly became a nationwide celebrity. In 2002, the Chicago City Council passed a two-page resolution honoring Eppie's “strong opinion, sage-like advice, and impeccable manners.”



Maria T. Mangual

Social activist and civic leader Maria T. Mangual (1944–2007) came to Chicago with her husband in the early 1970s. Mangual founded *Mujeres Latinas en Acción*, a social agency that provides reproductive services and childcare to Latinas, while also promoting nonviolent advocacy and empowerment through initiatives to develop leadership skills. Mangual was also involved with the Chicago Foundation for Women, serving as their chairwoman from 1994–1996, and later serving as director of development. Mangual was active with the foundation's Latina Leadership Council. She received awards and recognition from a variety of organizations, such as Outstanding Leadership from The Women's Funding Network and *Mujeres Latinas en Acción*. Mangual was also included on a list in *Today's Chicago Woman* magazine's 100 Influential Women.

Ruth Hanna McCormick

Suffragist and U.S. Congresswoman Ruth Hanna McCormick (1880–1944) learned about politics while working as personal secretary to her father, Ohio Senator Marcus Alonzo Hanna. In 1903, she married J. Medill McCormick, grandson of *Chicago Tribune* publisher Joseph Medill. She became involved in many Chicago reform efforts. In 1913, she headed the Congressional Committee for the National American Woman Suffrage Association, remaining active in suffrage efforts until women gained the right to vote in 1920. McCormick chaired the first woman's executive committee of the Republican National Committee and served as an associate member of the National Committee from 1919–1924. Elected to the U.S. Congress in 1928, McCormick was the first woman to serve on the House Committee on Naval Affairs. After a successful term in the House of Representatives, she received the Republican nomination for the U.S. Senate, but did not win the general election.

Angela Perez Miller

Angela Perez Miller (1937–2007) was passionate about education for Chicago's Latino children and served as an educator with the Chicago Public Schools for more than 30 years. Having received two master's degrees and a PhD, she went on to teach bilingual education and educational policy at DePaul University and the University of Illinois–Chicago. Senator Miguel del Valle appointed her to his education committee. Miller was also a founding member of the Alivio Medical Center, which provides primary healthcare to Latino communities. Miller also served as board president of the Latino Institute, a civil rights think tank that has been addressing Latino concerns in Chicago for over twenty-five years.

Dawn Clark Netsch

Lawyer, professor, and politician Dawn Clark Netsch (1926–2013) graduated first in her class from Northwestern University School of Law in 1952. As chief aide to Illinois Governor Otto Kerner from 1961–1965, she was the first woman in the position. She went on to become the first female faculty member at Northwestern University School of Law. In 1970, Netsch served as a delegate at the Illinois Constitutional Convention, and in 1972, she was elected to the Illinois State Senate. Considered one of the state's most progressive and influential senators, Netsch served for eighteen years. Elected as Illinois Comptroller in 1990, she became the highest ranked woman in the state at the time. As the first woman nominated by a major political party to run for governor of Illinois, she won the Democratic primary in the 1994 gubernatorial but lost to Republican Jim Edgar in the general election. Netsch was inducted into the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame for her support for LGBT issues.



Bertha Honoré Palmer ★

Philanthropist, civic leader, and proponent of women's rights, Bertha Honoré Palmer (1849–1918) was married to Potter Palmer, the self-made millionaire who owned a Chicago dry goods store that became known as Marshall Field and Company. The couple established the fashionable Palmer House Hotel, quickly rebuilding after the original structure was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1871. Bertha Honoré Palmer played a leading role in prominent organizations, such as the Chicago Woman's Club, Society of Decorative Arts, Fortnightly Club, and Chicago Civic Federation. She often used her influence to advance women's causes. She served as president of the Board of Lady Managers for the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. Avid art collectors, the Palmers lent priceless Impressionist paintings for display in the Fine Arts Palace during the World's Fair. She also bequeathed a substantial collection of world-class art to the Art Institute of Chicago. Bertha Honoré Palmer Park is located at 916 N. Honore St.



Lucy Ella Gonzales Parsons ★

Lucy Ella Gonzales Parsons (1853–1942) was a labor reformer and women's rights activist. Born of a mixed Native American, African American, and possibly Hispanic heritage, she married socialist newspaper editor and labor organizer Albert Parsons. (One of several anarchists convicted for conspiracy to commit murder, he is considered a martyr of the Haymarket incident.) In 1878, Lucy Parsons helped organize the Working Women's Union No. 1 (WWU). At the time, this was the only trade union in Chicago with female members. In 1905, she helped found the Industrial Workers of the World along with other radicals, such as Eugene Debs and Mother Jones. Parsons was a powerful orator and prolific writer. Her work appeared in such publications as *The Socialist*, *Freedom: A Revolutionary Anarchist-Communist Monthly*, and the *Liberator*. Lucy Parsons Park is located at 4712 W. Belmont Ave., near the apartment where she lived towards the end of her life.

Tobey Prinz ★

Teacher, community activist, and parks advocate Tobey Prinz (1911–1984) made substantial contributions to her Rogers Park neighborhood and Chicago as a whole. She was a longtime member of the Chicago Teachers Union and served on the Board of Truman City College. Prinz helped organize “Education vs. Racism,” one of the earliest conferences in America to promote the teaching of African American studies in the schools. She was a founder of the Rogers Park Community Council and served as the organization’s conservation committee chairwoman and vice president. A strong proponent for parks and open space in Rogers Park, she led a “Save the Beaches” campaign in the early 1960s (when lakefront property in Rogers Park was threatened by development) and advocated to save green space by converting the Bryn Mawr Country Club into Warren Park. Tobey Prinz Beach Park is located near the foot of Pratt Avenue and Lake Michigan.



Guadalupe Reyes ★

Activist and community leader Guadalupe Reyes (1918–2000) helped improve her South Lawndale community. One of eight children of a Mexican immigrant family, Reyes had little formal education, but discovered she had strong leadership skills. In the 1950s, as the mother of a child with severe disabilities caused by spinal meningitis, she couldn’t find adequate services in her neighborhood. Frustration sparked her fifty-year campaign to establish social services for her community. In 1969, she opened a school for children with developmental disabilities called Esperanza. In 1973, she founded another organization known as El Valor. Still active today, El Valor provides services to children, families, seniors, and people with disabilities. Over her lifetime, Reyes received many honors and awards, including a Kraft Foods scholarship named in her honor and an El Valor Children and Family Center that bears her name. Guadalupe Reyes Park is located at 821 W. 19th St.

Maria del Jesus Saucedo ★

Community activist and teacher Maria del Jesus Saucedo (1954–1981) was born in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico, and raised in Chicago. She attended NIU in 1973 and founded the Chicano Student Union in 1974. Saucedo valued education and felt it was a key factor in improving the living conditions of Mexican Americans. She later taught English as a second language at the Pickard School. She earned a master's degree in bilingual studies from DePaul University and co-founded the Mexican Teacher's Organization. Having dedicated her life to helping improve the lives of Mexican Americans, she was active in many organizations in the Pilsen neighborhood. The Maria Saucedo Scholastic Academy is located in the Little Village neighborhood.

Ellen Gates Starr ★

Working alongside Jane Addams, Ellen Gates Starr (1859–1940) was one of Chicago's most important social reformers. Starr and Addams founded Hull-House on Halsted Street in Chicago in 1889 after Addams' visit to one of the world's first social settlements, England's Thornbee Hall. Starr's deep interest in the arts soon spurred progressive programs at Hull-House. Hull-House also had an art gallery frequented by residents, immigrants who lived nearby, and Chicago's cultural elite. Starr helped found the Chicago Public School Art Society in 1894, and the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society in 1897. Starr also fought tirelessly for both women's and workers' rights. She became involved in helping workers form unions and strike for better pay and improved working conditions. Ellen Gates Starr Park is located at 2306 W. Maypole Avenue.

Mamie Till-Mobley ★

Mamie Till-Mobley (1921–2003) helped spur America's Civil Rights Movement after her son, Emmett Till, was lynched in 1955. Born in Mississippi, Till-Mobley grew up in Argo, Illinois. At eighteen, she married Louis Till, and gave birth to Emmett the following year. The couple soon separated, and Mamie and Emmett moved to the South Side of Chicago. In 1955, she sent fourteen-year-old Emmett to spend part of the summer with relatives in Mississippi. Days later, Emmett was brutally murdered after a white woman accused him of "sassing" her. Till-Mobley insisted on showing the world what happened by giving her son an open-casket funeral. She spoke out against racial violence and galvanized support for the NAACP. Although an all-white, southern jury acquitted the murderers, his accuser admitted she lied in 2008. Efforts are underway to reopen the murder case. Mamie Till-Mobley Park is located at 6404 S. Ellis, only blocks from where Mamie and Emmett lived in the early 1950s.

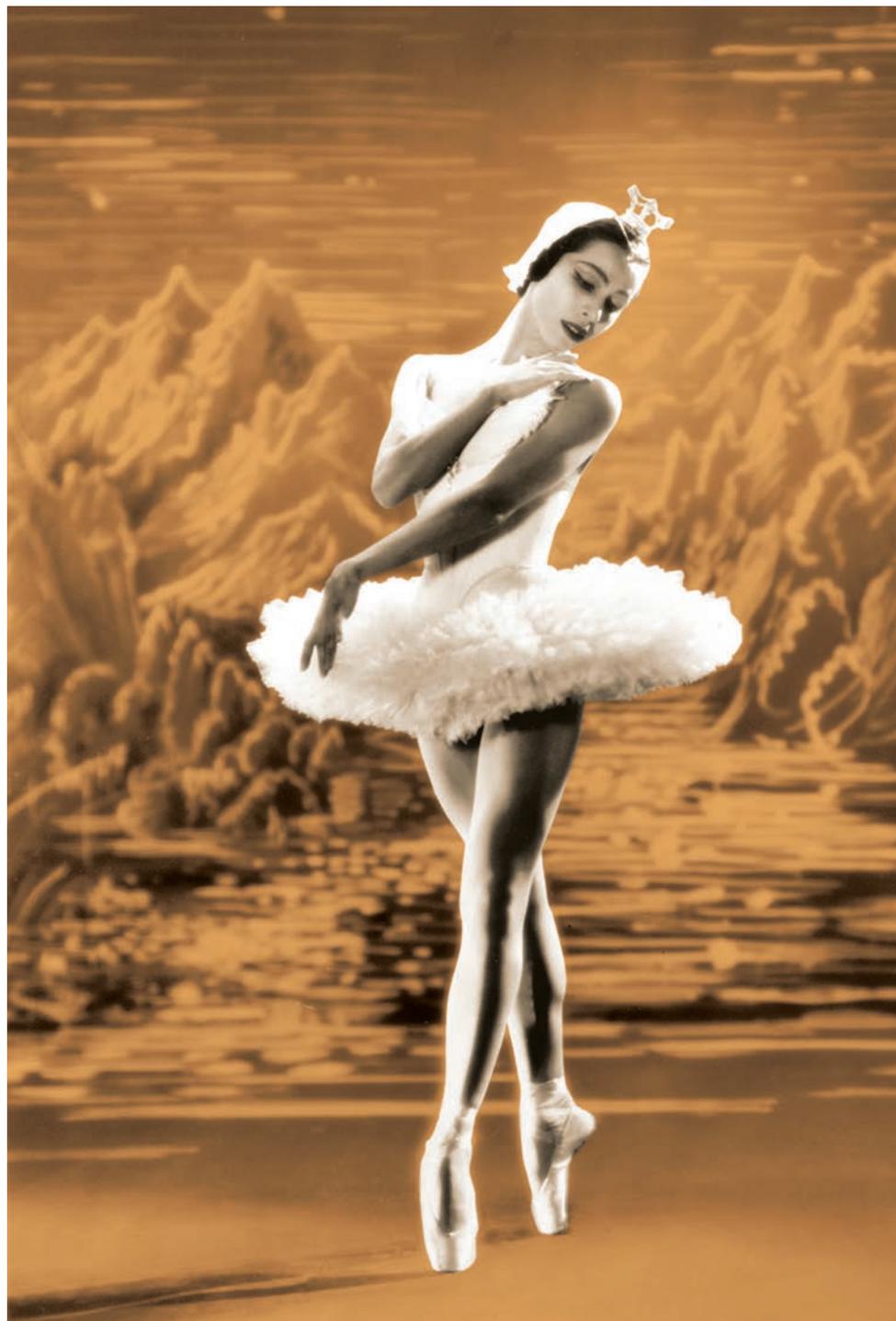
Hattie Kay Williams ★

Social worker Hattie Kay Williams (1922–1990) was a dynamic community leader. Inspired after learning about the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case, she became committed to integrating and improving Oakenwald School in her own neighborhood. Williams became the first African American president of the school's Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and organized fundraisers and programs to better the lives of minority children. She soon headed the Southeast Council PTA, covering more than forty schools. When Superintendent Benjamin Willis refused to integrate the Chicago Public Schools, Williams organized protests and befriended nationally syndicated columnist Ann Landers, who attracted media attention for the cause. Williams also helped establish a Head Start pilot site, food pantry, rape prevention programs, community services for teen mothers, and programs to address domestic and gang violence. Williams-Davis Park at 4101 S. Lake Ave. honors Hattie Kay Williams, along with another activist, Izora Davis.



Addie Wyatt

Civil rights activist and labor reformer Addie Wyatt (1924–2012) was the first African American woman elected as international vice president of a major labor union. She began working in a Chicago canning factory in the 1940s and soon joined the United Packinghouse Workers of America. Appreciative of the union's commitment to anti-discrimination, she became a UPWA leader, focusing on fighting race and gender-based inequities. Elected as president of her local union, she rose to the position of international Vice President of the United and Commercial Workers in the 1950s. She also became an ordained minister who was deeply committed to civil rights reforms. Working closely with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Wyatt served as labor advisor to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and participated in Chicago's Freedom Movement. In 1984, Wyatt retired to become a full-time minister. She founded the Wyatt Family Community Center in Chicago, and remained committed to civil rights reforms for the rest of her life.





visionaries & artists



FEATURED

Maria Tallchief Paschen (1925–2013)
An Osage Tribe member who became
America's first Native American prima
ballerina of a major dance company

[Read Tallchief Paschen's bio on page 19.](#)



Etta Moten Barnett

Actress, singer, and civic activist Etta Moten Barnett (1901–2004) was one of the nation's first African American female movie stars. She received acclaim for her performance in *Flying Down to Rio* with Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire in 1933. The following year, she married Chicagoan Claude Barnett, founder of the Associated Negro Press. Later that year, Barnett was invited to sing at the White House by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, making her the first African American woman to receive that honor. In 1942, she starred as Bess in the Broadway opera revival of *Porgy and Bess*, a role George Gershwin reportedly wrote with Etta Moten Barnett in mind. In addition to a successful career, Barnett was extremely committed to social justice, women's issues, global affairs, and Chicago cultural institutions.



Gwendolyn Brooks ★

One of the nation's most beloved poets, Gwendolyn Brooks, (1917–2000) was the first African American author to win a Pulitzer Prize. Born in Topeka, Kansas, Brooks grew up in Chicago and lived on the city's South Side. She began writing as a teenager and achieved fame in 1945 for *A Street in Bronzeville*, a collection of poems illuminating the difficulties for black people in urban America. In 1967, she wrote poetry for the unveiling of Chicago's Picasso sculpture and the "Wall of Respect," a South Side mural featuring black heroes. She served as the Illinois Poet Laureate for more than thirty years. Gwendolyn Brooks Park is located at 4534-40 S. Greenwood Avenue.



Margaret T. Burroughs ★

Margaret T. Burroughs (1917–2010) was an accomplished Chicago artist, teacher, and museum founder. Born in Louisiana, she moved to Chicago with her family during the Great Migration. After receiving degrees from the School of the Art Institute, she helped establish the South Side Community Art Center in 1941. Twenty years later, Margaret and her husband, Charles Burroughs, founded the DuSable Museum, one of the nation's first African American history museums. The institution initially operated from their own South Side home. In 1986, Mayor Harold Washington appointed Burroughs to serve on the Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners. She spearheaded the creation of cultural centers and made many other contributions to Chicago's parks. Margaret Burroughs Beach Park is located at 3100 S. Lake Shore Drive.

Claudia Cassidy ★

Claudia Cassidy (1899–1996) was a prolific arts critic who reviewed music, dance, and drama. In 1925, she became *The Journal of Commerce's* drama and music critic and was later hired by the *Chicago Tribune*. Her column, “On the Aisle,” quickly became well known in Chicago. Cassidy’s candid, energetic, and often scathing reviews earned her the nickname, “Acidy Cassidy.” Despite her excessive criticisms, Cassidy is credited with helping to launch or further the careers of many artists, including playwright Tennessee Williams. Cassidy was a fervent supporter of the Lyric Opera, and in 1997, the Chicago Cultural Center named a theater in her honor.



Maggie Daley ★

Chicago’s longtime first lady, Maggie Daley (1943–2011) was deeply committed to providing cultural opportunities for all of the city’s residents. Born and raised in Pennsylvania, Margaret Ann Corbett graduated from the University of Dayton in 1965. While working for the Xerox Corporation in Chicago, she met and married Richard M. Daley, son of longtime Chicago mayor Richard J. Daley. When her husband was elected Mayor of Chicago in 1989, Maggie Daley led efforts to rehabilitate the historic Chicago Cultural Center. She went on to establish Gallery 37 and After School Matters. She was also involved in projects with many other civic organizations, including the Golden Apple Foundation, and Children at the Crossroads Foundation. Maggie Daley Park is on the northeast side of Grant Park.



Katherine Dunham

Legendary dancer Katherine Dunham (1909–2006) became interested in dance while studying anthropology at the University of Chicago. Dunham founded the Negro Dance Group, and was soon invited to appear before the Julius Rosenwald Foundation. Devoted to “the well-being of mankind,” the Foundation began to support Dunham’s dance studies. Dunham travelled to Haiti, and other nearby islands, where she studied Afro-Caribbean dance over the next two years. After returning home, Dunham opened a dance studio in Chicago, and earned the nickname “Matriarch of Black Dance.” Known as a pioneer in the use of folk and ethnic choreography, Dunham is also credited with developing an important pedagogy for dance, often referred to as the “Dunham Technique,” which is still used today.



Lorraine Hansberry ★

Acclaimed African American playwright Lorraine Hansberry (1930–1965) was born and raised on the South Side of Chicago. During her early childhood, her father challenged racial housing restrictions by purchasing a home in an all-white neighborhood. The family suffered discrimination and racial violence, a theme that later influenced her work. In 1956, Hansberry wrote *A Raisin in the Sun*, the first play on Broadway by an African American author. Three years later, she became the youngest person, and first African American writer, to win the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play of the Year. Lorraine Hansberry Park is located at 5635 S. Indiana Avenue, less than two miles from Hansberry's childhood home in the Woodlawn community.



Mahalia Jackson ★

Mahalia Jackson (1911–1972) is widely considered the “World’s Greatest Gospel Singer.” Born in New Orleans, Jackson moved to Chicago as a teenager with hopes of becoming a nurse. While working as a laundress, she joined the Greater Salem Baptist Church and began singing in the Johnson Gospel Choir. She became popular for her beautiful, warm, contralto voice, and in the 1930s, she began touring and recording albums. She performed at Carnegie Hall in 1950, and had her own television show in 1954. She became involved in the Civil Rights Movement, and sang at the 1963 March on Washington at the request of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Mahalia Jackson Park is located at 8385 S. Bickhoff Avenue, a few blocks away from the home she purchased in 1956.

Ardis Krainik ★

Mezzo-soprano singer Ardis Krainik (1929–1997) served as general director of Chicago's Lyric Opera for more than a decade. A graduate of Northwestern University, she began her career in the dual role as a clerical secretary and mezzo-soprano performer at the Lyric Opera. After being promoted to assistant manager, she helped guide the Lyric through a period of financial hardship. In 1981, she was promoted to general director, a position she held through the 1990s. In 1996, she was appointed a member of the National Endowment of the Arts, and later that year, the interior of Chicago's Civic Opera House was renamed as the Ardis Krainik Theatre to honor her forty-three years of service.

Evelyn Beatrice Longman

Sculptor Evelyn Beatrice Longman (1874–1954) was the first woman admitted to the National Academy of Design. Born in Ohio, she and her family settled in Chicago during her early childhood. As a teenager, Longman took night classes at the School of the Art Institute. After briefly attending college in Michigan, she returned to Chicago to study full-time at the Art Institute under sculptor Lorado Taft. Longman graduated in 1900 and moved to New York, where she served as Daniel Chester French's only female studio assistant. She received critical praise for a large-scale male figure known as Victory, displayed at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. In 1915, Longman sculpted the "Genius of Electricity" to top the AT&T corporate headquarters, then in Manhattan. Five years later, she collaborated with French on the iconic Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C.



Harriet Monroe

Chicago poet, journalist, and founder of Poetry Magazine, Harriet Monroe (1860–1936) played an important role in Chicago's Literary Movement. Born and raised in Chicago, she moved to New York in 1888 to serve as a *Chicago Tribune* correspondent. The following year, she returned home to focus on writing poetry. She convinced the World's Columbian Exposition planning committee to allow her to write an ode for the opening of the fair. After the exposition, she produced a biography of her brother-in-law, Chicago architect, John W. Root. In 1911, she began asking philanthropists to sponsor a magazine devoted solely to poetry. The next year, she published the first issue of *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*. Still in existence today, *Poetry Magazine* has been published continually since 1912.



Maria Tallchief Paschen

Osage Tribe member Maria Tallchief (1925–2013) broke racial barriers as America's first Native American prima ballerina of a major dance company. Born in Oklahoma, she and her younger sister Marjorie began formal ballet lessons during early childhood. At seventeen, Tallchief moved to New York where she became first prima ballerina of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and then the New York City Ballet under choreographer George Ballanchine. She popularized roles in ballets like "The Nutcracker" and "The Firebird." She married Chicagoan Henry "Buzz" Paschen in 1956. After retiring from dance a decade later, she actively promoted ballet in Chicago. Tallchief served as the director of ballet for the Lyric Opera of Chicago from 1973–1979. Two years later, she and her sister founded the Chicago City Ballet, with Maria serving as artistic director until 1987. Tallchief received a Kennedy Center Honor for Lifetime Achievement.

Lucy Fitch Perkins

Artist, illustrator, and writer, Lucy Fitch Perkins (1865–1937) was America’s most popular early 20th century children’s author. After graduating from Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts School in 1886, she worked as a book illustrator for the Prang Educational Company. In 1891, she married architect Dwight H. Perkins, and the couple soon moved to his hometown, Chicago. After her marriage, Fitch Perkins became active with many progressive organizations, such as the Chicago Woman’s Club. She also continued working professionally as an artist—painting murals, lecturing, and illustrating children’s books. In 1906, she produced *The Goose Girl: A Mother’s Lap Book of Rhymes and Pictures*, which she wrote and illustrated. In 1911, she published *The Dutch Twins*, the first in a widely successful series of books meant to broaden children’s understanding of other cultures and life during earlier periods in history. She published twenty-six books in the *Twins* series, and her books sold over two million copies.



Viola Spolin

Actress, educator, and author, Viola Spolin (1906–1994) transformed American theater and theatrical training. Nicknamed the “Mother of Improvisational Theater,” she developed theater games as a new approach to actor training. After studying to be a settlement house worker

under Hull-House resident Neva Boyd, Spolin began working as a drama supervisor for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Recreation Program in Chicago. She soon developed a series of theater games that focused upon creativity and free expression. Spolin’s Theater Games spurred the first generation of improvisational theater in America. Her son, Paul Sills, used Spolin’s techniques when he founded Chicago’s Compass Players, which became the basis for Second City. From 1960–1965, Spolin was workshop director for Second City. Spolin wrote extensively on the subject of improvisational theater. Northwestern University Press published her first and most influential book, *Improvisation for the Theater: A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques*.

Koko Taylor

Koko Taylor (1928–2009) was nicknamed the “Queen of Chicago Blues.” Born in Tennessee as Cora Ann Walton, she and her husband, Robert “Pops” Taylor, moved to Chicago in the 1950s. Pops encouraged her to begin singing with blues bands at the South Side clubs they often frequented. Blues musician and record producer, Willie Dixon, discovered Taylor and helped launch her career. In 1965, she got her first recording contract with Chess Records to sing “Wang Dang Doodle,” a song that Dixon had written. Remembered for her brassy voice and powerful vocals, Taylor was influenced by such early blues legends as Bessie Smith, Big Mama Thornton, and Memphis Minnie. Taylor is credited with influencing other famous artists, including Bonnie Raitt, and Janis Joplin. She won a Grammy in 1985.



Lois Weisberg

Lois Weisberg (1925–2016) was a dynamic and creative force who left a major imprint on Chicago’s cultural scene. In 1983, Mayor Harold Washington appointed her to head of the City’s Office of Events. Soon after the election of Mayor Richard M. Daley in 1989, she became Commissioner of Cultural Affairs, a position she held until January 2011. She initiated many new cultural programs, such as Gallery 37, an initiative that transformed an empty lot downtown into a vibrant arts apprenticeship program. In 1999, she spearheaded the outdoor exhibit, “Cows on Parade,” through which hundreds of local artists decorated fiberglass cows located throughout the city. Co-founder of Friends of the Parks, Weisberg oversaw the transfer of what is now Women’s Park from the City to the Chicago Park District, with the goal of honoring famous Chicago women.





trailblazers & innovators

FEATURED

Bessie Coleman (1892–1926)
One of the world's first female
African American pilots

[Read Coleman's bio on page 24.](#)





Bessie Coleman ★

Bessie Coleman (1892–1926) was one of the world's first female African American pilots. Born in Texas, Coleman moved to Chicago in her early twenties and worked as a manicurist in a South Side barbershop. After WWI soldiers told her they had seen women fly planes in Europe, she decided to become a pilot. Prominent African Americans helped her underwrite the costs of attending flight school in France, and Coleman became the first African American flyer to hold an international pilot's license. She performed flight stunts in exhibitions in the US and abroad, and often campaigned against the segregation of audiences at these exhibitions. She died in a plane crash during an aerial show rehearsal. Bessie Coleman Park is located at 5445 S. Drexel Avenue.

Margaret Donahue ★

Margaret Donahue (1892–1978) was one of the first women executives in major league baseball. Born on a farm in Huntley, Illinois, she moved to Chicago at the age of sixteen to find a job as a secretary. In 1919, with only one year of high school, a year of secretarial training, and a brief position at a laundry, Donahue was hired as the stenographer for William Veeck, president of the Chicago Cubs (and father of longtime Cubs owner, Bill Veeck). She worked her way up to corporate secretary in 1926 and vice president of the Cubs in 1950. She brought many innovations to professional baseball, such as offering season tickets, providing off-site ticket locations, and selling reduced-priced tickets for children. Margaret Donahue Park is located at 1230 W. School Street.



Ella Flagg Young ★

Chicagoan Ella Flagg Young (1845–1918) was the first woman to head the school system of a major American city. She began her career in 1862, at the age of seventeen, as a Chicago Public School teacher. She became a principal in 1876, and the assistant to the superintendent of Chicago schools in 1887. Studying part-time at the University of Chicago, she earned a PhD under renowned educational reformer, John Dewey. The University of Chicago soon hired her as a professor of education. In 1905, Flagg Young became the principal of the Chicago Normal School. The Chicago Board of Education appointed her as superintendent of schools in 1909. Despite some political turmoil, Flagg Young remained in the position until 1915, enacting reforms, such as improving teaching training, and increasing opportunities for vocational training in the schools. The Ella Flagg Young Elementary School is located in Chicago's Austin neighborhood.



Frances Glessner Lee

Frances Glessner Lee (1878–1962), the daughter of wealthy Chicagoans John and Frances Glessner, dedicated her life to advancing forensic medicine and scientific crime detection. In the 1940s, she began creating the Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death, small dioramas depicting, in great detail, real unsolved crime scenes. Still used today, the models helped train detectives, private investigators, and medical examiners. Glessner Lee also hosted a series of seminars on homicide investigation, and provided an endowment for forensic studies at Harvard University. Admired by scientists and detectives throughout the nation, Frances Glessner Lee became known as the “Mother of Forensic Science.”



Maria Goeppert Mayer

Maria Goeppert Mayer (1906–1972), a Nobel Prize winning physicist, was the third woman to win a Nobel Prize in science. Goeppert was born in Kattowicz, Germany, and from a young age had an unquenchable curiosity for science. In 1924, Goeppert entered Göttingen University, and in 1930, she earned a doctoral degree in physics. Later, she moved to Maryland with her husband, where she taught physics for a number of years. In 1946, the University of Chicago hired her to serve as a professor in the physics department and the Institute for Nuclear Studies. The University of Chicago was also home to the Argonne National Laboratory, where Goeppert was employed as a senior physicist.



Vivian Gordon Harsh ★

Vivian Gordon Harsh (1890–1960) was a librarian devoted to African American studies, well before the topic received public attention. In 1924, after receiving a degree from Simmons College Library School in Boston, she became the first African American to head a branch of the Chicago Public Library. Along with other South Siders, she pushed for a full-service branch in Bronzeville. Philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, who agreed to help finance the new library, awarded Harsh a traveling scholarship as part of the effort. When the new George Cleveland Hall branch opened in 1932, Harsh became its first director. She organized literary clubs to review works by black authors, and began collecting materials related to African American history. Today, the Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature is housed at Carter G. Woodson Regional Library, and Harsh Park is located at 4458-70 S. Oakenwald Ave., close to her childhood home.



Pearl M. Hart

Legal pioneer and activist Pearl M. Hart (1890–1975) was one of the first women to practice criminal law. She was also the first woman attorney to be appointed as a public defender in the Morals Court, where she represented children, women, and immigrants, for minimal or no fee.

Nicknamed the “Guardian Angel of Chicago’s Gay Community,” Hart defended many members of the gay community against entrapment and harassment perpetrated by members of Chicago’s police force. Hart worked tirelessly to get anti-entrapment laws passed, as well as right-to-privacy laws. In addition to gay rights, Hart defended immigrants in deportation proceedings. Hart was posthumously inducted into the Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame in 1992.

Harriet Gerber Lewis

Businesswoman and philanthropist Harriet Gerber Lewis (1919–2001) was the first woman to become a top executive in the plumbing industry, and accomplished many significant “firsts.” Lewis was the first woman general campaign chair of the Jewish United Fund, the first woman honored with the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago’s Julius Rosenwald Award, and the first woman honored as America Israel Chamber of Commerce’s “Industrialist of the Year.” Gerber Lewis was regarded as a role model in her community, and generously gave her time and money to important causes. She was one of only six people who helped raise more than \$26 million in the Chicago area to help build the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.



Margaret Hie Ding Lin ★

Margaret Hie Ding Lin (1888–1973) was one of the nation’s earliest Chinese women doctors. After attending China’s Fuzhou College, and graduating in 1907, she came to Chicago to attend medical school at the University of Illinois. Lin was one of the nation’s earliest Chinese immigrants to attend

medical school, and among a small number of female doctors at that time. After completing an internship at Mary Thompson Hospital for Women and Children, she returned to China and had a prestigious career as a doctor and hospital president. In 1941, she came back to Chicago to work at the University of Illinois Medical Center, and later, the Illinois Department of Public Welfare. Recognizing that Chicago’s Chinese community had inadequate medical care, she founded a free clinic in Chinatown, and devoted countless hours attending to patients there. Margaret Hie Ding Lin Park is in Chinatown at 1735 S. State Street.



Marion Mahony Griffin ★

The New York Times hailed Marion Mahony Griffin (1871–1961) as a “Heroine of Chicago Architecture.” Born in Chicago, and raised in Winnetka, Illinois, Mahony received a degree in architecture from MIT in 1894. She returned to Chicago, and became the first licensed woman architect in Illinois.

Early in her career, Mahony worked for architect Frank Lloyd Wright, producing exquisite drawings that helped him achieve fame. In 1911, she married architect Walter Burley Griffin. Together, the couple won a competition to design Australia’s new capital, Canberra. After her husband’s death in 1937, Mahony Griffin moved back to Chicago and lived in her family’s Rogers Park home for the rest of her life. Marion Mahony Griffin Beach Park is located at the foot of W. Jarvis Avenue.



Archange [Marie] Chevalier Ouilmette

Archange [Marie] Chevalier Ouilmette (c. 1781–1840), one of Chicago’s earliest residents, was of French and Potawatomi descent (also known as a *métis*). Though there is little known about her, due to lack of documentation during this period, she is credited for saving two people during Chicago’s 1812

Fort Dearborn Massacre by hiding them in her home. It is believed that Archange also helped to guide traders and their cargo safely across the river, and was influential in encouraging trade deals between the Potawatomi people and French fur traders. Her husband, Antoine Ouilmette, was granted 1,200 acres of land by the 1829 Second Treaty of Prairie du Chien. The site was later named Wilmette, to honor the Ouilmette family.

Esther Rothstein

Prominent attorney Esther Rothstein (1912–1998) was the first woman president of the Chicago Bar Association, a group that refused to allow women members for many years. She began her legal career as a secretary for the law firm McCarthy and Levin in 1947, and earned her law degree in 1949. Rothstein became partner of the firm in 1955, one of the few women law partners at that time. In 1966, she was a founding member and president of the Woman’s Bar Foundation, which has provided hundreds of scholarships to women law students. From 1961–1962, she served as president of the Women’s Bar Association of Illinois, which was formed in 1914. She was elected president of the Chicago Bar Association in 1977. Devoted to many civic organizations, Rothstein served as director of the Youth Justice Institute and the Illinois Pro Bono Center, and vice president of the Mary Bartelme Home for Girls. Rothstein received the American Bar Association’s Margaret Bent Women Lawyer’s Achievement Award.

Jacqueline Vaughn ★

Jacqueline Vaughn (1935–1994), the first African American woman to serve as president of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), was one of the nation's strongest union leaders. Vaughn began her career as a special education teacher in the Chicago Public Schools in 1956. The following year, she began serving on the CTU's 800-member House of Delegates. Elected secretary of the CTU in 1968, she rose to the position of president in 1984, and retained that position until 1994. She also served in leadership roles in the Illinois Federation of Teachers, and the American Federation of Teachers. The Chicago Public Schools were in crisis in the 1980s. Vaughn led the union through numerous strikes during this period, including a month-long strike in 1987. This strike resulted in pay increases for teachers, and a reduction in class sizes. The Jacqueline B. Vaughn Occupational High School and the CTU Quest Center have been named in her honor.

Chi Che Wang ★

Chi Che Wang (1894–1979) was an accomplished scientist and teacher who participated in many civic efforts in Chicago. Born in China, Wang came to America to obtain a good education. She received a bachelor's degree from Wellesley College in 1914, and then attended the University of Chicago, where she received a master's degree in chemistry in 1916, and a PhD in nutrition and chemistry in 1918. Soon after arriving in Chicago, she helped found the Chicago Chinese Women's Club, a group with which she remained active for a decade. She taught for several years at the University of Chicago, and was then hired as a department head to conduct medical research for Michael Reese Hospital. She was elected as a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1922. Chi Che Wang Playlot Park is located at 1719 W. Wolfram Street.



Kate Warne

Kate Warne (1833–1868) was one of the nation's first female detectives. In 1856, she responded to a classified advertisement placed by Allan Pinkerton, who was looking for a detective for his Chicago-based detective agency. Although few, if any, women worked in investigative or law enforcement positions at that time, Pinkerton gave Warne the job. She quickly proved herself as a competent and clever investigator. She went undercover, sometimes disguised as a man, to help the Union gather intelligence during the Civil War. In 1861, Warne helped uncover an assassination attempt against President-elect Abraham Lincoln. After the plot was uncovered, she and Pinkerton continued gathering intelligence for the Union cause during the Civil War.



Willye B. White ★

Willye B. White (1939–2007) was a five-time Olympian, coach, and mentor. Raised by her grandparents in Greenwood, Mississippi, White picked cotton as a child to help support her family. Having displayed natural talents in sports, she was recruited in high school to join the Tennessee State University women's track team. She became a member of the 1956 U.S. track and field team, earning a silver medal in the long jump in Melbourne, Australia. In 1960, Mayor Richard J. Daley invited her to join the Chicago Youth Foundation. She moved to Chicago and competed on the track and field team while also attending nursing school. She became a nurse and public health administrator, and continued winning medals and setting records in the Olympics, Pan-American Games, and other international competitions. She founded the Willye White Foundation to inspire Chicago's youth through sports. Willye B. White Park is located at 1610 W. Howard St.

credits

PHOTOS

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