

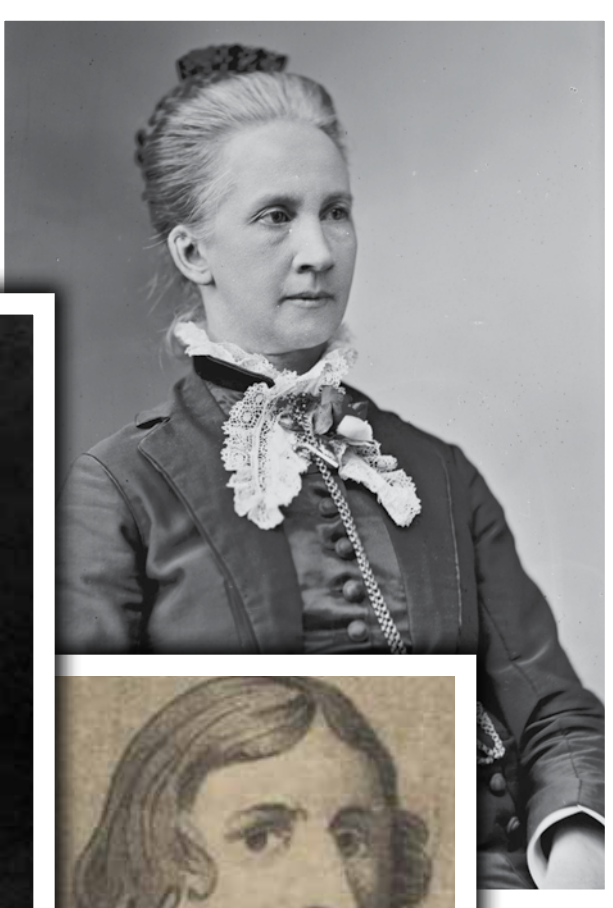
Women in History



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Edna St. Vincent Millay

Edna St. Vincent Millay was a poet and playwright in the early 20th century.

She was a noted feminist who won the 1923 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for “Ballad of the Harp-Weaver,” making her the first woman to win the award. She won the Frost Medal in 1943 for her lifetime contribution to American poetry.

EARLY LIFE

Millay was born in Maine in 1892 to Cora Lounella Buzelle and Henry Tolman Millay. Her middle name comes from St. Vincent’s Hospital in New York City, where her uncle’s life was saved before she was born. Millay’s parents divorced in 1904 and Cora and her daughters, including Millay, moved from town to town in relative poverty. The family eventually settled in Camden, Maine, with an aunt.

Millay went to Vassar College where she strained against the college’s conservative attitude for young women. In 1917, she was suspended indefinitely, but pressure from her peers allowed her to graduate.

WORK

After graduating from Vassar, Millay moved to Greenwich Village in New York, just as it was gaining a reputation for bohemian writers. She wrote the anti-war play “Aria da Capo” in 1919



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and “The Lamp and the Bell” in 1921.

Millay often used poetry for feminist activism, delving into

subjects such as a wife leaving her husband in the middle of the night and female sexuality. She toured nationwide,

reading her poetry to great acclaim.

She married Eugen Jan Boissevain in 1923, with

whom she eventually bought a former blueberry farm called Steepletop in New York. There, she grew her own vegetables and wrote, including “The King’s Henchman” for the Metropolitan Opera House, which was an account of the life of Eadgar, King of Wessex. Millay was arrested in 1927 for protesting the impending executions of anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti.

During World War II, and after a horrendous traffic accident that left her in constant pain, Millay took up her pen against fascism, working with the Writers’ War Board to create propaganda.

This did some damage to her reputation, but didn’t stop her. In 1942, she wrote a poem memorializing the destruction of the village of Lidice by the Nazis, later becoming the “Murder of Lidice” and a 1943 movie, “Hitler’s Madman.”

Millay’s final collection of poems was published after her death. “Mine the Harvest” includes retrospective of her career.

She died in 1950, a year after Boissevain succumbed to lung cancer.

LEGACY

The New York Times called Millay “an idol of the younger generation during the glorious early days of Greenwich Village.” In 2001, Nancy Milford published a biography of Millay, “Savage Beauty.” Milford called Millay “the herald of the New Woman.”

Deborah Sampson

Before America was America, there was Deborah Sampson. She was a hero of the American Revolution, disguising herself as a man and fighting for U.S. forces.

She was the only woman to earn a full military pension for participation in the Revolutionary army.

EARLY LIFE

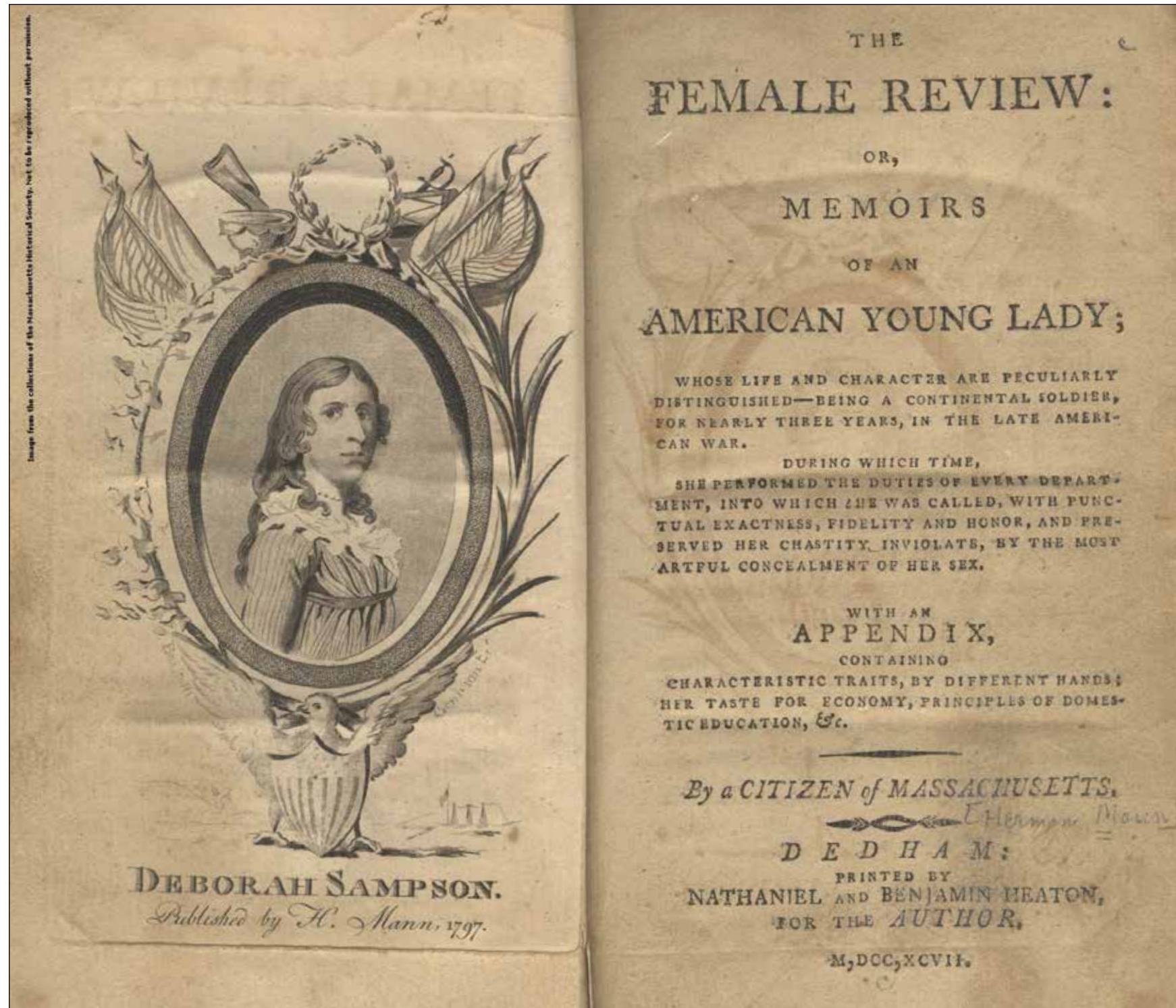
Sampson was born in 1760 in Massachusetts. She was one of seven children born to Jonathan Sampson Jr. and Deborah Bradford Sampson. Both parents were the descendants of Pilgrims.

Even so, the Sampsons were poor. Jonathan failed to return from a sea voyage, and Deborah was sent to be an indentured servant for farmer Benjamin Thomas, a farmer with a large family. After the indenture was completed, Sampson worked as a teacher and weaver.

OFF TO WAR

Full of patriotism for the nascent United States, Sampson disguised herself as a man named Robert Shurtleff and joined the Fourth Massachusetts Regiment in 1782. She was assigned to Capt. George Webb's light infantry at West Point, New York, and was sent as a scout to assess British buildup of men and material in Manhattan.

In June 1782, Sampson and two sergeants led about 30 soldiers that ended in confrontation with Tories and led a raid on a Tory home that resulted in the capture of 15 men. She also claimed to have fought at Yorktown, digging trenches and helping storm a



British redoubt.

She eluded detection for two years, going so far as to extracting a pistol ball from her own thigh to preserve the ruse. Sampson was eventually discovered when she became ill in Philadelphia, was taken to a hospital and lost consciousness.

AFTER THE WAR

Sampson returned to Massachusetts in 1783 after receiving an honorable discharge. She married Benjamin Gannet in 1785 and had three children. Sampson received a military pension from the state of Massachusetts and, in 1802, held a year-long lecture tour.

Four years after Sampson died at age 66, her husband successfully petitioned Congress for pay as the spouse of a soldier. In 1837, a committee concluded that the Revolution “furnished no other similar example of female heroism, fidelity and courage.” Gannet died before he could be paid.

Belva Lockwood

Belva Lockwood was an American lawyer, politician, educator and author who was the first woman admitted to practice law before the U.S. Supreme Court.

She was active in the women's rights and women's suffrage movements. Lockwood ran for president in 1884 and 1888, becoming the first woman to appear on official presidential ballots.

EARLY LIFE

Lockwood was born Belva Ann Bennett in 1830 in New York to Lewis Johnson Bennett and Hannah Green. She was teaching at the local elementary school by 14 and married farmer Uriah McNall in 1848, with whom she had a daughter, Lura. McNall died of tuberculosis in 1853, spurring Lockwood to attend the Genesee Wesleyan Seminary to prepare for college.

She became the headmistress of Lockport Union School in 1857, making half of what her male counterparts did. Lockwood took several teaching and administrative positions, including at the Gainesville Female Seminary and, in 1863, buying the Owego Female Seminary.

She met Susan B. Anthony, agreeing with many of her ideas about the treatment of women. Lockwood accordingly expanded her curriculum, adding courses such as public speaking and gymnastics.

In 1866, Lockwood and her daughter moved to Washington, D.C. and opened a coeducational private school. She eventually married Rev. Ezekiel Lockwood in 1868 and earned a master's degree from Syracuse University in



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1871. Ezekiel Lockwood died in 1877.

LAW PRACTICE

Lockwood was admitted to the

National University School of Law (now George Washington University Law School) and completed coursework in 1873, though the school

refused her a diploma. She was granted a diploma after pleading her case to President Ulysses S. Grant.

The 43-year-old was admitted to the District of Columbia bar, but was denied entry to the Maryland Bar and, initially, denied to the Supreme Court bar on gender grounds.

Still, Lockwood began to build her practice and win cases. She became an advocate for women's issues, including an 1872 bill for equal pay for federal employees. Lockwood was active in women's suffrage organizations and testified before Congress in support of legislation to give married women and widows more legal protections.

In 1879, Congress passed a law Lockwood helped write, giving qualified female attorneys the right to practice in any federal court. She became the first female member of the U.S. Supreme Court bar in 1879.

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND LATER LIFE

She ran for president in 1884 and 1888 as the candidate from the National Equal Rights Party. While Victoria Woodhull was the first woman to run for president, Lockwood was the first to appear on official ballots owing to Woodhull's age.

She knew she didn't have much chance of winning, but instead looked at her campaign as a way to further women's rights, including the right to vote.

She remained active in women's suffrage, frequently writing essays in support of legal equality for women. She was president of the Woman's National Press Association and was attorney general of the American Women's Republic, dedicated to preparing women for the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Maria Montessori

Maria Montessori was born in 1870 in Italy and was a physician and educator who developed a pedagogical method for building on the way children learn naturally.

She opened the first Montessori school, the Casa dei Bambini, in Rome in 1907.

EARLY LIFE

Born in Chiaravelle, Montessori grew up in Rome and, at 13, attended an all-boys technical institute to prepare for a career in engineering, but changed her mind. At 16, she enrolled at the Region Istituto Tecnico Leonardo da Vinci, studying Italian, math, history, geography, geometry, physics, chemistry and more. She graduated in 1890 and decided to study medicine, enrolling in the University of Rome and earning a diploma in 1892, qualifying her for entrance to the university's medical program in 1893.

She was required to perform her dissections of cadavers alone, after hours, because it was believed her attendance of classes with men in the presence of a naked body was inappropriate. In 1895, she became a hospital assistant and went on to study pediatrics and psychiatry.



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CAREER

Montessori initially worked with children who had some form of cognitive delay, illness or disability. She traveled, spoke and published nationally and internationally, gaining prominence as an advocate for women's rights and education for children with learning challenges.

Her son, Mario, was born in 1898. Montessori, who was unmarried, had an affair with Giuseppe Montesanto. If she married, she would be expected to not work

professionally. Instead, she decided to continue her work and studies and eventually placed her son in the care of a wet nurse until his teenage years.

PIONEERING EDUCATION

Montessori became an expert on children with disabilities, becoming a counselor to the newly formed National League for the Protection of Retarded Children in 1899. She lectured in hygiene and anthropology and was appointed co-director of the

Orthophrenic School for training teachers to educate children with learning difficulties in 1900. During two years at the school, Montessori developed methods and materials she later adapted for mainstream children.

She continued to study psychology and work with elementary-aged children. In 1906, she opened the first Casa dei Bambini in the low-income San Lorenzo district of Rome. The children learned personal care, cleaning and caring for the garden in addition to

working with Montessori's learning materials.

Based on her observations in San Lorenzo, she developed what would be the foundation of her educational method. She instituted child-sized furniture and child-sized materials on low, accessible shelves. She expanded the range of practical lessons at the school, including care of pets, gymnastics and cooking. Children were encouraged to come and go to lessons as they pleased. By working independently, Montessori believed, children could become more autonomous and self-motivated to learn.

AN EDUCATIONAL MOVEMENT

The Montessori educational method spread to Switzerland in 1908 and 1909, and her reputation quickly spread internationally. By 1912, Montessori schools opened in France and more were planned for Argentina, Australia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Syria, the U.S. and New Zealand. Montessori's work was widely published and translated into several languages.

Montessori moved around Europe, continuing to open schools and give lectures. The first International Montessori Congress was held in Denmark in 1929, and Montessori and her son founded the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI). Montessori continued to work for peace, holding conferences internationally and being nominated six times for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Billie Jean King

Billie Jean King is an American tennis great, winner of 39 Grand Slam titles, seven Federation Cups and nine Wightman Cups.

She is an advocate of gender equality and a pioneer for equality and social justice. She is the founder of the Women's Tennis Association and Women's Sports Foundation. King received the Presidential Medal of Freedom and was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in 1990. She received a Congressional Gold Medal in 2024.

EARLY LIFE

Billie Jean Moffitt was born in 1943 in California to Betty and Bill Moffitt. The family was athletic; her younger brother Randy Moffitt was a Major League Baseball pitcher for the San Francisco Giants, Houston Astros and Toronto Blue Jays.

She started playing tennis at 11, saving her own money to buy her first racket. She had an aggressive playing style from the start, with her tennis playing carrying her to California State University, Los Angeles, eventually leaving the school to focus on tennis.

Moffitt met Larry King, who she married in 1965 in Long Beach.

CAREER

King won the French Open in

1972, only the fifth women in tennis history to win the singles titles at all four Grand Slam events. She had a record 20 career titles at Wimbledon, starting when the Long Beach Tennis Patrons, the Century Club and Harold Guiver raised \$2,000 to send King to Wimbledon in 1961, where she won the women's doubles title with Karen Hantze.

In 1973, King defeated Bobby Riggs in an exhibition match dubbed The Battle of the Sexes. Riggs was a former No. 1 player who claimed women's tennis was so inferior to men's that he could win against top female players, even at 55. He beat others, but King won in front of an audience of 50 million people in the U.S. and 90 million internationally.

LEGACY

During her career, King was an active advocate for equality for women. She became the first president of the Women's Tennis Association in 1973 and, the next year, founded women-Sports magazine. Her efforts, including her win in the Battle of the Sexes, is said to have started a second wave of feminism.

She and Larry King remained married until 1987, despite Billie Jean coming out as a lesbian. She is now married to fellow tennis player Ilana Kloss, who was also her doubles partner. She and Kloss are minority owners of the Los Angeles Dodgers and the WNBA's Los Angeles Sparks. They are also part owners of Angel City FC and investors in Just Women's Sports.



Maggie Lena Walker

Maggie Lena Walker was the first woman to own a bank in the United States.

She was born to enslaved parents in 1864 in Richmond, Virginia. After the Civil War, her mother worked as a laundress and her father was a butler until his death.

EARLY LIFE

After graduating school in Richmond, Walker began teaching until she married a successful brick layer. She was a member of the Independent Order of St. Luke's, an African American benevolent organization that helped the sick and elderly, eventually becoming publisher of the group's newspaper, *The St. Luke Herald*, which she used to encourage Black people to harness their own economic power by establishing their own institutions.

BANKING CAREER

Walker's first business endeavor was a community insurance company for women. In 1903, she founded the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank, becoming the first woman of any race to charter a bank in the United States. It attracted adults and children, to whom she passed out banks to encourage them to save.

In 1915, her husband died after being mistaken for a burglar by her son, leaving Walker a sizable estate. She

continued working for the Order of St. Luke's, but also held leadership roles in the National Association of Colored Women and as vice president of the Richmond chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

By 1924, the Penny Savings Bank had more than 50,000 members. It had helped 645 Black families pay off their homes. It survived the Great Depression and eventually consolidated with two other banks and moved to downtown Richmond with Walker at the helm. It's still in operation today as The Consolidated Bank and Trust Company.

COMMUNITY

In addition to her work with St. Luke's and other organizations, Walker established a Community House in Richmond and managed funds for the National League of Republican Colored Women. She helped form the Virginia Lily-Black Republican Party and was an unsuccessful candidate for Virginia's superintendent of public instruction.

Walker began using a wheelchair after a fall in 1907. She continued to host Black leaders, including W.E.B. DuBois, Langston Hughes and Mary McLeod Bethune. She died in 1934 of diabetes complications.



Bessie Coleman

Few women flew higher or earlier than Elizabeth Coleman.

She was born in 1892 and became an early civil aviator, the first Black woman and first Native American to hold a pilot's license. She is the earliest known Black person to hold an international pilot's license.

EARLY LIFE

Coleman was born in 1892 in Atlanta, Texas, the 10th of 13 children of George and Susan Coleman. Her family, sharecroppers, eventually moved to Waxahachie, Texas, where Bessie Coleman attended school. Her father left for Oklahoma in 1901, but his wife and children remained in Texas.

In 1915, Coleman moved to Chicago, working as a manicurist and hearing stories of pilots returning from World War I. She worked two jobs to save to become a pilot herself. After her story was published in the *Chicago Defender*, she received financial sponsorship, learning French and moving to Paris in 1920 to earn her pilot's license. In 1921, she became the first Black woman and Native American to earn a pilot's license and the first Native American to earn an international aviation license from the *Federation Aeronautique Internationale*.

CAREER

As soon as she returned to the States, Coleman became a



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media sensation. She performed as a barnstorming stunt flier, leaving for Europe again in 1922 for more training. She met aircraft designer

Anthony Fokker and returned to America as an exhibition flier.

Queen Bess, as she was called, was increasingly

popular. She was invited to important events, flying Curtiss JN-4 Jenny biplanes and other Army surplus aircraft. She performed in shows to

honor Black veterans and other air shows, gaining a reputation as a brave and skilled pilot.

While touring, she spoke to audiences about aviation and racism, encouraging Black people to pursue their goals and refusing to participate in events that barred African Americans.

She dreamed of starting a school for young Black aviators. She moved to Orlando, Florida, opening a beauty shop to earn extra money. Still, her pioneering achievements inspired young Black fliers.

DEATH

In 1926, Coleman purchased a Curtiss JN-4 Jenny. She was in Jacksonville, Florida, practicing a parachute maneuver for an upcoming show. About 10 minutes into her flight, the plane went into a dive and spin. She was thrown from the plane at about 2,000 feet above the ground and was killed instantly on impact. Her funeral was led by activist Ida B. Wells.

Several schools and memorials are named for Coleman, as are streets in Chicago, California, Florida, Germany and France. She was inducted to the National Women's Hall of Fame in 2001 and the National Aviation Hall of Fame in 2006. In 2022, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Coleman earning her license, American Airlines flew a commemorative flight from Dallas to Phoenix. It was operated by an all-Black female crew.