

Influential Women of Fort Bend County



HerStory

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HerStory

INTRODUCTION

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Viola Randle (*Trailblazer*)

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Antoinette Reading (*Educator*)

Polly Ryon (*Humanitarian*)

MAP & DRIVING TOUR



HerStory

Celebrating Women's History Month this February and March, our self-guided driving tour recognizes 10 female pioneers, activists, humanitarians and trailblazers in Fort Bend County history. Through HerStory, we identify, honor and elevate some of the places marked by women across the county who penned their own narratives and continue to inspire future generations of women and girls.

However, this is simply the beginning. There are many stories still to be told. We are asking for your participation in this ongoing initiative. If there is an influential woman in Fort Bend County, past or present, whose story you feel needs to be shared, we want to know!

Please email us at info@fortbendmuseum.org.



JANE LONG

Jane Wilkinson Long, the “Mother of Texas,” was born on July 23, 1798, in Charles County, Maryland. In early 1815, Jane met Dr. James Long and they were soon married. In 1819, Jane joined her husband at an outpost on Bolivar Point near Galveston Island. Soon after their arrival, Dr. Long set out on an excursion in September of 1821 leaving an expectant Jane, their daughter Ann, and a young enslaved girl Kian, at the fort.

As supplies began to run low and the remaining soldiers and families started to leave the fort, Jane vowed to remain at Bolivar Point until her husband’s return. What she had not yet discovered was that James was captured and killed in Mexico City. On December 21, 1821, in an ice-covered tent, Jane gave birth to her third child Mary James Long. From this birth also grew the legend that Jane had the first Anglo baby born in Texas, thus earning her the title of “Mother of Texas.”

In March of 1821, at long last word reached Jane of her husband’s death in a prison in Mexico City and she left Bolivar Point.

In 1832, Long, her only surviving daughter Ann, and Kian moved to Brazoria and opened a successful boarding house that would later serve as the central location for social and political activities in Texas. Notable guests included Stephen F. Austin, Sam Houston, and William B. Travis. In 1837, Jane Long moved to Richmond, Texas where she opened another boarding house and ran a successful plantation and ranching operation. Though she had many notable suitors throughout the years, including Ben Milam and Mirabeau B. Lamar, she never remarried. Jane spent her remaining years at her home in Richmond.



MAMIE GEORGE

Mary Elizabeth, affectionately known as “Mamie” by friends and family, was born in 1877 to parents Susan Elizabeth, “Lizzie,” Ryon and J.H.P. Davis. Mamie’s mother, Lizzie, was the oldest daughter of Polly and William Ryon, making Mamie the 4th generation of a large family of Texas settlers originating from the Old 300 and Stephen F. Austin.

On October 17, 1869, Mamie married Albert P. George, a former employee of the ranch who was raised by Mamie’s grandfather. The couple decided to move back to the original homestead and continue the family ranching legacy. Albert’s experience and passion for business and the cattle industry helped their ranching business flourish. While Mamie, much like her mother and grandmother, had a pull towards her community and spent her life finding ways to give back and care for those in need.

Prosperity followed the Georges, and in 1923, oil was found on their property. This discovery greatly increased their wealth and solidified them in the history of Fort Bend County. However, following prosperity, a series of tragedies befell the George Family. Mamie and Albert’s only child, Davis George, died from infant cholera at two years old. A few years later, the George’s beloved niece, Mary Jones, died in a car accident while returning to the ranch from Houston.



With no heirs to leave their estate to, and a strong desire to continue supporting their community, Albert and Mamie George established The George Foundation in 1945. Over the years the George Foundation and its board of trustees has awarded over \$180 million in grants to Fort Bend County organizations and scholarship recipients.

Albert George passed away in 1955 and Mamie followed 16 years later in 1971, though their legacy and compassion for their community lives on today.

CARRIE A. NATION

Carrie Amelia Nation was born in Garrard County, Kentucky in 1846. As a young girl, her family moved to Missouri. During the Civil War, she helped nurse injured soldiers after a raid in Independence. She met Charles Gloyd, a young physician who fought for the Union in 1865. They were married in 1867 and Carrie soon learned of her husband's excessive drinking problem. It was clear upon the birth of their daughter, Charlien, that he could not support them. In 1869, her husband died due to his alcoholism and thus Carrie's passion for anti-alcohol activism began.

In 1874, Carrie married David Nation, and in 1881, moved their family to Richmond, Texas. Carrie operated the Veranda – later the National Hotel – at the corner of Morton and 4th Streets and boarded travelers of all backgrounds, often charging little to nothing for those in unfortunate circumstances. After her husband, David, was brutally attacked by members of the Jaybird Democratic Association in 1889 for an unfavorable article he wrote in Houston's Daily Post, he and Carrie moved to Medicine Lodge, Kansas, where she made a name for herself across the country.



A staunch prohibitionist, Carrie's simple protest against alcohol, saloons and bars escalated to marching into them while singing, praying and smashing stock and bar fixtures with a hatchet. In 1903, Carrie officially changed the spelling of her first name to "Carry." With the middle name Amelia, she adopted the name Carry A. Nation, which she said was a sign from God to "Carry A Nation for Prohibition." Between 1900-1910, she was arrested some thirty times for her "hatchetations," but was able to make bail through the selling of pewter hatchet lapel pins and accepting speaking engagements. Nation was also a supporter of women's suffrage and women's rights. This year marks the 110th anniversary of her death. Though her tactics were violent and disapproved, she was one of the many voices that helped pave the way for the additions of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Amendments to the Constitution in 1919.



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CARRIE NATION



ARREDONDO-CABELLO

Lupe Cabello did not initially have an interest in politics. In 1975, she was asked to speak at a Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SVREP) rally in Rosenberg at the age of 31. At the suggestion of a community member, she agreed to run for a city council seat which she won in 1978 and held for eleven years. Commonly a male-dominated culture, Lupe was often not just the only Hispanic in the room, but the only woman.

In 1992, she decided to run and was elected as Mayor of Rosenberg. She stated that her election “was for the people [in her community] to realize that they had a voice in government. They had a voice to pick and choose who they wanted to represent them.” Cabello held office until 1995. Today, Lupe serves as an example to other Hispanic citizens to get involved and know that their voice matters. She is currently a member of the Fort Bend Hispanic Heritage Forum, an organization that raises funds for scholarships in support of Hispanic students, citizens and Dreamers based on need and merit.

DORA OLIVO

Dora Olivo began her career as an educator in Corpus Christi before moving to Fort Bend County to teach at Lamar Consolidated High School in 1969. While earning her master's degree in education, she learned more about the strides Hispanic leaders were making towards socio-economic equality across the United States. Olivo recalled not questioning differences in opportunity until she learned about her ethnic history and began to notice blatant problems in her town such as housing discrimination and segregation.

Dora became very active in the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SVREP), an organization whose purpose was to mobilize and empower Hispanic voters, and recorded stories from individuals who experienced voter suppression. She founded and hosted Lo Nuestro Radio Show, KFRD, from 1977-1992 where she discussed current social issues. In 1981, she received her law degree. When African American and Hispanic community members met with a standing district representative in 1995, they agreed that someone who understood their communities needed to run for the district seat. In 1997, Dora was elected to the Texas House of Representatives, representing the 27th District, which she held until 2011.



Today, she is involved in Fort Bend P-16 Regional Council, an organization that advocates for life-long learning and continues “to fight the mindset that just because you’re poor or Black or brown that you’re not as smart.” She continues her law practice in Richmond, Texas.

“

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”

DORA OLIVO



RANDLE

Viola Randle was born on July 26, 1924, into a family of sharecroppers on a farm in Fulshear, Texas. Viola grew up and attended school in Fulshear while also helping her parents on their farm. In 1941, she married her long-time friend and sweetheart, Lloyd Randle, and together they had one daughter. After spending years in domestic work in Houston and as Head Custodian for Lamar Consolidated, Viola went into business for herself in the 1970s. She became an operator for a Texaco gas station and started a garbage service for the Fulshear area. Caring deeply for the future of Fulshear, Viola also became an outspoken advocate for its incorporation in 1977.

That same year, Viola Randle became the first black woman elected to the Fulshear city council where she served for ten years. In 1993, Viola was elected the first black mayor of Fulshear, a position she held until 1998. During her time in office, she passed ordinances to keep Fulshear's streets and water clean, established community centers and safe playgrounds for children, and protected the status of the Fulshear Black Cemetery. Viola remained active in her community until her death. She served as a board member of the Fulshear Historic Commission and volunteered for various non-profit organizations in the community. It is said that she never gave up her civic duty and continued to serve the people of Fulshear for the remainder of her life.

ARIZONA

FLEMING

Arizona Fleming was born on March 23, 1884, in Richmond, Texas to Beauregard and Laura Fleming. She attended segregated schools through the twelfth grade, before attending Guadalupe College in Seguin, Texas. Following college, she worked as a bookkeeper at Seagul Laundry in Houston before returning to Richmond to establish the Fort Bend Fraternal Undertaking Company in 1927. She served as secretary and manager of the company and later became the sole proprietor.

During the 1950s, Fleming became instrumental in reestablishing the African American vote in Fort Bend County. She joined a movement initiated in 1950 by Willie Melton, a prosperous Black farmer from the Kendleton area who sought to participate in the Fort Bend County democratic primaries. She was at the forefront of the civil rights efforts to end local voter discrimination and served as secretary of the Fort Bend Civic Club. Arizona tirelessly went door to door to encourage Black voters to participate in the local election.



The group filed a petition against A.J. Adams, the current president of the Jaybird Democratic Association, using the volunteered name of John Terry as the petitioner.

Wealthy Black Houstonians, church groups, and the NAACP assisted in court costs, but Fleming and Melton bore much of the financial burden.

Fleming and Melton were the only African Americans to attend the Supreme Court session, which ruled in their favor on May 4, 1953. Their work firmly secured Blacks the right to vote in Fort Bend County. It was said that Fleming's finances were severely depleted in the fight for the vote, but she proclaimed "I'd do it all over again!" In 1994, Fort Bend ISD opened the Arizona Fleming Elementary School in her honor.

“ I
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ALL
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ARIZONA FLEMING

MARJORIE ADAMS

Longtime Kendleton resident and historian, Marjorie Joyce Adams was born on July 13, 1933, in Kendleton, Texas to Burel and Louisa Melton. Her family had been in Kendleton for five generations. She grew up on her family's farm where they grew cotton, corn and raised livestock. Throughout her life, she attended Little Zion Missionary Baptist Church founded by her great-grandparents. After her graduation from the Powell Point School in Kendleton, Marjorie attended Dillard University, a historically black college in New Orleans, Louisiana. When Marjorie returned to Kendleton, she married and started a family. She continued with her studies and completed several business courses as well as teaching classes before eventually working in the family business.



During the 1950s, Marjorie worked alongside her Uncle Willie Melton, a Kendleton farmer who worked tirelessly with other advocates to end the White primary in Fort Bend County. Marjorie served as a secretary to Melton and kept records for the NAACP. She also assisted in writing memberships for people that joined the organization. After three years of courage and willpower, their case, *Terry v. Adams*, reached the U.S. Supreme Court. The plaintiffs prevailed, and in 1954, Blacks voted in Fort Bend County's Jaybird Primary elections without challenge. In 2009, with Marjorie's support and assistance the *Terry v. Adams* Texas historical marker was erected on William Melton Boulevard in downtown Kendleton.

With her extensive knowledge and a lifelong love for history, Marjorie founded the Fort Bend County Heritage Unlimited Museum to educate children, descendants, and the community about the rich cultural heritage of the area and African American history in Fort Bend and surrounding counties. She also served for several years as an active member of the Fort Bend County Historical Commission.

Fifty-five years after the iconic Supreme Court case, Marjorie was reflecting back on her life and acknowledged that while she may not be able to do the same things she had done in her youth, she grinned and said "but I'm a big mouth old woman – a hell-raiser. I learned much from Uncle Willie."



ANTOINETTE

READING

A sixth generation Texan and descendant of Austin's Old 300, Antoinette Reading was born on September 14, 1919. After graduating from Sam Houston State, Antoinette enlisted in the U.S. Women's Army Corps in February of 1943, serving in the Signal Corps in Florida and Pennsylvania. She was discharged as a captain in 1946. She worked for the Welfare Department in Alvin and Richmond until the first class of Lamar Consolidated High School met in 1947.

Reading taught social studies and sponsored student trips to Europe, Canada, Washington, D.C., Mississippi, Indiana, and Austin. She served as the chairwoman of the history department and, in 1966, was chosen as the first "Teacher of the Year" at Lamar. In 1974, she began her career as a certified librarian and served several years on the Fort Bend County Library Board of Directors. Serving as a member and holding office in a number of civic groups in the county and the state, Antoinette Reading was honored for her love of education and service with the opening of Antoinette Reading Junior High in August of 2010.

POLLY RYON

The oldest daughter of twelve children, Polly Ryon was born in 1826 as Mary Moore (Polly) Jones to parents Henry and Nancy Jones. Henry and Nancy Jones were members of Stephen F. Austin's "Old 300" Colony and received a large league of land adjacent to the Brazos River. Polly inherited the majority of her parents' successful farming and ranching operation, and its associated assets after their passing. Due to her successful running of the family land, Polly was considered one of the largest landowners in the region by age 18. She also made a name for herself as a very generous and helpful neighbor, braving rough conditions to deliver medical aid and resources to families in need.

In 1845, Polly married William Ryon who helped expand her farming and ranching operation, growing to more than 22,000 acres of land. At one point, it is believed that Polly owned and rented over 80,000 acres which is roughly 10% of Fort Bend County today. Polly and William had 9 children together and Polly remained active in her family business and charity work until her death in 1896.



In 1947, Ryon's granddaughter, Mamie George, and her husband Albert donated land for the construction of Polly Ryon Memorial Hospital in Richmond, where there was great need for an area medical center. Continuing to grow and serve the community for several years, Polly Ryon Memorial Hospital changed its name to OakBend Medical Center in 2004. Today, OakBend Medical Center includes two hospitals in Richmond and one location in Wharton, Texas; a true testament to a woman who made reaching out to others in need her life's purpose.

HerStory



We want to hear
from you! Is there
an influential
woman in your
community, past
or present, whose
story needs to be
told?



Please contact us!

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