

Bluegrass BOLD

STORIES OF

KENTUCKY WOMEN

BY CARLY MUETTERTIES & MADDIE SHEPARD

FOREWORD BY LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR JACQUELINE COLEMAN

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NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN

9,500 BCE – • SHAWNEE, CHEROKEE, AND CHICKASAW • THE ORIGINAL KENTUCKIANS

Many different groups of Native Americans have called Kentucky home. The diversity of languages and cultures reflects their deep human history. It reflects our commonwealth's diverse environments, too. Kentucky has flat floodplains, rolling uplands, lands with sinkholes and caves, and steep-sided mountains with narrow valleys and rock shelter overhangs. Rich in natural resources, Kentucky was a good place to live.

Native American women were (and are) important members of these diverse societies. Native women's role as food providers changed over time. In hunter-gatherer societies, gathering wild plants was often women's responsibility. The nuts, grasses, fungi, and roots they gathered provided food for their families, as well as medicines and dyes. Women used plants to weave fabrics to make clothing, mats, and bags.

As time passed and eating habits and methods of food preparation changed, women took on additional roles of gardening and later farming. They planted seeds, tended plants, harvested crops, prepared them for eating, and

saved seeds for planting the next year.

Women were the culture-bearers in many native societies. They committed to memory their community's traditions, stories, and histories. They passed these down to their children and grandchildren. Child-rearing practices likely differed from culture to culture. But their role as mothers remained the same. Women also performed rituals and religious ceremonies for the whole community. Native American women had powerful voices.

Native women experienced the changes caused by the appearance of Europeans in Kentucky. They died from European diseases, like smallpox. In the face of these challenges, native women tried to maintain their group's way of life. But, in time, there were too many European settlers. Many of Kentucky's native people moved away to continue their native ways of living.

The vibrant history of Kentucky's native women is seldom told, but it is the first page of Kentucky's story.



Brett Hartsfield

Native women are the first page of Kentucky's story.

CHARLOTTE DUPUY

1787 – 1866 • LEXINGTON (FAYETTE COUNTY) • FREEDOM FIGHTER

The first Black women came to Kentucky not by choice, but because they were enslaved. Enslavement meant people considered other people as their property. Enslavers forced enslaved people to work long hours for little or no pay. In Kentucky, slavery differed from place to place. Some enslaved people worked on farms, tended to horses, and grew hemp, tobacco, or other crops. Enslaved women often worked in homes. They cooked, cleaned, and cared for the enslavers' children.

Enslavers had complete power over the bodies of enslaved people. They could treat enslaved people violently. They could also sell enslaved people or their children to someone else. Enslaved people had few rights or opportunities to free themselves. Many fought against their enslavement in big and small ways. Some would slow down their work or break equipment and others tried to run away.

Charlotte “Lotty” Dupuy took a much bolder approach. A powerful Kentucky politician named

Henry Clay held Lotty and her husband, Aaron, in slavery. When Clay received a job in the White House, he moved the Dupuys to Washington DC to live with him.

Clay planned to return to Kentucky, but Lotty refused. She submitted a petition to “self-emancipate” or free herself. She claimed she was “entitled to freedom” from the Clays. But the court rejected her plea. Clay punished Lotty. He moved her family back to Kentucky, but had Lotty jailed in DC. Then Clay sent her to New Orleans, fearing she would inspire others to fight against slavery. Eventually, Clay allowed Lotty to return home to her family. Ten years later, Clay was running for president of the United States. He freed Lotty and her daughter, but kept her husband and son enslaved. Though Lotty was legally free, she stayed to be with her family.

By fighting against her enslavement, Lotty showed power and challenged a system that wanted to keep her powerless.

STORY SPONSOR: KARA CLARK



We are “people of color who are entitled to [our] freedom...”
from petition

JEAN RITCHIE

1922 – 2015 • VIPER (PERRY COUNTY) • “MOTHER OF FOLK,” MUSICIAN

Jean Ritchie always loved music and sharing it with others. She came from humble beginnings. She was the youngest of 14 children, and she and her 10 sisters shared a single bedroom. The whole family loved music, just like she did. Young Jean and her family would sing songs of their ancestors. Often neighbors would join their nightly singing.

When Jean was older, she went to college. She took her love of music with her. At the University of Kentucky, she sang in the glee club and taught herself to play piano. Jean shared her love of music by teaching young children. She was so proud of the music of her family, neighbors, and ancestors that she wanted to share it.

Jean moved to New York City. She began performing with some of the most popular folk musicians of her time. She had a beautiful

voice and often played instruments as she sang. Jean played guitar, piano, and the dulcimer. The dulcimer is a string instrument that musicians hold in their laps. Jean plucked the strings as she sang. She recorded several albums singing and playing her dulcimer. Now she could share the music of her home with the world.

Many people had never heard music like Jean's. But before long, folk music from her home in Kentucky became a national sensation. Jean traveled the world sharing music and culture from the mountains. She is often called “the mother of folk” because she brought the music of her family and her home to the world.

“I see folk music as a river that never stopped flowing,” she said.

Jean boldly made her mark by sharing her favorite parts of her Kentucky culture with the world.

STORY SPONSOR: RYAN DAVIS



Holly M. Graham

“I see folk music as a river that never stopped flowing. Sometimes a few people go to it and sometimes a lot of people do. But it’s always there.”

GEORGIA DAVIS POWERS

1923 – 2016 • SPRINGFIELD (WASHINGTON COUNTY), LOUISVILLE (JEFFERSON COUNTY)
CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST, STATE SENATOR

Though she bore the name of a different state, Georgia Davis Powers's boldness left a big mark on Kentucky. When she was growing up, Georgia saw people treated unfairly. She and her family were Black. She noticed that people were not always treated the same because of the color of their skin. Kids went to separate schools, swam in different pools in the summer, and ate in different restaurants. These places were *segregated*. Segregation means laws or customs that separate people based on being White or "colored" (or non-White). Segregation supported White people's higher status and control in society. It controlled where non-White people could go, what they could do, and what they could say.

As an adult, Georgia knew she needed to help make Kentucky fairer for everyone. She helped organize a march against racial segregation in Frankfort, the capital of Kentucky. The march was so big that people from all over the country came, even Martin Luther King Jr.

Around this time, Georgia asked representatives in Frankfort to support a civil rights bill. The bill would help make laws fairer for all Kentuckians. One representative told her that if he voted for her bill, he would not get reelected. Georgia said to him, "You know, Representative, what I need is my own seat here." And pretty soon, she *did* have her own seat! Georgia became the first African American and first woman elected to the Kentucky Senate.

Georgia served as a Kentucky senator for more than 20 years. During that time, she continued to support bills that would prevent people from discriminating against others based on their race, sex, age, or physical disability.

She believed being a leader meant she needed to always help people. Georgia once said, "When you are placed in a powerful position, whatever it is, you should do everything you can do for people who have no voice and need an advocate."

STORY SPONSOR: ELMER LUCILLE ALLEN



Sandra Charles

“When you are placed in a powerful position, whatever it is, you should do everything you can do for people who have no voice and need an advocate.”