



NOTABLE MINORITIES WHO CHANGED HISTORY

March 20, 2008

Featuring Sojourner Truth

“If women want any rights more than they’s got, why don’t they just take them, and not be talking about it!”

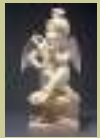
- An *Sojourner Truth* Quote

Women’s History Month

March is Women’s History Month and we will be celebrating by featuring inspiring women in this month’s newsletters. This year’s theme is visionary female artists. Here are some examples of sculptures by women.



Edmonia Lewis - Minnehaha



Harriet Hosmer - Will o’ the Wisp

March Dates to Remember:

- 1 - St. David’s Day (Welsh)
- 2 - World Day of Prayer
- 3 - The Doll Festival (Japan)
- 4 - Purim (Jewish)
- 8 - International Women’s Day
- 11 - Independence Day (Lithuania)
- 13 - Elephant Day (Thailand)
- 17 - St. Patrick’s Day (Ireland, United States)
- 21 - Naw Ruz (Baha’i, Persia)
- 21 - Good Friday
- 22 - New Year’s Day (India)
- 23 - Easter Sunday
- 25 - Feast of Annunciation (Christian)
- 26 - Mothering Sunday (England)

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Sojourner Truth

Sojourner Truth (1797 - 1883) Abolitionist and Women’s Rights Activist

Sojourner Truth was born into slavery in 1797. She was one of the thirteen children born to James and Elizabeth Baumfree, who were slaves of Colonel Hardenbergh who was Dutch. Her birth name was Isabella Baumfree, she later changed it to Sojourner Truth. The Colonel’s estate was located in the town of Esopus, New York. When the Colonel died the son, Charles, inherited the family slaves.

In 1806, Charles sold Sojourner to John Neely for \$100. Until this point, Sojourner had only spoke Dutch. She later said that Neely was cruel and harsh and that he had once beat her with a bundle of rods. Neely sold Sojourner in 1808, for \$105, to Martinus Schryver of Port Ewen. He was a tavern keeper and owned Truth for 18 months. He sold her in 1810, for \$175, to John Dumont of West Park, New York. In 1817, Sojourner was forced by Dumont to marry an older slave named Thomas. They had five children together; Diana, Elizabeth, Hannah, Peter, and Sophia.

The state of New York did not abolish slavery until July 4, 1827. John Dumont had promised Sojourner her freedom a year before the state abolished slavery “if she would do well and be faithful.” He later changed his mind claiming that a hand injury had made her less productive. Sojourner was furious and she worked until she had satisfied her sense of obligation to him by spinning 100 pounds of wool. In late 1826, Sojourner took her infant daughter, Sophia, and escaped to freedom. She had to leave her other children behind because they would not legally be freed in the emancipation until they had served as bound servants into their twenties.

She and Sophia met a Quaker family, Isaac & Maria Von Wagenen, who took her in and offered to buy her services until the emancipation took effect. Dumont accepted \$20 for the Van Wagenen’s to keep Sojourner. After the emancipation, Sojourner learned that her 8 year-old son, Peter, had been sold illegally by Dumont to a family in Alabama. With the help of Quaker activists, she took the matter to court and eventually got her son back. During her stay with the Van Wagenens, Truth became a devout Christian. In 1829, she moved with her son Peter to New York City, where she worked as a housekeeper for a Christian evangelist named Elijah Pierson. In 1832, she went to work for Robert Matthews as a housekeeper. Elijah Pierson died and Robert and Sojourner were accused of stealing from him and poisoning him. They were both acquitted and Matthews moved west. In 1839, Peter took a job on a whaling ship named the *Zone of Nantucket*. When the ship returned to port in 1842, Peter was not aboard and Sojourner never heard from him again.

June 1, 1843 is when Truth officially changed her name to Sojourner Truth. She became a Methodist and left to travel and preach about abolition. In 1844, she joined the Northampton Association of Education and Industry in Massachusetts. The abolitionist organization supported women’s rights and religious tolerance. Truth started dictating her memoirs to her friend Olive Gilbert, and in 1850 it was published as *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave*. She participated in abolitionist and women’s rights conventions. During the Civil War, Sojourner helped recruit black troops for the Union Army. In 1872, she attempted to vote in the presidential elections and was turned away. She rode the streetcar often to force its desegregation. She died on November 26, 1883.

(Source: www.wikipedia.org)