

WHT

Women's History Trail

Folk Heritage Association
of Macon County

Walking in Her Steps

1st

*First Women's History Trail in North Carolina
Est. 2018*

Downtown

Franklin, North Carolina



36 W. Main Street, Franklin, North Carolina
PO Box 1416 ~ Franklin, NC 28744

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WHT
Est. 2018

11 Franklin Terrace

Church Street

Social Workers 9
Nellie Cook 10 Courthouse

Iotla Street

8 Agnes Higgins Gazebo
7 Eloise Potts Town Hall

RIVER

Franklin Town Square

W. Main Street

E. Main Street

E. Main Street

15 Ruby Beshears
Museum 1
Dess Pendergrass
Nan Ray
Original Library 2

Phillips Street

Clock Tower 4
5
Stewart St.
3 Mica Workers
Beauticians
Milliners

RIVER

6 Na'ka Rebecca Morris
Sowing the Seeds Sculpture Site 2024
Nikwasi Mound



Palmer Street

Palmer Street

Arrah Belle Johnson 12

Lassie Kelly 14

American Legion

W. Main Street

Laura Jones 13

Harrison



#1 Macon County Historical Museum
36 W. Main Street, Franklin
Sponsor: Macon County Historical Museum
and Anonymous Donor

Dess Pendergrass earned a degree from Chillicothe Business College in Missouri. She met her future husband, Broadus Pendergrass while working in Franklin for Nantahala National Forest. Most of married life was spent running the Pendergrass Store which had been a fixture on Main St. Since 1904

Nan Ray came to Franklin after the Civil War to attend school at AME Zion Church. She married Matt Ray in 1879. Encouraged by AME Zion's progressive policies, Nan became a leader in the church. She was a trustee of the church in 1905, when the church was forced to move. The Rays gave land for a new chapel, named for them.



#2 Macon County Public Library
Women's Roles Essential in Library History
37 Phillips Street
Sponsored by Marty and Ken Greeble

About 1892, young Isabel Elias inspired friends to establish The Library Club. Their small group grew in numbers and strength, propelled by enterprising women who served in every library role. In 1955, their efforts culminated in construction of a library building, at a cost of \$10,000. Having a dedicated facility and 14,000 books seemed grand indeed and the building served patrons for more than 20 years.



#3 Women Mica Workers
Drake Building
210 Phillips Street, Franklin
Sponsor: Drake Software

The Western Electric plant offered Franklin residents their first opportunity to work for a giant national corporation with an international reach. The telephones they helped produce created a worldwide revolution in communications. The majority of the plant workers were women who were ideally suited to work in the plant. Their dexterity met the demand for precision work in handling the mica used for the transmitter button.



#4 Brave New World of Beauty

Industry Opportunities for Women

16 E. Main Street

Sponsored by Stan and Mary Polanski

'Beautician' entered the language in 1925 and Franklin women soon embraced the field. Mareta Munday opened the first salon in town and established a 'college of beauty culture' here. Within a few years, Macon women had a choice of beauty shoppes. Salons offered respectable work, opportunity for self employment, and a chance to provide indispensable services.



#5 Main Street Milliners

Blush 76 E. Main Street, Franklin

Sponsors: Erin Moffitt, Brittany Murphy and WHT

Popular magazines reached into isolated coves, keeping women throughout the county up-to-date on the latest fashions. Demand for the fashions grew, and a group of Franklin women seized the opportunity. Millinery - the art of women's hats - gave them a way to express their creativity and support themselves during their single years. Lily Moore opened a hat shop in the store of her father, J.T. Moore, in his half of the Moore-Benbow Building at this address.



#6 Na'ha Rebecca Morris

Nikawsi Mound Kiosk, Franklin

Sponsor: Cowee School Arts and

Heritage Center

Na'ha, known as Rebecca after marriage to Gideon Morris, had strong ties to Nikwasi. The Morrises' 650-acre reserve was across the river from the ancient town. Its mound was a sacred site, one that the Cherokee hoped to protect. Rebecca inspired the character of Little Deer in Robert Strange's *Eoneguski*, the first North Carolina novel.



#7 Women in Public Service

Eloise Potts

Town of Franklin

95 E. Main Street, Franklin

Sponsor: Town of Franklin

After retiring and enduring a second widowhood, Eloise crowned her notable career by winning election as the first female Mayor of Franklin. She is credited with modernizing town government by applying her administrative skills to the office. "She had good looks, energy and intelligence." – Dr. Furman Angel, remembering Eloise as his favorite teacher.



#8 Agnes Zachary Higgins-Musician

Crabtree General Store

41 Iotla Street, Franklin

Sponsors: Crabtree Family and Suminski Family Books

Silent films were never silent. The music that accompanied the moving pictures was critical for setting the right mood, heightening suspense and drawing in the crowd. At her parents' theater, originally close to this site, Agnes was the *woman behind the Wurlitzer*. Agnes taught piano to local children who remember her fondly.



#9 Women in Social Work

Corbin Building

28 Iotla Street, Franklin

Sponsors: Kevin and Beth Corbin

The Welfare Department worked with everything involving social work in Macon County. Social programs of Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty came under its umbrella. When the Food Stamp program began in 1964, staff had to address envelopes, mail out coupons, and even take clients to the store!



#10 Nellie Cleveland West Cook

State Representative, 1960

5 W. Main Street

Sponsored by Zonta Club of Franklin

Before marrying for the first time, at age 40, Nellie taught elementary school, ran a restaurant, and was Highland's Postmaster for 12 years. In 1935, she moved to Franklin, where husband Henry West was a grocer. At age 60 she became the first Macon County woman elected to the N.C. House.



**#11 Women in Hospitality
Franklin Terrace Bed and Breakfast
159 Harrison Avenue, Franklin
Sponsored by WHT**

Female entrepreneurs gave a boost to the tourism industry. Neighbors of the Franklin Terrace remembered the “delightful” bridge teas hosted for locals, and the ‘fine folks from Atlanta’ who arrived on the Tallulah Falls Railroad. In the early 1900s guests paid \$6 to \$12 per week for their board.



**#12 Women in Publishing
Arrah Belle Wilson Johnson
266 Harrison Avenue, Franklin
Sponsored by WHT**

In 1939, Arrah Belle used her life savings to purchase The Franklin Press and The Highlands Maconian, intending to establish her son as editor. When Blackburn returned to Asheville her other son, William, took his place as editor until military service called him to duty, leaving Arrah Belle in charge. Her role at The Franklin Press was unusual for a woman. American journalism was male-dominated, with women relegated to jobs on the society pages. Arrah Belle was up for the task becoming the first female editor of The Franklin Press.



**#13 Laura M. Jones
Teacher, Developer, Beloved Aunt
291 W. Main Street
Sponsored by Descendants of
George A. Jones**

Laura helped raise five younger brothers after their mother's death in 1893. She earned a degree from Columbia University in New York, returning home to teach and later became an assistant principal in Raleigh. She developed a summer camp and a 54 lot subdivision on land she inherited from her father.



#14 Lassie Kelly (1881-1963)

614 W. Main Street
Sponsored by Macon Post 108,
The American Legion

During WWI, Yeoman Lassie Kelly served in the offices of Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, Assistant Secretary Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Admiral Williams Sims. When peace came, she was a charter member of Macon Post 108 and was the first woman in the American Legion's history to become a Post Commander. Earlier, she was one of the first women in North Carolina to pass the bar exam.



#15 Ruby Dowdle Beshears

124 W. Main Street, Franklin
Sponsors: Alton and Rena Sutton
and the Ruby Beshears Circle, UMC

At a time when commercial hotels were scarce, travelers appreciated the comfort and convenience a private home could offer - a home away from home for tourists and regular boarders. As her neighbor's inn became overcrowded Ruby began taking on guests of her own. She proved to be a natural in the hospitality business. She approached it like a business, joining the Chamber of Commerce and marketing *Beshears Tourist Home* with signage, postcards and advertising. She welcomed guests until she neared 100 years of age. The home is now a private residence.

Women's History Trail

Leadership

Mary Polanski ~ Marty Greeble

Anne Hyder ~ Theresa Ramsey ~ Claire Suminski

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