

# Travel Where Women Made History in NC

In March, Women's History Month honors the contributions of American women from all walks of life. This month, I will be highlighting sites across the country where you can combine travel with celebrating their accomplishments. I begin this segment with North Carolina the beautiful state where I grew up because I feel its appeal is often underestimated. We have the Appalachian Mountains, the inviting shores of the Atlantic, bustling urban centers brimming with art and cuisine, and serene, picturesque trails and parks. Whether you're seeking adventure, relaxation, or educational enrichment, this state provides an array of opportunities to engage with both the natural world and the stories of influential women who have shaped our society. With a rich history and a roster of accomplished women whose stories are both celebrated and waiting to be discovered, beyond the recognized figures, numerous unsung heroines have also left their mark, making it a source of inspiration and cultural heritage. As someone who has called North Carolina home, I'm excited to share with you the hidden gems and monumental sites that celebrate the remarkable women who have contributed to its legacy.

## **Beulah Louise Henry, Raleigh's "Lady Edison"**

In Raleigh, North Carolina, the North Carolina Museum of History honors Beulah Louise Henry, known as "Lady Edison" for her prolific inventions. Born in 1887, Henry's creativity led to over 100 patents, including a typewriter for the visually impaired and a vacuum ice cream freezer, challenging gender norms in the field of invention. Her work, spanning the early 20th to mid-20th century, shows her significant impact as a female inventor in North Carolina's history.

## **Harriet Jacobs, Edenton's Beacon of Freedom**

Harriet Jacobs, born into slavery in Edenton in 1813, became an iconic figure for her autobiography, "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl." Her narrative, detailing her escape from abuse and her journey to freedom via the Maritime Underground Railroad, offers profound insights into the life of an enslaved woman. The Historic Edenton State Historic Site provides tours, allowing visitors to explore Jacobs' experiences and the town's historical significance in her life.

## **Roberta Flack, The Voice of Black Mountain, NC**

Roberta Flack, born in Black Mountain in 1937, rose to fame with her soulful music and timeless hits like "Killing Me Softly with His Song." The Swannanoa Valley Museum & History Center showcases Flack's career and advocacy, displaying memorabilia and recordings that highlight her impact on music and social justice. Flack's legacy continues to influence musicians and activists worldwide.

## **Penelope Barker, Edenton's Revolutionary Leader**

Penelope Barker, born in Edenton in 1728, is celebrated for organizing the Edenton Tea Party in 1774, a significant act of political protest by women against British taxation. The Penelope Barker House Welcome Center offers insights into her leadership and the revolutionary era, highlighting her role in advocating for independence and women's rights. Visitors to Edenton can also explore the Edenton Tea Pot, a symbol of the historic protest led by Barker and 51 other women.

## **Guilford County's First Lady**

Dolley Madison, born in Guilford County in 1768, is remembered as one of America's most beloved First Ladies. Her influence extended beyond her social gatherings, contributing to the cultural and political landscape of early America. The Greensboro History Museum invites visitors to explore the Madison Collection, emphasizing her contributions to diplomacy and society. Madison's ability to foster

bipartisan relationships through her "Wednesday Night Drawing Rooms" highlights her lasting impact as a cultural icon and leader.

### **Charlotte Hawkins Brown's Trailblazing Education**

Charlotte Hawkins Brown played a pivotal role in advancing education for African American women in the early 20th century. From her base in Sedalia, North Carolina, she founded the Palmer Memorial Institute, a beacon of learning and opportunity for young Black women at a time when such resources were scarce. Her home, Canary Cottage, now offers 45-minute tours that explore the history of women's education, highlighting the schools Dr. Brown was associated with and the educators who supported her mission. Visitors will gain insights into the educational landscape of Dr. Brown's era, the challenges and triumphs of the Palmer Memorial Institute, and the experiences of its students, reflecting a critical chapter in the progression of educational opportunities for African American women.

### **Maya Angelou's Legacy at Reynolda House**

Maya Angelou, an iconic figure in American literature and civil rights activism, left a profound impact with her words and presence at Reynolda in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Known for her powerful poetry and storytelling, Angelou's "Still I Rise," published in 1978, became a symbol of resilience and dignity against oppression. In the 1980s, Reynolda's Master Bedroom Gallery became a platform for Angelou to vocalize themes of humanity, survival, and triumph. Her contributions are part of the broader narrative explored in "Still I Rise: The Black Experience at Reynolda," an exhibition running through December 31, 2024. This exhibit explores the lives of Black men and women who were vital to Reynolda's development from a working estate to a museum of American art, highlighting the estate's evolution through the Jim Crow era to its current status as a cultural institution. Visitors to the exhibition can experience Angelou's legacy through art, letters, photographs, and audiovisual recordings, offering insights into Reynolda's complex history and the transformative power of Black voices in shaping a space for reflection, understanding, and healing.

North Carolina boasts several attractions, from the majestic Blue Ridge Mountains to the serene Outer Banks beaches, offering a diverse array of activities for every traveler. Beyond its natural beauty, this state is rich in cultural sites, culinary delights, and historic landmarks. While visiting, engaging with the stories of influential women during Women's History Month adds a meaningful dimension to your stay. As you explore North Carolina, these destinations are invaluable stops that broaden your understanding of the state's and the nation's past.