

## Women and Work

Native American women were primarily responsible for raising crops, from planting through the harvest. They made all the clothing and often constructed homes, in addition to caring for and teaching the children. Most work was done communally.

European women often arrived in North America as indentured servants, working five to seven years at the least desirable tasks to pay off their passage to the colonies. Marriage was forbidden while they were indentured servants.

**1638** Margaret Brent and her sister receive the first known land grant to women (Maryland). Brent's name later appears in many court records, indicating that she handles her own business affairs, which is extremely unusual.

**1640s** Slavery begins to be institutionalized. For the next two hundred years, African women are forced to do field labor or work in their owners' homes. As industries develop, they are sent to work in mills, foundries, and food-processing plants.

**1744** Eliza Pinckney harvests a successful indigo crop in South Carolina after years of experimentation. Indigo soon replaces rice as the colony's principle export.

**1819** The Bank for Savings (New York) is the first to allow women to open accounts in their own names.

**1844** The Lowell Female Labor Reform Association collects 2,000 signatures and petitions the Massachusetts Legislature to mandate a 10-hour day. The petition is denied and mill workers continue to work for 12 to 16 hours a day for \$1 to \$3 per week, half of which goes to company boarding houses.

**1849** In New York State, Elizabeth Blackwell is allowed to become the first licensed woman physician in the U.S.

**1850** Women are 13 percent of the paid labor force, primarily in agriculture or domestic service.

- 1861** Dorothea Dix is appointed superintendent of the Union army nurses during the Civil War. At first she only accepts for service women over 30 who are both plain and Protestant.
- 1861-** During the Civil War, women fill in for men away at war.
- 1865** Women of all ages do nontraditional work on farms and in factories, businesses, and stores. Many women take government jobs, becoming known as “government girls”.
- 1865** Slavery and involuntary servitude are outlawed in the United States with the passage of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution.
- 1867** The cigar makers are the first national union to accept women and African Americans.
- 1868** Middle and upper class women established the Working Women's Protective Union in New York; similar groups formed in other cities. These unions give free legal aid to workers, act as employment agencies, and lobby successfully for laws to protect women workers.
- 1868-** The National Labor Union supports equal pay for equal work.
- 1869** Women shoe stitchers from six states form the first national women's labor organization, the Daughters of St. Crispin. The organization folded in 1876.
- 1873** The invention of the typewriter revolutionizes American businesses. By the turn of the century, 75,000 women are office workers, while 100,000 worked as salesclerks, both fields previously reserved for men.
- 1877** The first telephone switchboard is introduced. By 1900, some 35,000 women are phone operators.
- 1880** Over four million women, about one out of every seven, work for pay outside their homes. The majority are young, unmarried immigrants, laboring 60-80 hours a week in agriculture or as servants.

- 1881** Three thousand washerwomen in Atlanta organize a strike to demand higher pay, the largest known labor action by Black women up until that time.
- 1883** Mary Hoyt scores first on the Civil Service exam, becoming the first woman appointed under the new system that assigns government jobs by merit and test scores.
- 1900** Over five million U.S. women are wage earners, about 20 percent of the adult female population.
- 1903** The Women's Trade Union League is founded by middle-class reformers and women labor organizers to advocate for an eight-hour day and a living wage, among other issues.
- 1903-** Middle class reformers and women labor organizers join forces to form the national Women's Trade Unions League (WTUL), to bring public attention to the concerns of women workers.
- 1908** In *Muller v. State of Oregon*, 208 U.S. 412 (1908), the Supreme Court upholds Oregon's 10-hour workday for women. The win is a two-edged sword because the protective legislation implies that women are physically weak.
- 1909** In the "Uprising of 20,000," women garment workers strike in New York City for better wages and working conditions. Over 300 shops eventually sign union contracts.
- 1911** 146 workers, most of whom are women and girls, die in the Triangle Shirtwaist fire (New York City, March 25), ultimately resulting in protective legislation for workers in New York that becomes a model for legislation in other states.
- 1917** During WWI women move into many jobs - working in heavy industry, in mining, chemical manufacturing, automobile and railway plants. They also run street cars, conduct trains, direct traffic, and deliver mail.
- 1918** To keep the agricultural economy afloat during World War I, the Woman's Land Army recruits and trains 18,000 women in 30 states for farm work.

- 1919** The Woman's Bank opens in Clarksville, Tennessee, under Brenda Runyon and with an all-female staff.
- 1919-** The National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs (BPW) is founded.
- 1919-** Lena Madesin Phillips founds the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs to address the needs of white collar women workers. 26,000 women join the first year.
- 1920** The Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor is organized to develop policies for women workers.
- 1930s** During the Great Depression, laws are introduced in 26 states forbidding the hiring of married women. Government employers and school districts fire married women to make room for unemployed men.
- 1933** Frances Perkins becomes Secretary of Labor, the first woman in a U.S. President's cabinet.
- 1935** The Wagner Act ensures workers the right to collective bargaining and revitalizes the labor union movement.
- 1935-** Lillie Mae Jackson starts a national "Don't Buy Where you Can't Work" campaign through the NAACP to boost employment opportunities for African Americans.
- 1938** The Fair Labor Standards Act regulates minimum wages and maximum hours.
- 1940** The number of women in the labor force increases almost 60 percent, going from 11 to over 18 million women. Three-quarters of these women are married. On average, women earn 58 cents for every dollar earned by men.
- 1940-** One-fifth of white women and one-third of black women are wage earners. 60% of the black women are still domestics, compared with 10% of white women. Among Japanese American women workers, almost 38% are in agriculture and 24% are in domestic service.

- 1940-** Women industrial workers begin to lose their jobs in large numbers to returning service men, although surveys show 80% want to continue working.
- 1942** Women's military services are established by the Army, Navy, Coast Guard, and Marine Corps. Over 350,000 women serve in uniform during World War II.
- 1950** 30% of all women are in the paid labor force. More than half of all single women and more than a quarter of married women.
- 1952** More women are in the labor force than had been during the height of wartime production, despite layoffs at the end of WWII. However, women are now working primarily in clerical and service sectors, which pay far less than industry.
- 1955** Women earn an average of 63 cents for every dollar earned by men.
- 1963** The Equal Pay Act is passed by Congress, promising equitable wages for the same work, regardless of the sex of the worker.
- 1964** Title VII of the Civil Rights Act passes, including a prohibition against discrimination on the basis of sex.
- 1968** Executive Order 11246 prohibits sex discrimination by government contractors and requires affirmative action plans for hiring women.
- 1970** Women's wages fall to 59 cents for every dollar earned by men. Although nonwhite women earn even less, the gap is closing between white women and women of color.
- 1972** Title IX (Public Law 92-318) of the Education Amendments prohibits sex discrimination in all aspects of education programs that receive federal support.
- 1973** *Pittsburgh Press v. Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations*, 413 U.S. 376 (1973): The Supreme Court bans sex-segregated "help wanted" advertising as a violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as amended.

- 1973-** 9to5: National Association of Working Women, is founded by Karen Nussbaum in Boston. Nussbaum later becomes Director of the Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor.
- 1974** Women from 58 unions form the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) to improve the lives of women working outside the home.
- 1976** Working Women: The National Association for Office Workers is formed. In four years it has over 10,000 members.
- 1976-** The first issue of *Working Woman* magazine appears on the newsstands.
- 1978** The Pregnancy Discrimination Act bans employment discrimination against pregnant women.
- 1978-** Separate women's armed services are abolished, admitting women into integrated service branches.
- 1978-** OFCC establishes quotas for federally funded construction projects: 6.9% of women on work sites and 20-25% of women in apprenticeship programs. Still, by 1983 women are only 2% of the construction labor force.
- 1981** In San Jose, California, a strike of city workers wins salaries based on comparable worth for nearly 1500 women, a national first.
- 1986** In *Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson*, 477 U.S. 57 (1986), the U.S. Supreme Court rules that sexual harassment in the workplace is illegal.
- 1986-** About 25% of scientists are now women, but they are still less likely than men to be full professors or on a tenure track in teaching. Only 3.5% of the National Academy of Sciences members are women (51 members); since the Academy's 1863 founding, only 60 women have been elected.
- 1991** Women-owned businesses employ more workers in the U.S. than Fortune 500 companies do worldwide.

- 1992** Women are now paid 71 cents for every dollar paid to men. The range is from 64 cents for working-class women to 77 cents for professional women with doctorates. Black women earn 65 cents, Latinas 54 cents.
- 1992-** Women owned businesses employ more workers in the United States than the Fortune 500 companies do worldwide.
- 1992-** Women are allowed to fly combat aircraft, opening the way for advances in their military careers.
- 1995** More than one-third of all full-time women workers are employed in six occupations: secretaries, schoolteachers (excluding colleges and university teaching), cashiers, managers and administrators, registered nurses, and bookkeepers and accounting clerks.
- 1995-** Women's median hourly earnings are 79.4 percent of men's, while median annual earnings for women are 70.6 percent of men's, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.
- 1995-** Women enrolled in medical school at Yale, Harvard, and Johns Hopkins outnumber men for the first time.
- 1996** Women comprise 46.2 percent of all workers, compared to 38.1 percent in 1970.
- 1996-** Women are the majority of high school and grammar school teachers, but only 30% of public school principals. Women are: 19.4% of doctors, up from 7.6% in 1970; 24% of lawyers, up from 5% in 1970; 8.3% of engineers, up from 1.3% in 1973; and 3% of firefighters, 1.9% of construction workers, 11.8% of college presidents, 6.2% of board of directors at Fortune 500 and Service 500 companies.
- 1998** In *Burlington Industries, Inc. v. Ellerth*, 524 U.S. 742 (1998), and *Faragher v. City of Boca Raton*, 524 U.S. 742 (1998), the Supreme Court establishes vicarious liability for employers where supervisors sexually harass employees in their line of supervision. However, it balances this with an employer of preventing or promptly correcting any sexually harassing behavior and requiring the employee to take steps to complain of the behavior through employer defined procedures.

- 1999** U.S. Census reports that 28.6 percent of women make between \$15,000-24,999, 23.3 percent earn \$25,000-34,999, 18.2 percent earn \$35,000-49,999, 9.3 percent make \$50,000-74,999 and 3.7 percent earn over \$75,000.
- 2000** The AFL-CIO Working Women Conference 2000 held in Chicago, March 11-12 brought together for the first time over 5,000 women, including telephone operators and health care employees, poultry workers and steel workers.
- 2000-** U.S. Census reports that 12.5 percent of all women are living below the poverty line, compared to 15.2 percent in 1990.
- 2000-** U.S. Census reports on women's occupations – 23.9 percent work as administrative support, including clerical, 17.9 percent have a professional specialty, 16.4 percent are service workers (except private household), 14.1 percent are executive, administrators, and managerial, and 12.6 percent are in sales.
- 2002** President George W. Bush issues a Presidential Proclamation for National Women's History Month 2000. He encourages events and celebrations in venues, including the workplace, throughout the country to recognize women's historic accomplishments.
- 2002-** Shirley Caldwell Tilghman, President of Princeton University and a noted molecular biologist is named Northern American Laureate for this year's Women in Science Award. Tilghman was a leader in the national effort to map the human genome. This award honors the top five women scientists in the world.

*For current reports about women and work, contact the Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, Washington, D.C. 20210.*