



By: Bette Lou Higgins

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FEISTY FEMALES FROM OHIO

On March 1, 1803, Ohio became the 17th state in the Union. It takes its name from the River which forms its southern boundary, whose name in turn originated from the Seneca word *ohi:yo'*, meaning "good river", "great river" or "large creek".

Ohio is known as the "Buckeye State" after the tree, not the candy!

It has the carnation as the state flower and the cardinal as the state bird.

It boasts two nicknames: "The Birthplace of Aviation" and "The Heart of It All." It also has two anthems: "Beautiful Ohio" and (for better or worse), "Hang On Sloopy".

Its motto is "With God, all things are possible."

Many important people have come from Ohio: Thomas Edison, The Wright Brothers, John Glenn, Chef Boiardi and Tecumseh, The Shawnee warrior and chief, to name a few

MMM... there's something strange about that list...

What? No women?!

Not to worry! Ohio has produced MANY feisty females. Here's a quick overview:

Elizabeth "Betty" Zane McLaughlin Clark was a heroine of the Revolutionary War on the American frontier. She was born: July 19, 1759 in West Virginia. Her family moved here sometime around 1769.

On September 11, 1782, the Zane family was at Fort Henry in Wheeling, West Virginia which was under siege by Native Americans who were allies of the British. While Betty was loading a rifle, her father was wounded and fell from the top of the fort right in front of her. At which point, the captain of the fort declared, "We have lost two men ..., and we need black gunpowder." Apparently Betty's brother had carelessly left gunpowder at their house. Without giving it another thought, Betty ran the 40 to 50 yards back home to retrieve the gunpowder. Her quick action allowed the group to hold off the Natives and they all lived to tell the story.

Many years later, Betty's great-grandnephew, author Zane Grey, wrote a historical novel about her – Betty Zane.

Frances Dana Gage (1808-1884) was born in Marietta, Ohio in 1808. Gage became a leader in the three great reform movements that reshaped American life in the years before the Civil War – the temperance movement, the women's rights campaign, and the anti-slavery crusade.

On May 28, 1851, Chairwoman Frances Gage opened the Women's Rights Convention at the Stone Church in Akron, Ohio to consider the "Rights, Duties and Relations of Women" and to encourage the people rewriting Ohio's constitution to include more rights for women. Over the next 48 hours many leaders in the movement stepped up to the platform. On May 29, perhaps the most famous speech of the convention was given by an ex-slave named Isabella. The speech became sort of an anthem for women everywhere – "Ain't I A Woman?" by Sojourner Truth.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911) was a poet, abolitionist, essayist, public speaker, journalist, suffragist and published fiction

writer (short stories and novels). In 1860, she settled near Columbus. She was one of the very first African American women to become published and she was a founding member of the American Woman Suffrage Association.

Clara Morris was born on March 17, 1848 in Toronto, Canada. Three years later, she and her mother moved to Cleveland to get away from her father who had just been exposed as a bigamist. There she became a resident dancer at the Cleveland Academy of Music.

From dancing, Clara moved on to acting making her New York debut in September, 1870. She went on to be featured in many highly emotional roles and toured extensively during the 1880s. Her emotional power and intensity impressed audiences everywhere. She seemed to have a real genius for portraying the suffering, impassioned, unfortunate heroines of melodrama.

Health issues brought her career to a close in 1890 and she went into retirement in Riverdale, New York where she wrote articles on acting for magazines, a newspaper column and several books including Life on the Stage: My Personal Experiences and Recollections in which she recounts her meeting with actor John Wilkes Booth better known as the assassin of Abraham Lincoln.

Clara died on November 20, 1925.

Phoebe Ann Mosey was born in Darke County on August 13, 1860. Today she is known as Annie Oakley, the American sharpshooter and exhibition shooter. Her talent first came to light when she won a shooting match against traveling-show marksman Frank E. Butler when she was only 15 years old. Apparently, Frank was undaunted by her skill because they got married in 1876! They joined Buffalo Bill's

Wild West show. Oakley became a renowned international star, performing before royalty and heads of state.

She used to shoot holes in playing cards to demonstrate her remarkable skill. Later when theatres started issuing comp tickets they called them “Annie Oakleys” because they would punch a hole in them to prevent counterfeiting.

She has been memorialized in two shows loosely based on her life – a film called “Annie Oakley” (1935) and the Irving Berlin music, “Annie Get Your Gun” (1946).

In 1884, Susanna Salter, of Belmont County, Ohio, became the nation’s first female mayor in Argonia, Kansas in 1887. Apparently her nomination was supposed to be a joke. The anti-temperance men nominated the Prohibition Party’s member never thinking that she’d actually WIN. The joke was on them and she served a one year term.

Mary Eliza Church Terrell was a well-known African American activist who championed racial equality and women’s suffrage in the late 19th and early 20th century. An Oberlin College graduate, Terrell was part of the rising black middle and upper class who used their position to fight racial discrimination.

You have to be pretty feisty to be a woman in sports – even today! But in the early 1900s when few women even PLAYED sports, one 17 year-old Ohioan stepped up to the mound in Vermilion, Ohio and started on a very unique career path. In 1907, Alta Weiss became the first woman to play PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL on a MEN’S team! Over the next 15 years, she was the star player of the Vermilion All-Stars (later called the Weiss All-Stars). She and her team played at Cleveland’s famous baseball field –

League Park against an up and coming semi-professional team, Vacha's All Stars. On October 2, 1907 more than 3,000 people came to see the "Girl Wonder" whose team won with a score of 7-6!

With the money Alta earned playing baseball, she put herself through medical school at Starling College which is now part of Ohio State University. When she graduated in 1914 she was the only girl in her class!

As for baseball, Alta proclaimed "You can't play ball in a skirt!" and switched from long woolen skirts to bloomers which was almost more radical than playing baseball in the first place!

On April 2, 1917, Frances Payne Bolton (1885 - 1977) was the first woman elected to congress from Ohio. A Republican who opposed the draft in 1940, she believed that women should also be drafted after World War II. She served in congress from 1940 to 1969.

When people say "A star is born" they don't usually mean a THREE-YEAR-OLD! But basically, that's how it was with Clevelander Dorothy Dandridge.

When her mother, Ruby, did not feel well one day and couldn't do her performance for a church social, her little daughter offered to go on for her. But Ruby wasn't sure. Then Dottie gave a perfect recitation of "In The Morning" by Ohio poet, Paul Lawrence Dunbar. With such an audition – what could Ruby do? So little Dorothy Dandridge made her debut! She was such a hit that soon Dorothy was receiving requests for performances at other Cleveland churches and Dottie was on her way in show business!

Born on November 9, 1922, Dorothy had a lot of firsts in her short career: Dottie was the first black actor to be nominated for an Academy Award in a starring role ("Carmen Jones). She was the first

black sex symbol accepted by white society, she was the first black to be engaged at the Empire Room in New York's Waldorf-Astoria, she was the first Negro to be featured on the cover of *Life Magazine*, and she helped integrate American motion pictures.

But acting roles were few and far between for the exotic-looking woman. Directors couldn't decide what to do with such a beautiful light skinned African-American or even what nationality to make her in the movies.

Dandridge died on September 8, 1965 at the age of 42. Though no evidence of suicide was found, there was acute ingestion of Tofranil, but whether it was suicide or accident to this day remains a mystery.

Speaking of sex symbols, one Ohio actress made her claim to fame with sex: Sarah Jessica Parker was born on March 25, 1965 in Nelsonville. Though she is also a producer and designer, she is best known for her role as Carrie Bradshaw in the series "Sex and the City" (1998–2004).

Sarah credits David Blackburn of the Cincinnati Ballet with having one of the biggest impacts in her life. Her family didn't have a lot of money when she wanted to audition for the ballet. When her mother went to the school to find out about financial aid, Mr. Blackburn found a way to offer a scholarship. He even helped arrange continued support when they moved to New York by smoothing the way for additional aid at the American Ballet Theatre. He inspired Sarah so much that after Blackburn's retirement she set up a scholarship in his name at the Cincinnati Ballet. Sarah said, "It is my belief that two Mr. Blackburns could change a whole school, and from that school we could possibly have a movement – and after that, who knows, maybe a whole new way of thinking."

Maybe even thinking about a Woman President!

Ohio is the birthplace of eight U.S. presidents: Grant, Hayes, Garfield, McKinley, Taft, Harding, William Henry and Benjamin Harrison.

It is also the birthplace of the first woman to run for president.

While students read about Grant, Garfield, Taft and the other Ohio presidents in school, few have ever heard the story of the country's first female presidential candidate: Ohioan Victoria Woodhull.

Some say that Victoria Claflin Woodhull Blood Martin never made it to the presidency because she was not presidential-quality material. Others say that she didn't make it because she was a woman, and a woman had never been, and never would be, President.

But even today, some still argue that Woodhull's gifts as storytelling, leg-pulling, palm-reading hornswaggler could have made her one of the all-time greats.

This is her story...

Truthfully, the tale of Victoria Claflin's childhood does not sound very much like the usual school book account of the early life of a president. There were no log cabins, cherry trees, or honest tendencies in Victoria's family. Victoria was born on September 23, 1838, the seventh child of a well-known crook in Homer, Ohio.

Her family was distinguished only by their efforts to avoid law, order, and respectability. According to one local legend, Victoria's father was visited by the sheriff investigating a claim of counterfeiting. As the charges were explained to him, her father pulled a counterfeit \$100.00 bill from his pocket, proceeded to tear it into tiny pieces, and ate the evidence bit by bit in front of the sheriff.

So, it should not be surprising that morality was not a strong part of Victoria's character. However, she did have gifts in other areas. Both Victoria and her younger sister Tennessee were remarkable in their extraordinary beauty. Victoria had raven-dark hair, startling blue eyes, and a face that some described being as lovely as the face of a porcelain doll or delicate cameo. Tennie was equally beautiful, and perhaps even more stunning, than Victoria. Both girls also possessed special supernatural abilities. They claimed that they could read minds and foretell the future, and with these abilities, they managed to frighten away most of the children in Homer -- and a few adults, too.

The girls' parents were not ones to overlook a good money-making scheme, even if it involved their daughters. So, at a young age, Tennie and Victoria became the stars of the family's seedy, traveling medicine show. They were the show's supernatural "mediums" and could perform levitation, rappings, séances, palm-readings, and other rituals. With her stunning good looks, Tennie also promoted "Miss Tennessee's Magnetic Life Elixir for Beautifying the Complexion and Cleansing the Blood", but it is unlikely that anyone who purchased the elixir ever attained her extraordinary beauty. (Although the potent alcoholic contents of the medicine might have made her customers believe that they looked better!)

Now, if Victoria had become President, historians probably could have overlooked this chapter in her life. They might have painted her as an unfortunate victim of exploitive, money-hungry parents. Or, they might have glorified the medicine show stories, making them entertaining bits of presidential folklore: "President Woodhull Once Read Palms To Make A Penny"...

But historians couldn't overlook the next chapter in her life. On November 20, 1853, when she was barely 15, Victoria married 28-year

old Doctor Canning Woodhull. Canning was a dozen years older than Victoria. He sold patent medicine and called himself a doctor. A short time later, he plunged into a life of alcohol and other vices.

By 1864, Victoria was fed up with the drinking and neglect so she divorced Canning, though she kept his name. To escape the unfortunate match, Woodhull polished up her medicine show skills again and met a Civil War veteran named Colonel Blood who was working as a magnetic and clairvoyant physician. Soon they were working together. Victoria said that she and Colonel Blood were “spiritual mates” and they married in 1866.

A few years later, Colonel Blood, Victoria and her sister, Tennessee moved to New York, where the sisters established themselves in high society in New York City. Their beauty and their supernatural gifts became their calling card.

Cornelius Vanderbilt, of the Vanderbilt empire, was so entranced with them that he helped them to establish themselves as the first female stockbrokers on Wall Street -- more popularly known as the "Bewitched Brokers". The two sisters, who had once earned mere pennies in medicine shows, soon claimed profits of \$700,000. That's about \$13 million in today's money.

With some of their earnings, the sisters started their own newspaper, "Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly", dedicated to women's causes. Circulation for the weekly paper grew to 50,000, even though it rarely came out once a week.

Stock markets, newspaper writing, fortune-telling, and fraternizing with millionaire men: there seemed to be little that the sisters couldn't do. But Victoria Woodhull would not be content until she attained the real prize: the presidency of the United States.

She joined the growing women's rights movement. It didn't take long for her to hit the "front page", so to speak. On January 11, 1871 she became the first woman to address a House Committee.

While other suffragists were advocating for the right to vote for women, Victoria declared women already HAD the right to vote because the 14th and 15th Amendments implicitly granted women the right to cast their ballot! Unfortunately, the members of the House did not agree with this logic and women were not granted suffrage until the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920.

Speaking before Congress, though, was just a stop on her campaign trail to the White House. At the age of 31, she used her own newspaper to announce her candidacy. In the presidential election of 1872, she would be campaigning against fellow Ohioan, Ulysses Grant. She told readers that her running mate was the black leader, Frederick Douglass, although she had never mentioned this idea to him, and he later refused to even entertain the possibility.

Victoria created her own political platform of new ideas and social reform. Today, many of her ideas sound ordinary -- even a bit dull, but in 1872, they were considered radical by some, and by others, laughably ridiculous.

Victoria and her "Cosmo-Political Party" (officially called The Equal Rights Party) supported an eight-hour work day, minority representation in Congress, universal suffrage for women, public housing for the poor, a national education system, and the creation of an international body to help prevent war around the world. And if elected, they also promised a few more revolutionary changes: a new United States constitution to replace that dusty, nearly century-old

document, and a one-term limit on the presidency. (After all, Victoria didn't want to sit around in the White House for years!)

Needless to say, the first woman to run for the presidency was not elected. Grant won easily over liberal Republican Horace Greeley. However, Woodhull did receive about 3,000 votes, and she insisted that many others were discarded by unscrupulous male poll workers, or the count would have been much higher.

After divorcing Colonel Blood, Victoria Woodhull decided it was time to move to a country where they appreciated women named "Victoria" -- a place where Victorias could actually be queens! She and Tennie sailed to England and managed to find themselves wealthy English husbands.

Tennie became Lady Cook, Marchioness, and Woodhull resided with her third husband, John Martin, on a sprawling country estate. Both sisters became philanthropists and continued to work for Women's Rights.

Though Victoria Woodhull never achieved her political dream, there had been other successes in her life. The poor palm-reader from a lawless Ohio family was now a wealthy English gentlewoman. The girl, who had barely any "schooling", could claim a newspaper and brokerage business to her name. Her financial and business success -- regardless of how it had been achieved -- was nearly unequaled by any other woman of her era.

To some people, Victoria Woodhull was persistent in pursuit of her dreams. To others, she was a foolish, vain publicity-seeker. But no matter how you look at Victoria and Tennessee managed to push political and social boundaries throughout their lives and gain wealth along the way.

Now, if Victoria Woodhull had been elected the first female President of the United States, she promised to have changed all that. If she had become President, women everywhere would have gained the right to vote, and the right to do a few other things as well. (She planned to introduce slacks and sex education to America) But some people say that if you believe that, they have some of “Miss Tennessee’s Magnetic Life Elixir for Beautifying the Complexion and Cleansing the Blood” to sell you.

AND that’s just a few of Ohio’s Feisty Females!



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Elyria, Ohio 44035

From **Canal Songs and Stories**, a fun and informative program that features music and stories from the Ohio-Erie Canal, to **Doctor Putnam's Miracle Mixture**, a vivid, high-spirited living history program, Eden Valley gives your audiences drama that brims with energy, humor, and fantasy and features a magical cast of characters.

Eden Valley has written and/or produced theatrical programs for many of Northern Ohio's most prestigious educational and cultural organizations including: The Cleveland Metroparks, The Steamship *William G. Mather*, The Lorain County Metro Parks, The Great Lakes Historical Society, The Western Reserve Historical Society.

Programs include: **Nature Tales, Cleveland Sings!, From Ohio To Broadway, Ohio Ghost Stories and Stories From A Christmas Past**

Most recently EVE documented the life of "Grandma" Emma Gatewood — first woman to solo thru-hike the 2,050-mile Appalachian Trail in 1955 at the age of 67 after raising 11 children and surviving domestic abuse. Their project included a one-act play, a storytelling program with companion book and DVD, and an Emmy-nominated documentary, *TRAIL MAGIC: THE GRANDMA GATEWOOD STORY*, which was named "Best Local Documentary" at the 2019 Chagrin Film Festival.

Their current project is to document the life of Victoria Woodhull — first woman to run for president in 1872. A reader's theatre storytelling program and companion book have been completed and funds are being raised for a documentary. For more information visit www.victoriawoodhullforpresident.org

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www.edenvalleyenterprises.org | blheve@edenvalleyenterprises.org