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Women's history sites in Mass. great learning destinations



Massachusetts state house. Getty Images

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One hundred years ago, women across America were readying to do something they'd never been able to do before: cast their vote for president of the United States.

That year, the choice was between Warren Harding and James Cox, both from Ohio. The nation, both men and women voting for president for the first time in 34 presidential elections, chose Harding.

Massachusetts played a key role in the suffragette movement.

Which means, of course, historic day trips focused on women and voting are plentiful.

Why not spend a crisp autumn day discovering how Massachusetts-born women helped deliver voting rights and more?

There are 99 historic locations celebrating 72 such trailblazing women dotting the Bay State map. Their stories are unique and yet connected. Some, like Susan B. Anthony (born in woodsy and scenic Adams) are familiar to all.

Then there are those lesser known but just as important, like Ruth Graves Wakefield, inventor of the Toll House cookie. Because she's not just about that famed cookie. Wakefield ran the Toll House Inn with her husband. She was a college graduate, trained chef, author and more. During World War II, her cookies were one of the most requested by troops overseas.

So how does one head out to find the rich women's history in the Bay State?

Groups dedicated to women's history have helped us on this quest.



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Start with the free and downloadable “Historic Women Trailblazers of Massachusetts” book, ([visitma.com/things-to-do/history/women-trailblazers/](https://www.visitma.com/things-to-do/history/women-trailblazers/)) created by the folks at Visit Massachusetts.

The book details locations and backstories of 99 locations, and gives you a plan for getting out and learning more about each.

You’ll find familiar names, like Fanny Farmer and Julia Child, and also some that may surprise you, like Amelia Earhart (she lived in Boston and flew out of Quincy).



In this Jan. 13, 1935, file photo, American aviatrix Amelia Earhart climbs from the cockpit of her plane at Los Angeles, Calif., after a flight from Oakland to visit her mother. (AP Photo, File)

There are mini-bios, maps and more.

Here are a few of the many routes you could consider.

Boston and the State House: The Massachusetts State House is packed with women's history.

Outside, you'll find statues of Mary Hutchinson, who fought for religious freedom in Colonial Massachusetts (and who believed the souls of men and women to be equal), and Mary Dyer, one of the "Boston Martyrs" hanged in 1660 for being a practicing Quaker.



The biographical sculpture, “Hear Us,” honoring the achievements of Massachusetts women, is seen at the State House, Wednesday, May 21, 2003 in Boston. Dorothea Dix was one of America’s first social service advocates, working on behalf of the poor, handicapped and mentally ill (AP Photo/Julia Malakie)

Inside you’ll find the “Trailblazers: Hear Us,” display, with plaques celebrating the hard work and courage of six Massachusetts women.

Next, walk to the Boston Women’s Memorial Sculpture on Commonwealth Avenue (boston.gov/departments/womens-advancement/boston-womens-memorial). Dedicated to Abigail Adams (who, after all, is the woman who beseeched her husband John, on his way to write the Constitution, to remember the women), Lucy Stone and Phillis Wheatley, it’s in a lovely setting in the heart of the city.

Greater Worcester Area: Worcester was a hotbed for the suffragette movement. Sarah E. Wall, a pioneer and leader in the movement, was born there. Mechanic’s Hall, a must visit on a learning day trip, was host of the very first and second National Women’s Rights Convention, held there in 1850 and 1851.

For your guidance on this day trip, turn to the Worcester Women’s History Project (wwhp.org), which gives you backstories and locations of spots in and around Worcester to discover.

Their Women’s History Trail Book (\$12, on their site) helps you find other great places to explore.

One is the home of Clara Barton in North Oxford. Tucked into the trees beside a pond, the home is where Barton planned her great work and lived out most of her life.

The grounds around it are also home to the Barton Center for Diabetes Education (bartoncenter.org), one of the world's first girls diabetes camps, founded just after insulin was invented.

South of Boston: In North Easton you'll find Borderland State Park, which is not only a lovely park for picnicking but features Ames Mansion, the home of Blanche Ames Ames, the daughter of a Civil War general. She was a suffragette of great standing, as well as an outspoken advocate for birth control. She was the first president of the American Birth Control League.

In Scituate, you can walk along the seawall and look at Cedar Point Light, aka Old Scituate Light, and learn about Abigail and Rebecca Bates. There is a great story for children to read and learn about (there are plenty of books available), and the lighthouse they lived in still stands.



Old Scituate Light on Cedar Point in Scituate. Getty Images

And then there's the Toll House in Whitman, where Wakefield invented those cookies. All that's left now is a sign, but you can dig out the classic recipe, bake the cookies and pack them as a snack for a quick visit.

"Many of the state's most popular tourism attractions celebrate accomplished Massachusetts women year-round, such as the historical homes, museums and monuments honoring Louisa May Alcott, Emily Dickinson, Abigail Adams, Elma Lewis, Isabella Stuart Gardner, Sojourner Truth and Susan B. Anthony," said Keiko Matsudo Orrall, executive director of the Mass Office of Travel & Tourism.

“From a tourism and educational perspective, this year’s celebration of the 19th Amendment centennial became the perfect opportunity for us to publish Historic Women Trailblazers of Massachusetts, which underscores the achievements of more than 70 women with Massachusetts connections,” Orrall said. “The Trailblazers digital booklet features dozens of landmarks, statues and tourism attractions for visitors and residents to enjoy while learning about some of our finest citizens.”

What do they hope to come of folks visiting the site? For Mary Smoyer, a longtime volunteer and board member of the Worcester Women’s History Project, it’s simple.

“To inspire them to vote,” she said. “These women worked for 72 years for this. They were harassed, jailed and more. They put their lives on the line so we could vote, and most of those women did not live long enough to vote themselves. Just think, it is quite remarkable to live in a time when, not so long ago, only my husband could vote. So learn and recall the stories of these women. Then vote.”

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