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Women's Voices

Meet the Women of Ashland

LUCRETIA HART CLAY

(1781 – 1864)



Lucretia Hart Clay

Lucretia Hart was born on March 18, 1781 in Hagerstown, Maryland. Lucretia was well educated in Hagerstown until 1794 when her father Thomas Hart moved the family to Lexington, Kentucky where she finished her education.

Lucretia Hart and Henry Clay were married on April 11, 1799 at her parents' home. Shortly thereafter, Lucretia and Henry moved into the home next door. They lived in that home for about seven years before moving to Ashland around 1807.

Lucretia had eleven children, and eight of them died before she did. She relied on her faith to get her through the difficult times in her life. And according to Lucretia's family and friends, she preferred caring for her children and home over other roles. Women in Lucretia's social circle were expected to care for their homes and serve as the moral anchor of their families. Later in life, Lucretia also raised some of her grandchildren.

Lucretia was supportive of her husband and his career. She traveled regularly to Washington, D.C. with him until their last daughter died in 1835. She also hosted several events for Henry. She and Dolley Madison, wife of the fourth President of the United States James Madison, alternated throwing weekly parties.

When Lucretia did not travel to Washington, she managed Ashland and served as the go between for Henry, his overseers, and the other men who managed the farm. As manager of the estate, Lucretia also managed the people she and Henry enslaved. She assigned work, meted out punishments, and participated in the buying and selling of enslaved people.

After Henry's death in 1852, Lucretia went to live with their son John at his home located on the other side of the Ashland estate, named Ashland at Tates Creek. She died there on April 6, 1864 at the age of 83. Lucretia left behind little record of herself: just a few letters to her husband, a will, and the letter she wrote in response to public criticism of her son James and his decision to tear down and rebuild the mansion at Ashland, which was highly republished. This letter demonstrates how far Lucretia, a very private person, was willing go outside her comfort zone to protect her family.

CHARLOTTE "LOTTY" DUPUY (c. 1788 -?)



Decatur house c. 1822.

Charlotte "Lotty" Dupuy was born in Maryland around 1788. Enslaved by the same person from birth, at seven years old Charlotte was sold for \$100 and transported to Lexington, Kentucky. Charlotte's new enslaver then hired her out to work in a tailor shop in Downtown Lexington. While working there, Charlotte met Aaron Dupuy. Aaron was enslaved by Henry Clay, who had hired him out to work in a nail factory Downtown. Charlotte married Aaron, and in 1806, to be with her husband, she convinced her enslaver to sell her to Henry Clay. Henry Clay paid \$450 to buy Charlotte. In the Clay household Charlotte labored as a cook, housekeeper, and caretaker to the family. She and Aaron had two children, Charles and Mary Anne.

In 1829, Charlotte brought a lawsuit against Henry Clay for her freedom and the freedom of her children. By this time, Henry Clay had been Secretary of State since 1825. Charlotte and her family had traveled with the Clays to Washington, D.C. and were living at Decatur House at the time of her lawsuit. Although Charlotte's freedom suit went to trial, the court found that she and her children had no rightful claim to freedom. After losing her suit, Charlotte refused to return to Ashland and was jailed as a result. Clay later sent Charlotte to New Orleans, Louisiana to labor for his relatives. Charlotte was separated from her family for over three years. In 1840, Charlotte and her daughter Mary Ann were freed by Henry Clay. In 1844, Clay freed Charlotte's son Charles. Charlotte's husband Aaron was never freed by the Clays.



The date of Charlotte's death and the place where she is buried are unknown.

SARAH "SALLY" HALL (c. 1760 – 1854)

Sarah "Sally" Hall was born in Hull, England in either 1761 or 1770 and immigrated to Virginia with her brothers Thomas, Joseph, and Robert. They later relocated to Bourbon County, KY. In 1804, Sally was hired as a housekeeper by Lucretia Clay and moved into the Clay home in downtown Lexington. She later moved with them to Ashland and served as housekeeper for over 50 years. Sally never married or had children. As a working-class white woman without a spouse, housekeeping was one of the few acceptable means of earning a living. It also provided her a home at a time when it was considered unacceptable for a woman to live by herself.

As housekeeper, Sally would have managed the people enslaved to work in the house. Like the overseers on the farm, she might have punished or rewarded them. She would have worked for Lucretia who would have determined how the house was to be managed. Sally was paid for her work, although not regularly. In February of 1838 she received a lump sum payment for work from 1804 until March 1, 1838.

After Henry Clay died, Lucretia took Sally to her son John's home, Ashland-on-Tates-Creek. Sally lived there the remainder of her life and died on September 2, 1854. Henry Clay's son Thomas arranged for her funeral and she was buried in the Old Episcopal Burying Ground in Lexington.

SUSAN JACOB CLAY (1823 – 1905)



Susan Jacob Clay

Susan Jacob Clay married James B. Clay, the son of Henry and Lucretia Clay, in 1843. Susan and James were married for twenty years and had ten children, only five of whom lived to adulthood. Susan was intelligent, well-educated, and from a wealthy Louisville family.

Susan's intelligence is best recorded in her writing. At times, she served as Henry Clay's personal secretary. Later in life Susan became an author, writing many articles about the Clay family. Some of her articles about Henry Clay altered his legacy by leaving out difficult subjects like slavery.

Susan and James had the Ashland mansion rebuilt and it was completed between 1856-1857. It was Susan's strength that ensured her family's survival during its darkest hour: The Civil War. James fled to Montreal, Canada during the war, leaving Susan to care for the estate and their children. A skirmish, or, a small battle, took place at Ashland in 1862.

Susan met the challenges in her life with intelligence, faith, and strength.

JOSEPHINE RUSSELL ERWIN CLAY (1835 – 1920)



Josephine Russell Erwin Clay, circa 1853



Josephine with her daughters and sons-in-law at Ashland on Tate's Creek

Josephine's first husband, Henry Clay's grandson, Eugene Erwin was killed in action in the Civil War in 1863 leaving her a Confederate widow in Union occupied Independence, Missouri. Losing a spouse is never easy for anyone, but for women in the early 19th century, it was especially difficult. Widows had little chance to support themselves or their families. Josephine had three children and needed help to survive. She eventually came to Lexington, Kentucky to be housekeeper for Henry Clay's son John, whom she married a few years later. John was a very successful Thoroughbred breeder and racer, and businessman. When he died, Josephine took over his horse business vowing "to do my best and to rely absolutely on myself—to paddle my own canoe; and if

the craft went down to sink with her.” Josephine was ultimately very successful and respected in her own right in the male-dominated equine industry, paving the way for women to be involved in the industry today.

Later in life, Josephine wrote novels based on her experiences. She also saved many family artifacts and stories. Those artifacts and stories make up a large part of the legacy of Henry Clay today.

ANNE CLAY MCDOWELL (1837 – 1917)



Anne Clay McDowell, circa 1890s



Ashland during the McDowell era

Henry Clay’s granddaughter Anne Clay McDowell returned the family home to its former glory. Anne also helped heal family wounds and restore unity to a divided house.

Anne's life was defined by loss and changed by war. Her father was killed in the Mexican War when she was ten. When the Civil War began, both her brothers went off to fight, one for the Union and one for the Confederacy. After enduring a year and a half of worry that they might meet on the battlefield, she lost both to disease.

Her husband, Henry Clay McDowell bought Ashland in 1882. Anne enhanced Henry Clay's presence in the home and its status as a monument to him by acquiring important artifacts and displaying them. Having felt the pain of family being ripped apart by the Civil War, she also used the home as a place where the family could reunite, share their legacy, and heal old wounds. Her efforts paved the way for her daughter Nannette to take the steps to preserve Ashland.

MAGDALEN HARVEY "AUNT MAG" MCDOWELL (1829 – 1918)



Magdalen Harvey McDowell, or "Aunt Mag"

Magdalen Harvey McDowell (Anne Clay McDowell's sister-in-law), also called Aunt Mag, lived at Ashland from 1883-1918. Unlike many women of her time, she was completely independent by choice. She never married or had children, nor was she ever employed in domestic service. Her sheer determination and the privilege of her family insured she succeeded in ways very few women of her time did. Aunt Mag's obituary noted that "in a day [when a] woman's sphere was thought to be confined to the drawing room, the kitchen and the nursery, [she] sought an outlet for her genius in painting, architecture, [and] kindred activities."

Aunt Mag was educated but not trained in any of the fields in which she worked. She was an artist, painting with incredible skill. Several of her works are in Ashland's collection and in other museums. Aunt Mag was an architect and designed several buildings, including homes for many family members and a children's facility for

the Lexington tuberculosis hospital. A few of the houses she designed still stand. She was also an inventor, designing a device to heat multiple rooms with a single fireplace. She even received a patent for it.

The most important legacy of Aunt Mag was not her art, architecture, or invention; it was encouraging her three nieces Nannette, Madeline, and Julia McDowell to find their voices. Aunt Mag showed them that they could be their own people and accomplish great things.

NANNETTE “NETTIE” MCDOWELL BULLOCK (1859 – 1948)



Nannette McDowell Bullock

Nannette McDowell Bullock, Henry Clay’s great-granddaughter, originally moved to Ashland with her family in 1882. She returned with her husband and son in 1903 to take care of her mother, Anne Clay McDowell.

In 1926, Nannette created the Henry Clay Memorial Foundation. The foundation was created to own and operate the mansion and surrounding land as a park and monument to her great-grandfather Henry Clay and sister Madeline McDowell Breckinridge, a suffragist and reformer. The mansion at Ashland opened as a museum in 1950. Ashland’s story and history exist today because of Nannette.

In 1913 Nannette ran for school superintendent. She did not do this because she wanted the job, but because women were being denied the right to vote for superintendent as provided by state law. Once that right was secured in a lawsuit, Nannette dropped out of the race.

Nannette’s generation of women had much greater freedom and independence than her great-grandmother Lucretia Hart Clay’s generation. Nannette used these opportunities to accomplish important things for her family and community.

MADELINE “MADGE” MCDOWELL BRECKINRIDGE

(1872 – 1920)



Madeline "Madge" McDowell Breckinridge

Madeline “Madge” McDowell was born on May 20, 1872 into two of Kentucky’s great families. She was the great-granddaughter of Henry Clay, the most famous Kentuckian of the 19th century, and the great-great niece of Ephraim McDowell, the famous surgeon. Her family’s wealth gave Madge opportunities beyond the reach of many women. Those opportunities included substantial education and social connections. Madge also benefitted from the support of her sisters Nannette and Julia.

Madge’s goal was to do as much good as possible in whatever time she had. She worked to provide educational opportunities to poor and working-class areas in Lexington by establishing the Lincoln School. She fought for the rights of African Americans. She created parks for outdoor recreation. She also led many organizations engaged in bettering society.

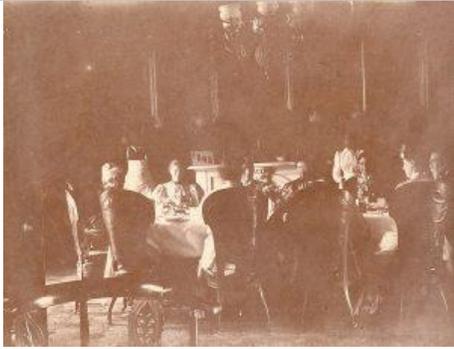
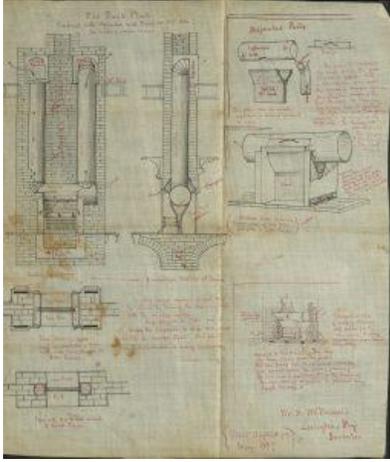
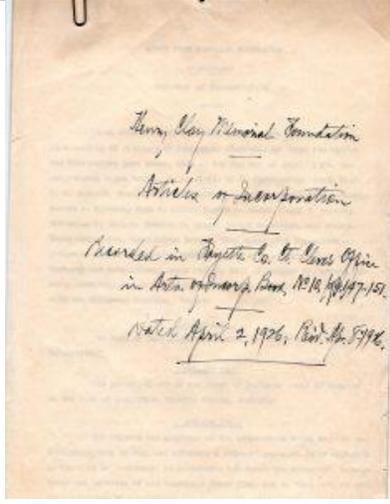
Of all the causes and projects for which Madeline McDowell Breckinridge fought, none was as near or dear to her as woman suffrage, or women’s right to vote. She was active on every level— local, state, and national. Madge also rose to positions of leadership in state and national organizations like the National American Women’s Suffrage Association.

Unfortunately, Madge suffered from poor health for most of her adult life. She battled tuberculosis and suffered a stroke at the age of 30, but still pressed on in pursuit of her causes. Madge was present on January 8, 1920 when Governor Edwin Morrow signed the ratification of the 19th Amendment, granting women the right to vote. Madge was able to vote in the presidential election later that year but died from another stroke just two weeks later.

Artifacts & Primary Sources

Item	Description	Date	Courtesy Of	Image	Web Link
1	Letter from Lucretia in defense of her son James tearing down the original Ashland		Louisville Journal		https://bit.ly/37E1DMG
2	Lotty's document of sale from James Condon to Henry Clay.		Library of Congress		https://bit.ly/2JMLo81
3	Document summoning Henry Clay to court to answer Lotty's petition for freedom. Courtesy of the National Archives.		National Archives		https://bit.ly/33SVbAq

4	Manumission document for Lotty and Mary Anne.		Office of the Fayette County Clerk		https://bit.ly/330tbO7
5	Sally Hall's receipt for work from 1804 to March 1, 1838	March 1, 1838	Library of Congress		https://bit.ly/37MAG9w
6	Susan Jacob Clay's letter box		Ashland Collection		https://bit.ly/2ImzEbE
7	Josephine's catalog of horses	1903	University of Kentucky Libraries Department of Special Collections		https://bit.ly/3ggemXs

8	Anne (seated far left) often hosted dinner parties where the family could reconcile after the Civil War		University of Kentucky Libraries Department of Special Collections and Digital Projects.		https://bit.ly/3mUS96e
9	House at 325 Linden Walk, Lexington, KY designed by Aunt Mag		Fayette County PVA		https://bit.ly/3gkYLrY
10	Aunt Mag's patent for a device that could heat multiple rooms with one fireplace		University of Kentucky Libraries Department of Special Collections and Digital Projects.		https://bit.ly/33QDUb9
11	Henry Clay Memorial Foundation Articles of Incorporation-- Created by Nannette McDowell Bullock	1926	Ashland Collection		https://bit.ly/3gkUZPv

12	Clipping from newspaper about Nannette running for School Superintendent		Ashland Collection		https://bit.ly/3gmbzOQ
13	The Lincoln School not only made it possible for lower income children to receive an education, but it also served as a community resource center		University of Kentucky Libraries Department of Special Collections and Digital Projects		https://bit.ly/39PvdBz
14	Madge, second from right, looks over the shoulder of Governor Morrow as the 19th Amendment is ratified in Kentucky	January 8, 1920	Kentucky Historical Society		

15	Article in the Lexington Herald written by Madeline McDowell Breckinridge to the Governor of KY when she was the Chairman of the KERA	November 15, 1915	University of Kentucky Libraries Department of Special Collections		
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Activities

For younger students:

1. Think about a woman in your life (it can be someone you know personally or someone you do not know) who you admire. Explain why you admire her.

For older students:

1. Create a timeline beginning with Lucretia Hart Clay's birth and Madeline McDowell Breckinridge's death, including all the women of Ashland. Make notes of social, cultural, and political progress for women in the United States. Indicate how each woman of Ashland either reflected or rejected the cultural norms of her time. Use the photos and primary sources provided in your timeline.
2. Document Analysis: <https://henryclay.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/MMB-document-analysis.pdf>

Guiding Questions

1. How did women's roles in American society change from Lucretia Clay's lifetime to Madeline McDowell Breckinridge's time?
2. Sally Hall and Charlotte Dupuy both worked for the Clay family. Explain how their lives were similar and how they were different.
3. Madeline McDowell Breckinridge fought for women's suffrage. What issues exist today in the fight for women's equality?

Vocabulary

1. **domestic** - Related to the running of the home and family. Women were expected to spend their time caring for matters of the home instead
2. **gender roles** - Men and women were expected to operate in different ways within the same society. Men were expected to go to taverns, participate in politics, and work outside of the home. Women were expected to focus on domestic matters and religion.
3. **Kentucky Equal Rights Association (KERA)** - The first permanent statewide women's rights organization in Kentucky
4. **National American Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA)** - Madeline McDowell Breckinridge was the vice-president of this national organization whose goal was to secure the right to vote for women.
5. **oppression** – Unjust treatment or control over a long period of time
6. **progressive movement** - a political movement based on social reform to gain rights or resources for underrepresented people
7. **social norm** – the usual, typical or standard way someone operates in society. At most points in history, going against the social norm could have consequences for social standing within a community.
8. **suffrage** – the right to vote
9. **suffragist** - A person who advocates for voting rights, especially for women
10. **anti-suffragist** – People who believed it was against the laws of nature for women to seek the vote

Videos

Madeline McDowell Breckinridge: <https://youtu.be/fXP8gNwsXtM>

The Women of Ashland: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DV_oSI1fntc