HUDSON VALLEY WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS
The following profiles of remarkable Hudson Valley women entrepreneurs are part of a larger publication.

**Women in the Hudson Valley: A Teaching Resource** introduces more than 50 extraordinary women with ties to our region -- artists and athletes, lawyers and legislators, mapmakers and mathematicians. Whether you’re a teacher or a site educator, you’ll find a story to help students you work with see women.

Our aim is to stir interest, not to tell the women’s full stories or portray the complexity of their lives. We hope these mini-bios prompt you to dig more deeply. You can learn more about the other sections or [download them here](#).

### ENTREPRENEURS

- Cathyna Rombout Brett
- Women of Huguenot Street
- Margaret Beekman Livingston
- Elizabeth Come Kennedy Dyckman
- Flavia Miranda Bristol
- Sarah Breedlove “Madam C.J. Walker”
- Katharine Graham

### Resources
Catheryna Rombout has been called America's first female real estate tycoon. Born in Manhattan, she inherited 28,000 acres in Dutchess County. In 1708, she moved there with her husband, Roger Brett. In 1718, Roger Brett died. With three sons to raise, Madam Brett stayed on the land where she operated a mill and formed a trading cooperative.

In need of additional income, Madam Brett encouraged homesteaders, selling land to farmers and skilled tradesmen. She used innovative practices such as keeping the water rights on land she sold, prohibiting competing mills, using credit, and bringing lawsuits.

While Europeans of this period thought of Dutchess County as quite wild, it should be noted that American Indians almost certainly lived there for thousands of years before Europeans arrived. Details about how the Rombouts and other colonial families acquired land are not always easy to find. Madam Brett was undeniably creative and independent in her business dealings, but it's worth remembering that servants and enslaved people contributed to her success by working her land and helping with her businesses.

**DEFINE**

**Entrepreneur**
a person who organizes and operates a business, typically taking financial risks in hopes of earning more than the original investment.

Image: photo of the Brett Homestead, Rolf Müller, 2006. Wikimedia, Creative Commons, ShareAlike 3.0
1708 – 1787
Wyntje Hasbrouck

Wyntje Hasbrouck ran the family estate after her husband died. She became the wealthiest woman in 18th century New Paltz.

1775-1819
Cornelia VanWagenen

Cornelia Harp VanWagenen opened a successful women's hat shop in 1805. Her business was atypical in that she founded and ran it herself, rather than inheriting it from her husband.

1830 – 1916
Eliza Ackert

Born in Poughkeepsie, Eliza Varick Silvernail Ackert became the first woman editor of the "New Paltz Times" when her husband enlisted in the Civil War.

1834 – 1919
Julia Dillon

Julia McEntee Dillon was raised in Kingston. She was a partner in her husband's business. After his death, she supported herself with her painting, which was showcased in many galleries. She often worked at the Vaux Studio owned by her cousin, Hudson River School painter, Jervis McEntee.
Margaret Beekman was raised in Brooklyn by an aunt after the death of her mother. At 18 she married Judge Robert Livingston. They spent winters in New York City and summers at Clermont, the Livingston estate in Columbia County, pictured here. Margaret had 11 children in 22 years. Her oldest son, Robert R. Livingston, helped draft the Declaration of Independence. In 1775, Margaret's husband, father, and father-in-law all died in the span of seven months.

This left her the owner of Clermont and the Beekman Patent; the latter included more than 80,000 acres in Dutchess County. Women in Margaret's family were often involved in business and property management. Evidence suggests she shared the inclination and may have deliberately decided not to remarry so she could run the estates herself. A lawyer helped Margaret when the law did not permit a woman to act for herself. Her daughter, Janet Montgomery, also had a head for business and is also profiled in this guide.

In 1777, British troops moved north from New York to Albany burning the homes of rebellious colonists. Margaret escaped to Connecticut two days before they reached Clermont. Many of the buildings were lost along with household goods, but Margaret rebuilt. “The Poughkeepsie Journal” reported at the time that Margaret Beekman Livingston freed the enslaved people at Clermont on the day she died.

**DEFINE**

Patent

In this context, a patent is an exclusive land grant made by a ruler. The Beekman Patent was made by the British king.
Elizabeth was born in Westchester County and raised mainly by her grandfather in Peekskill. Peter Corne was loyal to the English, and Elizabeth grew up in a Loyalist social circle that included States Dyckman. In 1794, States and Elizabeth married despite an age difference of more than 20 years. The letters that survive suggest they were very much in love. Elizabeth had two children born in 1797 and 1799; one died as an infant.

In the early 1800s, States visited England and saw the original Boscobel where King Charles II hid after his loss to Oliver Cromwell in 1651. Some assume States chose the name for his future estate because he longed for his own refuge from legal battles to obtain money owed to him by the English. Work began on the house in 1803, but States died in 1806, and Elizabeth Dyckman oversaw the completion of Boscobel alone.

By 1808, the house was ready and she moved in and furnished it using States’ plans, which were far more elaborate and expensive than those of nearby mansions. Elizabeth was among Westchester’s wealthiest women with a few live-in servants (including, according to the 1810 census, four freed slaves) and farm laborers hired as needed. Elizabeth supervised the housework – fine furniture and accessories required constant care and attention. She also made sure the 250-acre farm and large gardens prospered and sometimes joined in the work herself.

Westchester County Parks acquired the property in 1923, but the house remained vacant. Throughout the 1940s and ’50s there were threats to demolish it. Finally, in 1956, a citizens’ group arranged for the house to be dismantled and moved piece-by-piece to Garrison (Putnam), where pieces were stored in barns and other vacant buildings. From 1957-60 the house was reconstructed and landscaped in Garrison.

Image: Boscobel today, https://www.boscobel.org
Unusual for the times, Flavia Marinda Bristol owned and operated a dry goods business independently after the death of her brother. She established herself as a prominent member of her community, using her earnings to support local religious and service groups.

In her will, Bristol left $30,000 for the creation and ongoing support of a public library in the town of Hillsdale. The library (shown at left) opened in 1926. An obituary described Bristol as "one of the oldest residents of the village and...one of its firmest friends."

Images: Town of Hillsdale website.
Sarah Breedlove was the first of her parents' children to be born into freedom. Orphaned at seven, married at 14, and widowed at 20, she became a single mother earning $1.50 a day as a washerwoman. To supplement her income and cure her alopecia (a scalp disease caused by poor diet and stress) Breedlove sold "wonderful hair grower" for a company owned by Annie Turnbo Malone.

Realizing the potential of such products, Breedlove took her daughter and savings to Denver, married her third husband, a newspaper sales agent named Charles Joseph Walker, and began promoting and selling her own hair-care product. Its popularity led her to develop, manufacture, and market an entire line of hair and beauty products as Madame C. J. Walker. In 1910 she moved her business to Indianapolis and traveled the country giving lectures and demonstrations.

Walker was one of the first American women to become a self-made millionaire. She was also known as an activist and philanthropist. She thought of herself as a southerner, but toward the end of her life she built an estate in Irvington-on-Hudson. It became a gathering place for the African-American community. Walker died there in 1919.

Madam C. J. Walker products are still sold at major cosmetic chains.
Katharine Meyer Graham, the first female publisher of a major American newspaper, led "The Washington Post" for more than two decades. Her wealthy New York family owned the paper as well as other businesses. She spent much of her childhood in Mount Kisco (Westchester) though the family owned several homes, and Graham attended boarding school in Virginia. She spent two years at Vassar College (Dutchess) before transferring to the University of Chicago.

In Chicago, Graham took an interest in labor issues and shared friendships with people from all walks of life. After graduating, she worked briefly at a San Francisco newspaper where, among other things, she helped cover a dock workers’ strike. In 1938, she began working at "The Post." In 1946, Graham’s father handed over the paper to her husband, Philip, a lawyer she had married in 1940.

In her Pulitzer Prize-winning autobiography, "Personal History," Graham wrote, "Far from troubling me...it pleased me. In fact, it never crossed my mind that he [her father] might have viewed me as someone to take on an important job at the paper." Philip Graham chaired "The Post" until his death, adding television stations and "Newsweek" magazine to the business.

Katharine Graham became "The Post’s" publisher in 1963, but did not formally receive the title for several years. At the time, "The New York Times" was viewed as the country’s paper of record, but that was about to change. In 1971, "The Post" published the Pentagon Papers, and then aggressively covered the Watergate conspiracy that led to President Richard Nixon’s 1974 resignation. "The Post" began to be viewed as the equal of "The Times."

In 1972, Graham became the first female chief executive officer (CEO) of a Fortune 500 company. She had no role models and many of her male colleagues and employees did not treat her with respect. In her memoir she describes distrusting her own instincts and credits the women’s movement with bolstering her confidence and leading her to promote gender equality within the company.
ENTREPRENEURS

LISTEN OR WATCH


Madam C. J. Walker in the National Archives, 3+ minutes, National Archives, 2011. A great-great-granddaughter describes what she learned at the Archives.

Meet the First Self-Made Female Millionaire, 4+ minutes, Smithsonian Channel, 2016. This is a video about Madam C. J. Walker.

The Post, 1 hr. 57 min., Steven Spielberg, 2017. Meryl Streep portrays Katharine Graham. Available in multiple formats and on several streaming services. How ‘The Post’ stood up to the power of the presidency, 7+ min., PBS News Hour, 2018, is a commentary on and nice intro to the film. Older students may be interested in comparing The Post with the 1976 film, All the President’s Men. Katharine Graham is mentioned in the latter film, but never appears.

READ


Flavia Marinda Bristol, short biography from the Town of Hillsdale, NY.


VISIT

General Richard Montgomery and Janet Livingston House, Rhinebeck, Dutchess. The house is managed by the Chancellor Livingston Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution. Schedule a tour: lalandy371@gmail.com or 845-871–1777.

Hillsdale Town Hall, Columbia. Opened in 1926 as the Hillsdale Public Library with funds provided by Flavia Marinda Bristol. In 2004 a new library (the entrance road is Flavia Bristol Drive) was built; the old library became the town hall.

Historic Huguenot Street, New Paltz, Ulster. Tours, special events, exhibits, and school programs for all ages.

Madam Brett Homestead, Beacon, Dutchess. To schedule tours: 518-831-6533.

Madam Brett Park, Beacon, Dutchess. Madam Brett’s gristmill stood here on the Fishkill Creek. In the 1800s, the creek powered many hat factories (including the Tioronda Hat Works in the brick building adjacent to the park), earning Beacon the nickname, New York’s Hat-Making Capital. Trails, fishing, observation deck.

Montgomery Place, Red Hook, Dutchess County. The grounds are open daily dawn to dusk, free. House tours by appointment. Younger children may enjoy this free Scavenger Hunt. (Janet Livingston Montgomery.)

**LESSON PLANS & OTHER TEACHER RESOURCES**

*NatureNotes: Madam Brett Park*, 2 pp, Susan Hereth and Kate Brill Phipps, Scenic Hudson. Perfect material for a class field experience.

*Two American Entrepreneurs: Madam C.J. Walker and J.C. Penney*, grades 5 and up, Rita Koman, education consultant to Teaching with Historic Places, National Park Service. Based on National Historic Landmark files, photographs, and other sources related to Walker and Penney.

*From the Hudson River Valley Institute at Marist College*

  *Hands-on-History at Historic Huguenot Street* (grades 5-8) lesson and PowerPoint (15 slides), activities, possible site visits, and bibliography. J. Klein, J. Cunneen, N. Fellows.

  *Huguenot Street plans* (grades 3-9) several lesson plans developed by teachers in the region.

  *Montgomery Place* (grades 3-5) lesson, bibliography, PowerPoint (12 slides). Jason Dubois, Lauren Hunker, Mary Lillis, Lauren Mills, and Sarah Pettinicchi.

**BACKGROUND READING**


