The following profiles of remarkable Hudson Valley women of faith 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.

**FAITH LEADERS**

“Mother” Ann Lee  
Women of Huguenot Street  
Frances Jane Crosby van Alstyne  
Margaret Newton Von Cott  
Dorothy Day  

**Resources**

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Image on previous page: Dorothy Day, 1916, photographer unknown, Bettman/Corbis Images
Ann Lee was a blacksmith’s daughter and mill hand in Manchester, England. Looking for a more personal and emotional religion than the official Church of England, she joined the Wardley Society in 1758. The Wardleys had split from the Quakers and because their worship involved physical shaking, they were called Shaking Quakers, Shakers for short. The group’s official name, which they used after emigrating to the U.S., was the United Society of Believers in the Second Coming of Christ and they often referred to themselves as Believers.

Lee's father arranged for her to marry another blacksmith, Abraham Stanley. They had four children who died at birth or in early infancy. In her grief, Lee began to have visions. The visions called attention to Lee's innate leadership skills and charisma. She become more active with the Shakers eventually becoming a leader of the group. The Shakers' nontraditional worship resulted in persecution, and eventually one of Lee's visions directed her to take her followers to America.

A group of eight, including Lee's husband and other family members, arrived in New York City in 1774 and began looking for a place to settle. Eventually, they found a site near Albany and, with four others who had come from England, settled there in 1776. By 1793, Lee had inspired 12 settlements in New York and New England.

After Ann Lee's death the Shakers established their primary settlement at New Lebanon (renamed Mount Lebanon in 1861), and eventually spread to 19 communities from Maine to Kentucky, creating the first and largest American communal organization. Today one Shaker community exists in Maine.

**DEFINE: Shakers**

The Shakers believe in establishing “heaven on earth” through cooperation and collectivism. They practice pacifism, celibacy, gender equality, and the public confession of sin. Shakers made significant contributions in religious thought, music, art, architecture, agriculture, and business. They are known today for simple, elegant design and the high quality of the items they produced.
Frances "Fanny" Crosby was born in Brewster or Southeast, Putnam County. As an infant, she suffered from an eye infection and was blinded by the treatment she received. Sources disagree about whether the cause was ignorance or malpractice. Despite being blind, Crosby became one of the most prolific hymn writers ever. She composed 8,000 or more hymns in her lifetime. Her songs remain popular with many Christian denominations.

From 1835-1843 Crosby attended the New York Institution for the Blind in New York City. There, she developed a love for poetry and the Bible. After graduation Crosby taught at the school where she met Alexander Van Alstyne. They married in 1858.

Alexander, a former student at the Institution for the Blind, supported and often transcribed Fanny's work. She never learned to write and composed entirely in her head. In addition to hymns, Fanny authored secular and patriotic songs, poetry, and a two-volume biography.

Appalled at the plight of immigrants and the poor, Crosby wanted to be seen as helping those around her. She was described as having "a horror of wealth" and gave away much of the little she earned. She and her husband organized benefit concerts and contributed to organizations such as the American Female Guardian Society and Home for the Friendless.
Margaret Newton was born in New York City to a wealthy Episcopal family. In 1848, she married Peter Van Cott and joined his wholesale patent medicine business.

When Peter died in 1866, Margaret continued to support her family through sales. She also joined a Methodist Episcopal church in Manhattan and began to lead prayer meetings and Bible study at a mission in a poor area.

Successful in winning converts, Margaret accepted an invitation to hold revival meetings in Greene County. More invitations followed. Initially reluctant to preach, she was encouraged by her success.

In 1868 and 1869, she became the first woman to receive formal permission from Methodist Episcopal churches to preach. One "license" came from the Methodist conference of Stone Ridge/Ellenville, Ulster.

By 1880, Van Cott was said to have traveled 143,417 miles and to have held 9,933 revival meetings from Boston to San Francisco, Milwaukee to New Orleans.

When she retired in 1902, Van Cott had converted more than 75,000 people, half of whom joined the Methodist Episcopal Church. She held special meetings for mothers, veterans, and children.

At the end of each revival, Maggie organized new converts into prayer bands to help maintain their new faith. She supported herself with small offerings received at revivals.

Margaret Van Cott's supporters raised funds to support her retirement, and she made her home in Greene County.
Dorothy Day was born in Brooklyn. Trained as a journalist, she was baptized and converted to Christianity in 1927. A lifelong labor and peace activist, she worked on a wide range of social issues keeping in mind Catholic teachings.

In 1933 -- the depths of the Great Depression -- she and Peter Maurin formed the Catholic Worker Movement to serve the homeless, hungry, and forsaken. They believed God gives every person dignity and that as Christians they should show love and respect to all.

In 1964, Day bought Rose Hill, a former Livingston estate in Tivoli (Dutchess County), and began using it as a base. Printing presses for the movement's paper, "The Catholic Worker," were there. The site also hosted lectures and conferences, and housed the homeless in exchange for work on the farm. Soon, a day-care program provided classes and meals to apple pickers' children in the area.

Around 1979, the farm in Tivoli closed and the movement opened Peter Maurin Farm in Marlboro, Ulster County. As of June 2018, Catholic Worker communities continue to serve the downtrodden. Often called "houses of hospitality," there are more than 200 in the U.S. and around the world. Members commit to nonviolence, poverty, and works of mercy. Dorothy Day is being considered for sainthood by the Catholic Church.

Image: Dorothy Day, 1916, photographer unknown, Bettman/Corbis Images
LINKS, LESSONS, AND DESTINATIONS

FAITH LEADERS

LISTEN OR WATCH

Ann Lee: She Inspires, one minute video, WMHT, August 2017.

Dorothy Day: Don’t Call Me a Saint, 55 minutes, Claudia Larson, 2006.

The Shakers: America’s Quiet Revolutionaries, video, 2+ minutes. Made for a special exhibit at NYS Museum. Also: Shaker dictionary and online exhibit divided into six areas, e.g., settlement in America, religious practice, and design.


READ

Anne Hutchinson: Puritan Rebel, Cobblestone Magazine for Kids, about 50 pp, year unknown. Ages 9-14. Single copy, $6.95. (Not profiled in this guide.)

Catholic Worker.org provides a detailed history of the movement along with a directory of related communities and farms that continue today.

A Clash of Cultures: Anne Hutchinson’s Brief Life near St. Paul’s Church. Online exhibit about the Puritan involved in major religious and political controversies in the Massachusetts Bay Colony during the 1630s. She lived in Westchester County the last year of her life. (Hutchinson is not profiled in this guide.)

Shaker Heritage Society’s website features extensive, easy to use resources about Ann Lee and the Shakers.

Shaker Museum collects, preserves, and interprets Shaker artifacts. Its collection spans more than 200 years. Searchable online database. Library.

VISIT

Akin Free Library, John Kane House, and Oblong Meeting House, Pawling, Dutchess. For related lesson plan see below, Quakers of Pawling.
**Foster Memorial African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion Church**, Tarrytown, Westchester. Amanda Foster (b. 1807, Albany, not profiled in this guide) joined the Underground Railroad while working as a nurse to the children of Arkansas’s governor. She moved to Tarrytown in 1837, started a sweet shop, married, and helped found AME Zion, which during the Civil War fed and sheltered fugitives.

**Historic Huguenot Street**, New Paltz, Ulster. School programs for all ages, e.g., Life & Death in the 1700s (grades 7-12), touches on religious persecution. The website has a concise description of their religious motivation for coming here.

**Shaker Heritage Society**, Albany. School programs for all ages, e.g., Explore America’s First Shaker Settlement (K-6) and Shakers and The Giver (MS). In-school program: Shakers in your Classroom (3-6). Nature preserve and bike paths.


**St. Paul’s Church National Historic Site**, Mount Vernon, Westchester. Ask about special programs. Standard public tours include a short video, exhibits, and tour of the 18th-century church and cemetery. Spring and summer, weather permitting, visitors may climb the bell tower. Self-guided cemetery tour.

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**LESSON PLANS & OTHER TEACHER RESOURCES**

**Quakers, Women, & Reform**, Resource 12, Women & the American Story, Center for Women’s History, New-York Historical Society, 1 p., background, discussion questions.

**Activities for use with The Shakers: Hands to Work, Hearts to God** (see Listen or Watch, above), 13 pp. Four activities, with assessment suggestions for grades 5-8 and one for grades 7-10. Also: [additional resources](#) and a [Shaker timeline](#).

**Quakers of Pawling**, K-5, K. Brennan, C. Rand, and L. Bendl, Hudson River Valley Institute, Marist College. Pawling was once home to the region’s largest community of Quakers. Lesson plan, places to visit, and bibliography.

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**BACKGROUND READING**
