**Selected Firsts**

**Government** In 1916, Jeannette Rankin was the first woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. She served another term from 1941 to 1943. A lifelong pacifist, Rankin voted against going to war with Germany in 1917 (World War I), and was the only representative to vote against the U.S. entering World War II.

**Science and Medicine** After being the first woman admitted to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Ellen Swallow Richards also became the first professional chemist in the US after her graduation in 1873.

**Literature and Publishing** Edith Wharton became the first woman to win a Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1921 for her novel *The Age of Innocence*. Wharton did not begin her writing career until she was almost 40 years old, and through her career published over 40 books.

**Film** In 1896, Alice Guy Blache became the first American female film director with the release of her film *The Cabbage Fairy*. During her career she directed over 300 short films.

**Music** In 1914, Mary Davenport-Engberg became the first woman to conduct a symphony orchestra in the United States.

**Air and Space** In 1932, Amelia Earhart became the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean. She flew from Harbor Grace, Newfoundland, to Ireland in about 15 hours. In 1937 Earhart attempted to fly around the world, but her plane disappeared. No one knows what happened to her.

**Military** In 1993, Sheila Widnall was appointed Secretary of the Air Force, becoming the first woman to hold this high-level position for any branch of the U.S. military.

**Sports** In 1967, Althea Gibson became the first woman (and African American) to win the tennis singles title at Wimbledon. During her career, Gibson won ten straight national black women’s singles championships, and, in 1971, she was inducted into the National Lawn Tennis Hall of Fame.
Women’s History Month

is one of the outcomes of a county-wide movement in Sonoma County, California, in the 1970s that brought a focus on women into school curricula as well as into the general public’s consciousness. In 1978, the Educational Task Force of the Sonoma County (California) Commission on the Status of Women initiated a “Women’s History Week.” The week of March 8 was chosen since March 8 is International Women’s Day. As word of the movement spread, State Departments of Education across the U.S. initiated similar changes to their curricula, and encouraged celebrations of women’s history as a means of achieving equity in classrooms. In 1987 the National Women’s History Project petitioned the United States Congress to recognize the whole month of March as National Women’s History Month. Since then, every year the House of Representatives and the United States Senate approve the designation.

March is celebrated with special programs and activities in schools, workplaces, and communities. Besides recognizing women’s achievements in such areas as science, math, politics, arts, and athletics, a common topic in school curricula is the women’s suffrage movement in the United States. Before 1920, women did not have the right to vote under the constitution. In the decade between 1910 and 1920, women organized and were involved in political demonstrations and marches across the United States. Though the vote was brought to the congress several times, it failed to pass. Finally in 1919, after years of picketing, petitioning, and protesting, the vote passed, resulting in the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution on August 26, 1920. In November 1920, women voted for the first time in a national election.

Glossary
outcome(s): n. a result or the effect of an action
consciousness: n. knowledge or awareness
initiate(d): v. to begin
equity: n. justice or fairness
designation: n. something chosen for a particular reason or purpose
suffrage: n. the right to vote in an election
right: n. a legal claim
decade: n. a period of ten years
picket(ing): v. to stand or demonstrate outside a building or place of work to prevent people from entering and working, as a means of political protest
petition(ing): v. to demand or request some action from a government or other authority
amendment: n. a change in a law