

February 22

Isabelle Beecher Hooker (February 22, 1822- January 25, 1907)

Isabelle Beecher, half sister to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catherine Beecher and Henry Ward Beecher, grew up in Boston, Cincinnati and Hartford, Conn. After attending Catherine Beecher's Hartford Female Seminary she married John Hooker, a distinguished lawyer. He read aloud to her from law books and she was horrified to learn about the lack of legal rights for women. She became involved in the woman's rights movement and soon joined others in founding the New England Woman Suffrage Association where she played an important part in planning and sponsoring woman's rights conventions in Connecticut. She also supported a married women's property bill, drafted by her husband and introduced into the legislature.

Although Victoria Woodhull submitted a suffrage petition to Congress which rivaled her own, Isabelle was impressed with Woodhull and became her supporter even when Woodhull published accusations of adultery against Isabelle's brother Henry. Victoria Woodhull also introduced Isabelle to Spiritualism, a popular practice of the time, and Isabelle became convinced that the spirits would give her a divine message to lead a matriarchal revolution. Isabelle was still active in her 70s, supporting Olympia Brown's efforts at national suffrage, rather than gaining the women's vote state by state. She served on the board of lady managers at the Columbian Exhibition of 1893 and served as president of the Connecticut Woman Suffrage Association until 1905.

February 23

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (September 24, 1825 – February 22, 1911)

Frances Watkins was born in Maryland, and orphaned at the age of three. Raised by her aunt and uncle, she attended the Academy for Negro Youth. At the age of 25, she went to teach at the Union Seminary in Ohio, becoming the first woman to do so. Two years later, she left for Pennsylvania where she took another teaching position and began living in an Underground Railroad station. Frances learned how it worked, and soon became very distressed at the suffering of her people. She took action immediately, joining the State Anti-Slavery Society of Maine, and publicly spoke out against race, class, and sexual discrimination all across Canada and the Northern United States. In her speeches she included poetry and prose she had written herself, a childhood love. After the Civil War ended and her husband passed away, Frances continued to travel around to speak out publicly and formed alliances with many feminists. In 1897, she became the Vice-President of the National Association of Colored Women. This teacher, lecturer, temperance worker, and poet continued to write and lecture until her death in 1911.

February 24

Ruchira Gupta

Ruchira Gupta was a well-known journalist and social worker on assignment in Nepal in 1994. When she realized that she saw very few young women and girls, she asked around and eventually followed their trail to the brothels of Mumbai in India. Many of the women and girls, some as young as seven, had been sold into sexual slavery or tricked by

offers of jobs or marriage. After months of research, she began to film the documentary, *The Selling of Innocents*.

After filming, she decided not to leave Nepal and instead set up Apne Aap (Self-Help in Hindi), which is dedicated to helping exploited women and children gain their independence by non-violent means. The agency helps girls finish school and gives them a place to stay. It also promotes education of sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV and AIDS, and works to end the sex-trade industry.

February 25

Mary Jane Seacole (c. 1805- May 14, 1881)

Mary Jane Grant was born in Jamaica, the daughter of a Scottish military officer and a Jamaican mulatto. She married Edward Seacole in 1836 but he died shortly after. When the Crimean War broke out, Mary traveled to London to offer her skills as a nurse to the British War Office but they refused. She was so intent on helping tend to the wounded that she applied to the wife of the Secretary of War who was recruiting nurses for the war effort. Apparently, she was not welcome as a black nurse for they too denied her an interview.

Seacole was so concerned about the soldiers that she independently established a British Hotel at her own expense in order to provide a comfortable setting for the sick and convalescing officers. Often she went to the battlefield and attended to the wounded there. After the war, she had to declare bankruptcy but when her story was carried by the British press, money was raised to help pay off her debt. She was awarded the Crimean medal, the French Legion of Honour and a Turkish medal. Much of what we know of her life came from her autobiography, *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* published in 1856.

February 26

Alicia Dickerson Montemayor (August 6, 1902 – 1989)

Alicia was a feminist, activist, wife, mother and businesswoman (she attended night school to gain her degree, when it was rare for anyone of Latin American origin, let alone a woman to do so). She joined LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens) when women were not encouraged to join. LULAC was founded in 1929 as a way of ending racial discrimination, advocating pride in Mexican culture, raising money and awareness for social concerns, English proficiency and encouraging the influence of Mexican Americans within politics.

In 1936, Alicia chartered a council in Laredo, composed of mainly working-class women. She encouraged the women to vote, become active in their communities, attend citizenship classes and work outside the home. Because of her local prominence, she became the first woman elected to a national office that had not been designated for a woman and was the first woman to serve as an associate editor of the LULAC News. Alicia promoted the involvement of youth and women within LULAC and helped to advance their standing within the organization.

February 27

Rosa Perea (April 3, 1952 – February 27, 1992)

Rosaleen Perea worked for the rights of people with disabilities until her death at age 39. Rosa could not see or speak but this did not limit her ability to teach, to study, to develop programs for deaf-blind children and to fight for the rights of people with disabilities. Rosa was born deaf and developed diabetes at age 11. The diabetes was responsible for her blindness at age 29 and kidney failure two years later. During these years, despite her illnesses and disabilities, Rosaleen completed her education, worked for the Education Commission in Washington and as a VISTA volunteer in San Antonio where she acted as a peer counselor for blind-deaf children.

In 1983 an airline refused to allow her to fly independently because she was deaf and blind. With the help of Advocacy, Inc, an organization which works for the rights of disabled Texans, Rosa filed a federal complaint in 1984 against an airline policy which prevented her from flying without a traveling companion. In 1987, the US Department of Transportation ruled that the airlines' refusal to fly unescorted people who are both blind and deaf was discriminatory and violated federal law. The ruling made it possible to have deaf-blind persons considered on an individual basis for flying. In time, Rosa became a Company Club member through her frequent flights from her home in Lubbock, Texas to Austin and San Antonio to represent deaf-blind persons on various committees. Rosa was asked through her translator and sister Palmira Perea-Hay to describe her feelings. "I have been very lucky in my life," she signed. "I have a supportive family, close friends and my faith in God. I have always kept going. Certainly I have felt frustrated at times; that's normal. The key is to be assertive and to fight and to keep going and going and going." Rosa died suddenly in 1992 while planning the annual convention for Texas Blind Deaf Association.

February 28

Mabel Keaton Staupers (February 27, 1890 – November 29, 1989)

Born Mabel Doyle in Barbados, West Indies, she immigrated to the United States with her parents when she was 13. After graduating with honors in 1917 from Freedmen's Hospital School of Nursing in Washington, DC, Mabel Keaton Staupers dedicated her efforts to improving the status of African-American nurses. At that time African-Americans had segregated training schools and nursing organizations. In 1934, Mabel accepted a position as the first paid executive secretary of the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses. It was during her twelve-year tenure that membership was increased, a citizen advisory committee was established, and the racial barriers that kept African-Americans nurses from serving in the Armed Forces Nurse Corps were broken down. Through these accomplishments and her founding the first private facility where African American doctors could practice, in Harlem, Staupers became known as one of the great heroines in nursing history.