

# Maryland Archives\_Women's History Month

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

Jennifer Abbott, Announcer, Ashley Biggs

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- A** Announcer 00:01  
This podcast is brought to you by the Maryland State Library Agency. The MSLA podcast features presenters from Statewide Youth Programs, as well as learning opportunities for library staff and resources for patrons of the Maryland State Library for the Blind and Print Disabled.
- A** Ashley Biggs 00:20  
Hi, everyone. Welcome back to another LBPD Guest our I'm so excited because we have the Maryland State Archives here today. Specifically, we have Jennifer Abbott, and she is currently the Deputy Director of Research, Education and Outreach, and serves as the deputy commissioner of land patents at the Maryland State Archives. She has a bachelor's degree in History and anthropology with a minor in geography from Saulsbury and has a paralegal certificate from Anna Rundle Community College. She started at the Maryland State Archives in September of 1999. And she has grown from there. So welcome, Jennifer.
- J** Jennifer Abbott 01:03  
Hi, thank you, Ashley. It's exciting to be with you today.
- A** Ashley Biggs 01:08  
And I've got to ask, I went to school for archiving myself. So I have a kind of have a little bit of a passion for it. How did you end up at the archives?
- J** Jennifer Abbott 01:17  
I've always had a lifelong passion for history. And I knew I didn't want to teach. That's the thing everyone asked you when you're studying history in college. Oh, so you want to teach? And it

was like no, I really want to be out there. And I want to help share stories in history, especially of our wonderful state. I am a Maryland native. As I said, I went to Salisbury for my degree.

A

Ashley Biggs 01:37

Very cool. Very cool. So tell us about the Maryland State Archives. What exactly does the archives do?

J

Jennifer Abbott 01:45

So the Maryland State Archives is the central repository for all government records of permanent value. So we have records going back to this founding and 1634. That's going to include colonial state, executive court records, land records, things like that. So we preserve these records, and we make them accessible in our public search term. And some records that are over 100 years old are actually available online as well. So why do people come to us, a lot of people come to us because they need certified copies of records like death records, marriage records, divorce decrees, Separation Agreements, those type of things have been transferred to us by the government agency that created them, whether it was like the court, or the division of vital records, and they've been sent to us for storage. They tend to need these types of things for legal purposes, like insurance benefits, filing for retirement estate settlements, and most recently, the real ID requirements. That's a huge one to track name changes over time, and events such as that, in recent years has also seen an increase in requests from people who are seeking dual citizenship and countries like Italy and Ireland, Ireland. We also have special collections, which are non government records. So those are things like church records and maps and photographs and newspapers. One of our records in that collection is a ledger from the family that had enslaved Frederick Douglass on the Eastern Shore. Douglas never knew his birthday, but he chose to celebrate it on February 14, because his mother always referred to him as her Little Valentine. The Ledger lists Frederick Augustus son of Harriet as having been formed, in fact, in February 18 18th. And that volume is currently being lent and on display at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington through April 21. So that's we're more than just people coming to us because they're doing their genealogy, or working on a historical paper or historical research matter. We get a lot of scholars authors who come to us that type of thing. The Archives is also home to the state art collection, so includes artwork and furnishings in the statehouse. The legislative office buildings, the governor's residence, which is Government House, but it's not limited just to paintings and things in those buildings. You've got statues like the memorial for Thurgood Marshall and lawyers ma outside the statehouse.

A

Ashley Biggs 04:11

Wow, that's a lot of responsibility for for your agency. So how is the Maryland State Archives different from say somebody like the Baltimore city archives?

J

Jennifer Abbott 04:25

So the butler State Archives is actually our sister agency. We have an agreement with the City of Baltimore to manage it. And two of our staff members serve as the Baltimore City archivist

of Baltimore to manage it. And two of our staff members serve as the Baltimore City archivist and the deputy city archivist. So while our focus is the state, counties and municipalities amount and their sole focus is on Baltimore, so they're going to have municipal records such as records from the Department of Transportation, the health department tax records. They also have some non government manuscript collections like maps and photographs. Some of those include photographs from alumni of Easter high school records from funeral homes and administrative records for the Baltimore City Symphony Orchestra just to name a couple. So

A

Ashley Biggs 05:09

do you guys like share records back and forth?

J

Jennifer Abbott 05:13

They have their own archives and facility on Matthew St. and Baltimore. And they are searching is open by appointment only. We do have some of our records stored there. But for the most part, we tried to serve them where they are.

A

Ashley Biggs 05:28

Gotcha, gotcha. Well, with all those records and with with everything that you guys do, I'm sure that you have, you know, exhibits. Can you tell me about some of them? Are they like pop up exhibits? Are they exhibits found only in person or can they be online? You know, so tell me a little bit about about the exhibits.

J

Jennifer Abbott 05:53

So we have a variety of exhibits, we don't really have a lot of dedicated in person exhibit space at our facility, which is at 350, Ral Boulevard in Annapolis. We have a permanent exhibit in our lobby that focuses on the history of the archives from its establishment in 1935, as part of the state's 300 day anniversary celebrations, to the history of our present building, which opened in 1986. Among the interesting items, is that we have a 3d lenticular portrait of retired state archivist Edward Papin. Foose the tiny in there. So it's really interesting because when you look at it at one angle, he's holding a map. But then when you kind of move your angle that you're looking, it flips, and he's holding an iPad, which features that same map, and it's meant to show how he helped guide the archives into the digital age and really helped us become a leading institution and placing records online. We do have some exhibit cases in our search room. Right now. There's an exhibit focused on Alex Haley and his research at the Maryland State Archives when he was working on routes. It was at the archives that he located an advertisement for the Lord Lincoln ear. The ship that has enslaved ancestor come to contain was brought to Annapolis from from the Gambia in 1767. And while doing research at archives, he developed a long friendship with Phoebe Jacobson, who was the head of our reference services department at the time. As also in person, the archives overseas exhibits in the Maryland State House that detail both the state and national history that took place there. The highlight of that historic watch intense handwritten resignation speech that was developed and delivered to the Continental Congress when they met in Annapolis on December 23 1783. And the old Senate

chamber has been recreated to preserve that moment as well. We do have some of our exhibits and projects available online. You can get to them if you go to our website, which is an S a.maryland.gov and click on the violent history tab. Among the items you'll find there are online exhibits and feature documents but also longtime things we work on, like the legacy of slavery and Maryland project are my yeas indigenous records projects, the Maryland 400 Revolution were project and the Maryland Women's Hall of Fame.

A

Ashley Biggs 08:11

Oh, well, that's perfect, perfect, because March is actually Women's History Month. And I have to ask, how does the archive preserved women's history in Maryland? I know one way is through the Women's Hall of Fame. So why don't you tell us a little bit about women's history and Maryland's archives

J

Jennifer Abbott 08:33

is indeed the online home of the Maryland Women's Hall of Fame. The Maryland has Hall of Fame was established in set in 1985 by the Maryland commission for women and the women legislators of Maryland. It seeks to honor Maryland women who have made unique and lasting contributions to the economic, political, cultural, social life of the state. And adopters can be living or historic and they don't necessarily need to be native to Maryland, but have perhaps had the most success in their career and things such as that. It is administered by the Maryland commission for women and they purchased about 20 years ago to be the online home of the hall so that we can better share the stories of these such wonderful women. Over the years they have funded interns to create and edit detailed biographies of these groundbreaking women. Each fall they put out a call for nominations for the hall generally have to submit a biography as well as letters of support and I ended commit independent committee reviews nominations and selects women for induction into the Hall in March during women's history month and the call for nominations and applications as you typically posted on their website. Like I said in the fall probably like October ish, maybe. Which and their website is Maryland women that work. Um, as far as how the archives itself helps preserve women's history, you know, this is obviously my focal point is on the projects I manage But we do have that special collections, which are all those non government records. So we accept, you know, personal papers or papers from groups and things. During 2019. Of course, it was the 100th anniversary and 19 and 2020, excuse me, of course, was the 100th anniversary of the 19 amendment. So some of our focus was on preserving records of women's clubs and things that we were approached about. But really, we just like to have these online exhibits and help focus on these women.

A

Ashley Biggs 10:32

So there are a lot of women, I'm looking now through the hall of fame, there are a lot of really outstanding women, do you have a particular favorite? Or someone that you kind of point to and say, yes.

J

Jennifer Abbott 10:48

So the Women's Hall of Fame, there are so many amazing women in the hall. And they cover such diverse backgrounds. You've got people with civil rights, law and public service and medicine and education. So you know, some of the fields that we typically associate with women in that instance, but also you've got like Dr. Eugenie Clark, I had was unfamiliar with her myself, but she was known as the shark lady because of her groundbreaking research, studying them. My personal favorite, I have a couple that I actually nominated over time through my work at the archives. And Gertrude pole was one of them. I had the fortune to get to personally know her and nominate her. And she was, again, someone I was unfamiliar with prior to meeting her. And she became known as Maryland's First Lady journalism. She had been trained as a lawyer intended to practice law and she came back to her hometown, ready to practice it. And the lawyer handed her a newspaper and said, Here, do this. And she, she took that on it full force and became the editor of the world leader, dot and really focused on making community journalism important and telling the stories of the people of Laurel. And in 1958, she was elected the first woman to head the Maryland Press Association. And she received many awards for community journalism during the course of her career.

A

Ashley Biggs 12:18

That's really cool. So she went from being gung ho about becoming a lawyer through becoming a an editor. Yes, yes.

J

Jennifer Abbott 12:28

And she really put her heart soul into it and really had extremely high standards. It was really a treasure to get to know her over the years.

A

Ashley Biggs 12:39

Well, and she of course isn't, as is an inductee into the Hall of Fame? Yes. 2011 Very cool. With the Hall of Fame, do they have to have passed or do they? or can people

J

Jennifer Abbott 12:56

can she was living at the time. She passed away in 2017. At the age, I think she was about 102. At the time, when she passed, she lived quite a long, remarkable life. No, and that's one of the great things about the hall is that they are recognizing both living and historic women as well. So you have people like Katie Allah Deki, who is still, you know, extremely active in her career with swimming and presumably going to continue to be win awards in the upcoming Olympics this year. But then, and you also have major general Janine Birkhead, who recently was named the first. Oh, no, sorry, she's not the first but she recently named the Adjutant General for Maryland last year. She was the second woman to become that her predecessor, Dr. Linda Singh, was also nominated, inducted into the Women's Hall of Fame as well. That's so cool.

A

Ashley Biggs 13:56

How can we preserve women's history here in Maryland? Like how can we like me, the average person, preserve women's history?

**J** Jennifer Abbott 14:08

So it really, in my opinion, history really starts locally? You know, don't look for the groundbreakers per se, talk to the women in your family, talk to them in your church, your community, you know, what are their stories? What is their experience been? Help record and share their stories? You know, I had the extreme fortune of knowing my great grandmother for many years and I now looking back 2030 years later regret that I didn't talk to her about things like being a Rosie the Riveter in the Boston shipyards during World War Two. And you know, seeing the change, you know, she was born in 1900s. So she really got to experience the bulk of the 20th century. So those are the types of things you know, understand women and how communities and what was going on the world really helped shape their lives and what challenges they encountered. And then how did they try to persevere through what they had to go through?

**A** Ashley Biggs 15:05

You do a lot of research in your job Have you run across anybody this year that you're like, oh, they should be part of that whole thing.

**J** Jennifer Abbott 15:15

The Archives has tried, but it's been unsuccessful to nominate our former director, I mentioned Phoebe Jacobsen earlier who worked so closely with Alex Haley. Over the years, Phoebe did a lot of really grabbed late breaking work for starting to recognize records that detail the history of African Americans and indigenous people in Maryland, she really laid the groundwork for a lot of the work we're trying to do now, you know, 3040 years later, so it'd be nice to eventually see her. But that so far, that's where we're at.

**A** Ashley Biggs 15:51

Okay, okay. So all right, people, right, in campaigns? I know, let's make that a campaign. One question that pops into my head is does the archive take volunteers?

**J** Jennifer Abbott 16:05

We do in fact, and that actually is one of the many hats I wear. We do take volunteers. Right now we're taking volunteers. In person, we have a long term project with the Maryland comptroller's office, and the Family Search organization that is affiliated with the Mormon Church in preserving and digitizing records. So we have folks who sit in our research room, and they help process and inventory private materials so that they can place online. That's really our big project at the moment. We do take some imaging volunteers and also redo some court records research. One of our other projects is actually you don't even need to come to the

archives to do we have an online transcription project that we run through a third party site to help index marriage records. We have a lot of people who come to us say, like I mentioned before you they need marriage records for legal purposes. And we don't always have the best indexing or any sometimes even any indexing to them. So these folks are helping go through scans and enter all this information in a database so we can better serve the public and researchers now and in the future. A really prime example of that is there's no index to bottom or say marriage records for the 1940s. And you've reached the point where that generation has been dying off. And again, people need copies of these items, whether it be for like veterans benefits, survivor benefits, things like that. Oh, wow. Lots of opportunities to help. Yes, the off site ones are restricted to our normal work hours, which are Monday through Friday 830 to 430. Not our search is not open on Mondays. But we do you have some volunteers working on that project that day. Okay. So

A

Ashley Biggs 18:03

if someone wanted to get in touch with the Maryland State Archives, because they had a follow up question, or perhaps they wanted to volunteer, how would they do that?

J

Jennifer Abbott 18:11

The easiest way to reach anyone on our staff is through our help desk email address, which is m s a dot help desk@berlin.gov. Or to go to our website, which is MSA dot Maryland taco.

A

Ashley Biggs 18:29

So easy, so simple.

J

Jennifer Abbott 18:31

We I hope so. We tried, we tried to make it simple.

A

Ashley Biggs 18:36

Well, you know, our website, which is MSLA dot Maryland duck have but it's our initials to or the Maryland State Library Agency is website. So I understand how wanting to keep it simple and clean, just like that. All right, guys. Well, that's all the time that we have today. Thank you so very much too, Jennifer for being here. I hope to have the archives back again someday on another topic. So that would be interesting. As always, have a great week, and we'll see you again next month.

A

Announcer 19:06

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