



Office on the Economic Status of Women

Monthly Newsletter
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Photo courtesy of OESW.

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Black History Month Spotlight
- Women and Girls Sports Participation

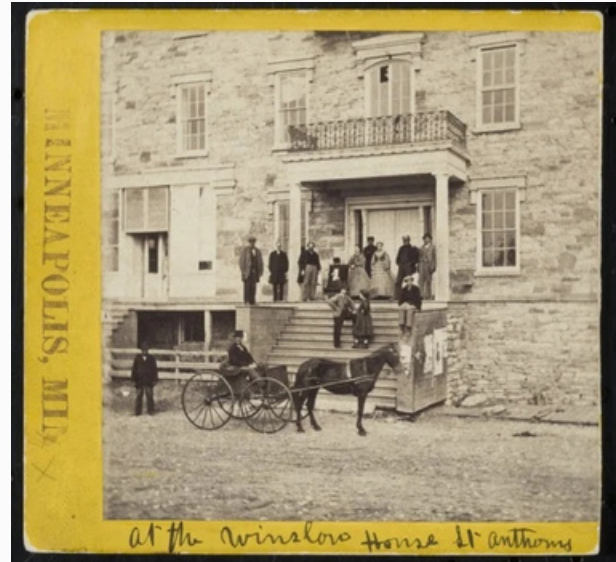
★ Per **Minnesota Statute Sec. 3.303, Subdivision 7**, the Office on the Economic Status of Women “shall study and report to the legislature on all matters relating to the economic status of women... The [OESW] shall communicate its findings and make recommendations to the legislature on an ongoing basis.”

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

This February marks the 100th anniversary of Black History Month, a commemoration designed to celebrate the achievements of Black men and women throughout American history. Minnesota too has been shaped by influential Black women; from suffragists to labor organizers, to judges and politicians and so many more. Below we highlight a few of the many Black women who have contributed to making Minnesota the state it is today.

Eliza Winston

When Eliza Winston was brought to Minnesota in 1860, she met a free woman named Emily Goodridge Grey, who assisted Winston in filing a legal complaint that she was being "restrained by her liberty". She was brought to the Hennepin County Courthouse, where pro-slavery mobs had gathered outside for fear of losing tourism businesses from visiting slaveholders if Winston were to be freed. The judge ruled in Winston's favor due to the clear illegality of slavery in Minnesota's constitution. The mob outside protested, and Winston, though now free, had to escape and hide in a safe house for several days.



The Winslow House, near the courthouse where Eliza Winston's case was heard. Photo credit Minnesota Historical Society.



Emily Goodridge Grey

The woman who helped free Eliza Winston was a successful business owner and seamstress in Old St. Anthony long before she even met Winston. When she spoke out in support of Winston's freedom, her house was damaged by a pro-slavery mob in retaliation. Regardless, Grey remained a staunch abolitionist. She hosted Ida Wells and Frederick Douglass when they visited Minnesota, and in 1893 led a campaign to get an exhibit on the achievements of Black women at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, though the organizers refused.

There are no existing photos of Emily, but this photo was taken by her brother of her younger sister, Mary. Courtesy of Oblate Sisters of Baltimore, via the Minnesota Historical Society.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH



Nellie Francis circa 1924. Photo credit Minnesota Historical Society.

Nellie Griswold Francis

Nellie Griswold Francis was an advocate for racial equality throughout her life, but specifically is credited with writing Minnesota's anti-lynching statute in response to the lynchings of three Black carnival workers in Duluth in 1920. Thanks to Francis' efforts, the bill passed the legislature with near-unanimous support. According to the Minnesota Historical Society, it's likely that Francis' was the first African American woman to ever lobby the Minnesota Legislature. She is featured in the Woman Suffrage Memorial Garden at the Minnesota State Capitol.

Lena Olive Smith

Lena Olive Smith began to pursue a career as a lawyer after moving to Minneapolis in 1907 and witnessing the racial discrimination in her work as a real estate agent, during a time when realtors often made private agreements to refuse to sell homes to African Americans. She was then motivated to attend Northeastern College of Law and graduated in 1921. She was one of nine African American attorneys to be practicing law between 1890 and 1927, and the only African American woman to practice law in the Twin Cities during the 20s and 30s. In 1930 she was elected the first woman president of the Minneapolis chapter of the NAACP, and acted as their prosecuting attorney on a variety of civil rights cases, including helping to end segregation of audiences at the Pantages Theatre in Minneapolis, and other cases involving equal public accommodations.



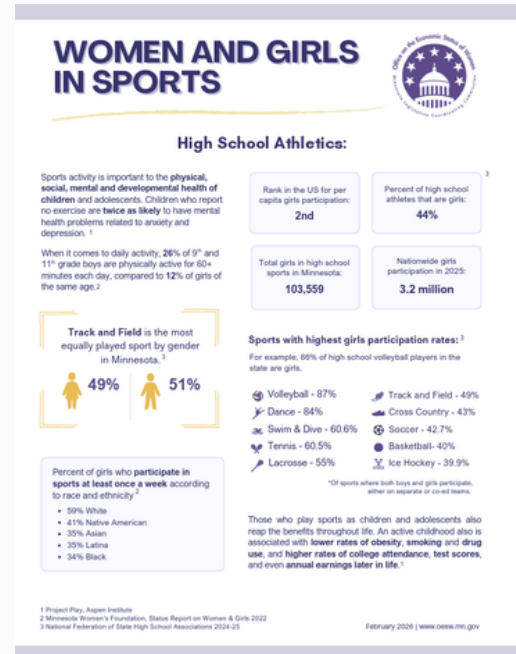
Lena Olive Smith in the 1920's. Photo credit Minnesota Historical Society.

Learn more about Black History Month in Minnesota at the [Minnesota Historical Society's Black History, Black Voices page](#).

WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SPORTS

February 5th was **National Girls and Women in Sports** day, and to celebrate we've released a new fact sheet on high-school and collegiate level sports participation looks like for girls in Minnesota. Participation on sports teams and regular physical activity have repeatedly been shown to have significant positive impacts on the quality of life of young people, both during adolescence but also into adulthood and beyond.

Minnesota ranks highly in terms of per-capita sports participation for high-school girls, second only to Iowa, with **44%** of high-school athletes being girls, a total of **103,559**. The top three sports for girls by participation rate are volleyball, dance, and swim & dive.



When it comes to college athletics, the nation has seen massive increases in participation of women in NCAA sports – increasing by 15 percentage points from 1985 to 2023. As of 2023 in Minnesota, **43%** of all collegiate athletes are women.

For more details, check out the full [fact-sheet on our website](#).

A BRIEF INTERMISSION

The OESW will be taking a break from monthly newsletters as we head into the busy legislative session. We'll still be working hard on releasing monthly fact sheets about a variety of issues, as well as tracking bills for our Legislative Summary later this summer. Be sure to follow us on our social medias to stay up-to-date on new data, updates from the legislative session, and more. **Thank you for reading**, and see you soon!

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