

**St. Louie Women:** Julia Cerre was of the wealthiest families to settle in early St. Louis. Her father, prominent merchant Gabriel Cerre, owned large tracts of land. Antoine Pierre Soulard escaped the guillotine in the French Revolution, sailed to America and settled in St. Louis in 1795. That same year Antoine married Julia and received 64 acres of land from his new father-in-law. He was appointed surveyor general of the entire province of Upper Louisiana, acquired a great deal of land himself, and resigned after several months to tend to his fruit orchard.

Julia Cerre Soulard was a philanthropist who donated considerable tracts of land to the city and to various charities during her marriage. However, after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, ownership of the 64-acre Soulard farm was mired in legalities. Eleven years after Antoine's death in 1825, Julia finally secured rights to the land. She bequeathed two blocks to the city upon her death on condition it would remain "in perpetuity" a market as begun in 1779 when farmers would bring their wagons, form a circle, and sell their wares. It was and is the city's primary farmer's market, now a major St. Louis tourist attraction, Soulard Market.

Charlotte Stearns Eliot, also an early settler of St. Louis, was born in 1843 of early New England family heritage. She was the daughter-in-law of Washington University founder William Greenleaf Eliot. Albeit a brilliant scholar in high school, she was unable to attend college because of her gender. Barred from full use of her intellect did not restrain her. As a social reform activist during the era of social reform championed by Jane Addams, Eliot was known as the 'mother' of the St. Louis juvenile court system.

Through her poetry and writings that addressed the need for women to be part of the cultural and political life of their country, she openly opposed women's restrictive sphere. Her article "The Higher Education of Women" advocates for women's access to the male confines of higher education. It was written in the era Marion Talbot founded AAUW.

Author of several published books, articles, and poems Eliot's literary excellence was not to be recognized until many years hence. To her seventh and last child T.S. (S for Stearns) Eliot, C.S. Eliot was his first awareness of a writer seriously engaged in writing poetry. His poetic talent has been attributed to her genes (rhymes with jeans), and during his adult years of writing, he always kept her aware of his 'works in progress.'

Josephine Baker was born in the slums of St. Louis in 1906. As a child she scavenged for food in garbage cans, danced for coins on street corners where she slept beneath cardboard coverings, and where she experienced the 1917 Bloody Sunday race riots in East St. Louis. At age fifteen she joined a vaudeville show and left St. Louis to appear in an all-black musical, *Shuffle Along*. Four years later she traveled to Paris as the lead dancer in *La Revue Negre* and went on to become a world famous performer and exotic dancer. By 1927, she was the highest paid entertainer in Europe. Her fame and fortune abroad, however, did not eradicate the racism she encountered when home in America.

Baker expatriated to Paris, became a French citizen, and served with the Free French Army as an informant and ambulance driver during World War II. Many of her songs sung over the radio carried coded messages to the *Résistance*. She was awarded France's highest military decoration, the gold *Croix de Guerre* (which she melted down to help fund the war effort), she received the *Rosette de la Résistance*, and was made a Chevalier of the *Légion d'honneur* by General Charles de Gaulle.

Baker had a lifelong dream that people of all creeds and colors would live in harmony. In her adopted country, she married and adopted fourteen children of different nationalities. She bought a country chateau she called, "Village du Monde" (world village) and left performing to devote her time to this, her most valued venture. But with finances failing and her husband fled, she returned to performing in 1959.

When in the United States, Baker continued her challenge to racism. She refused to perform in clubs or theaters that segregated. Thus, she integrated many establishments, especially

in Las Vegas. A prominent activist in the civil rights movement, Baker worked with the NAACP. She was the only woman invited to speak at the 1963 March on Washington, D.C. next to Martin Luther King, Jr.

After King's assassination in 1968, Coretta Scott King asked Baker to replace her husband as leader of the American Civil Rights Movement. After much consideration Baker declined, citing her commitment to her adopted children. Sadly, in 1975, her life and her lifelong dream had ended, her property had been foreclosed upon, she was bankrupt, and she suffered a cerebral hemorrhage home alone in her own bed where she was found in a coma four days later.

An icon in France, she received a state funeral in Paris with full French military honors attended by thousands. Poor at death, much as a child in St. Louis when she scavenged for food behind Soulard Market, Josephine Baker is an inductee in the St. Louis Walk of Fame and Hall of Famous Missourians.

Sources: Gender, desire, and sexuality in T.S. Eliot, Cassandra Laity, Nancy K. Gish

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