Famous Women Scientists

Women Scientists through the Ages: Notable Women in Science, Medicine, and Math  By Jone Johnson Lewis, About.com Guide

British and American polls say that few people can name even one famous woman scientist. Here are some women in the sciences including medicine and mathematics. You may recognize some of these famous women scientists; others may be new to you and worth further exploring. They're listed alphabetically.

1. Joy Adamson
Dates: January 20, 1910 - January 3, 1980

Known for: Naturalist Joy Adamson wrote Born Free about raising a lion cub, Elsa, and releasing her back to the wild, part of her efforts in Kenya for conservation.

2. Maria Agnesi
Dates: May 16, 1718 - January 9, 1799

Known for: Maria Agnesi wrote the first mathematics book by a woman that still survives. She was also the first woman appointed as a mathematics professor at a university.

3. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson
Dates: June 9, 1836 - December 17, 1917

Known for: Elizabeth Garrett Anderson was the first woman to successfully complete the medical qualifying exams in Great Britain and the first woman physician in Great Britain. She was also an advocate of women's suffrage and women's opportunities in higher education and became the first woman in England elected as mayor.

4. Virginia Apgar
Dates: June 7, 1909 - August 7, 1974

Known for: Virginia Apgar developed the Apgar Newborn Scoring System, increasing infant survival rates. She was a pioneer in anesthesiology including helping to raise the respect for the discipline; she warned that use of some anesthetics during childbirth negatively affected infants. Virginia Apgar also helped refocus the March of Dimes organization from polio to birth defects.

5. Elizabeth Arden
Dates: December 31, 1884 - October 18, 1966

Known for: Elizabeth Arden was the founder, owner and operator of Elizabeth Arden, Inc., a cosmetics and beauty corporation. At the beginning of her career, she formulated the products that she then manufactured and sold.

6. Florence Augusta Merriam Bailey
Dates: August 8, 1863 - September 22, 1948

Known for: A nature writer and ornithologist, Florence Bailey popularized natural history and wrote a number of books about birds and ornithology, including several popular bird guides.
7. **Clara Barton**  
**Dates:** December 25, 1821 - April 12, 1912  
**Known for:** Nurse Clara Barton is famous for her Civil War service and as the founder of American Red Cross.

8. **Laura Maria Caterina Bassi**  
**Dates:** October 31, 1711 - February 20, 1778  
**Known for:** Professor of anatomy at the University of Bologna, Laura Bassi is most famous for her teaching and experiments in Newtonian physics. She was appointed in 1745 to a group of academics by the future Pope Benedict XIV.

9. **Elizabeth Blackwell**  
**Dates:** February 3, 1821 - May 31, 1910  
**Known for:** Elizabeth Blackwell was the first woman to graduate from medical school (M.D.) and a pioneer in educating women in medicine.

10. **Annie Jump Cannon**  
**Dates:** December 11, 1863 - April 13, 1941  
**Known for:** The first scientific doctorate awarded by Oxford University to a woman was earned by astronomer Annie Jump Cannon. She worked on classifying and cataloging stars, discovering five novae.

11. **Rachel Carson**  
**Dates:** May 27, 1907 - April 14, 1964  
**Known for:** Rachel Carson is remembered for writing the book *Silent Spring*, motivating the environmentalist movement of the late 60s and early 70s.

12. **Eva Crane**  
**Dates:** June 12, 1912 - September 6, 2007  
**Known for:** Bee scientist; she founded and served as the director of the International Bee Research Association from 1949 to 1983. She originally trained in mathematics and obtained her doctorate in nuclear physics. She became interested in studying bees after someone gave her a gift of a bee swarm as a wedding present.

13. **Marie Curie**  
**Dates:** November 7, 1867 - July 4, 1934  
**Known for:** Marie Curie was the:
- first well-known woman scientist in the modern world
- called the "Mother of Modern Physics" -- pioneer in research into radioactivity, a word she coined
- first woman awarded a Ph.D. in research science in Europe
- first woman professor at the Sorbonne
- discoverer of and first to isolate polonium and radium; she established the nature of radiation and beta rays
- first woman to be awarded a Nobel Prize, first person to win Nobel Prizes in two different scientific disciplines: (1903) Physics and Chemistry (1911)
14. **Gertrude Bell Elion**  
Also known as Gertrude Belle Elion  
**Dates:** January 23, 1918 - April 21, 1999

**Known for:** Gertrude Elion is known for discovering many medications, including medications for HIV/AIDS, herpes, immunity disorders, and leukemia. She and her colleague George H. Hitchings were awarded the Nobel Prize for physiology or medicine in 1988.

15. **Dian Fossey**  
**Dates:** January 16, 1932 - December 26, 1985

**Known for:** Primatologist Dian Fossey is remembered for her study of mountain gorillas and her work to preserve habitat for gorillas.

16. **Sophie Germain**  
**Dates:** April 1, 1776 - June 27, 1831

**Known for:** Sophie Germain's work in number theory is foundational to the applied mathematics used in construction of skyscrapers today, and her mathematical physics to the study of elasticity and acoustics. She was also the first woman not related to a member by marriage to attend Academie des Sciences meetings and the first woman invited to attend sessions at the Institute de France.

17. **Lillian Gilbreth**  
**Dates:** May 24, 1876 - January 2, 1972

**Known for:** Lillian Gilbreth was an industrial engineer and consultant who studied efficiency. With responsibility for running a household and raising twelve children, especially after her husband's death in 1924, she established the Motion Study Institute in her home, applying her learning both to business and to the home. She also worked on rehabilitation and adaptation for the disabled. Two of her children wrote of their family life in *Cheaper by the Dozen*.

18. **Alessandra Giliani**  
**Dates:** ~1307 - March 26, 1326

**Known for:** Alessandra Giliani was reputedly the first to use the injection of colored fluids to trace blood vessels. She was the only known woman prosector in medieval Europe.

19. **Maria Goeppert-Mayer**  
**Dates:** June 18, 1906 - February 20, 1972

**Known for:** A mathematician and physicist, Maria Goeppert Mayer was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1963 for her work on the nuclear shell structure.

20. **Anna Jane Harrison**  
**Dates:** December 23, 1912 - August 8, 1998

**Known for:** First woman elected as president of the American Chemical Society, first woman Ph.D. in chemistry from the University of Missouri. With limited opportunities to apply her doctorate, she taught at Tulane's women college, Sophie Newcomb College, then after war work with the National Defense Research Council, at Mount Holyoke College. She was a popular teacher, won a number of awards as a science educator and contributed to research on ultraviolet light.
21. **Caroline Herschel**  
**Dates:** March 16, 1750 - January 9, 1848  
**Known for:** Caroline Herschel was the first woman to discover a comet. Her work with her brother, William Herschel, led to the discovery of the planet Uranus.

22. **Grace Hopper**  
**Dates:** December 9, 1906 – January 1, 1992  
**Known for:** Grace Hopper was computer scientist in the United States Navy, whose ideas led to the development of the widely-used computer language, COBOL.

23. **Libbie Hyman**  
**Dates:** December 6, 1888 - August 3, 1969  
**Known for:** A zoologist, she graduated with a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, then worked in a research laboratory on campus. She produced a laboratory manual on vertebrate anatomy, and, when she could live on the royalties, she moved on to a writing career, focusing on invertebrates. Her 5-volume work on invertebrates was influential among zoologists.

24. **Wangari Maathai**  
**Dates:** April 1, 1940 - September 25, 2011  
**Known for:** Founder of the Green Belt movement in Kenya, Wangari Maathai was the first woman in central or eastern Africa to earn a Ph.D., and the first woman head of a university department in Kenya. She was also the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

25. **Barbara McClintock**  
**Dates:** June 16, 1902 - September 2, 1992  
**Known for:** Geneticist Barbara McClintock won the 1983 Nobel Prize in medicine or physiology for her discovery of transposable genes.

26. **Florence Nightingale**  
**Dates:** May 12, 1820 - August 13, 1910  
**Known for:** Florence Nightingale is remembered as the founder of modern nursing, as a trained profession. Her work in the Crimean War established medical precedent for sanitary conditions in wartime hospitals. She also invented the pie chart.

27. **Antonia Novello**  
**Dates:** August 23, 1944 -  
**Known for:** Successor to the controversial C. Everett Koop as United States Surgeon General, Antonia Novello was the first Hispanic and the first woman to hold that position. As a physician and medical professor she focused on pediatrics and child health.

28. **Ellen Swallow Richards**  
**Dates:** December 3, 1842 - March 30, 1911  
**Known for:** Ellen Swallow Richards was the first woman in the United States to be accepted at a scientific school. A chemist, she's credited with founding the discipline of home economics.
29. Sally Ride  
**Dates:** May 26, 1951 - 

**Known for:** Sally Ride was the first American woman in space.

30. Florence Sabin  
**Dates:** November 9, 1871 - October 3, 1953

**Known for:** Called the "first lady of American science," Florence Sabin studied the lymphatic and immune systems. She was the first female to hold a full professorship at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, where she had begun studying in 1896. She advocated for women's rights and higher education.

31. Lydia Villa-Komaroff  
**Dates:** August 7, 1947 - 

**Known for:** A molecular biologist whose work with recombinant DNA contributed to developing insulin from bacteria. She researched or taught at Harvard, the University of Massachusetts and Northwestern. She was only the third Mexican American to be awarded a science Ph.D. and has won many awards and recognition for her achievements.

32. Chien-Shiung Wu  
*Courtesy Library of Congress*

**Dates:** May 29, 1912 - February 16, 1997

**Known for:** China-born physicist Chien-Shiung Wu worked with Dr. Tsung Dao Lee and Dr. Ning Yang at Columbia University. She experimentally disproved the "parity principle" in nuclear physics, and when Lee and Yang won the Nobel Prize in 1957 for this work, they credited her work as being key to the discovery. Chien-Shiung Wu worked on the atomic bomb for the United States during World War II at Columbia's Division of War Research, and taught university level physics.

33. Rosalyn Yalow  
**Dates:** July 19, 1921 - 

**Known for:** Rosalyn Yalow developed a technique called radioimmunoassay (RIA) which allows researchers and technicians to measure biological substances. She shared the 1977 Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine with her co-workers on this discovery.