

I am a member of the Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi. I served on the Vermont Commission of Native American Affairs for six years, five of those as Chair. I have also served on the Racial Equity Task Force, the Curatorial Task Force, and am now vice-chair of the Friends of the State House Board. Please note I am here as a member of the public and am not representing the Board in my remarks.

I agreed to serve on the Task Force and the Friends Board because I feel that this building has historically ignored those who are not members of the dominate culture. This means bringing an inclusivity where there is little representation of women or of BIPOC and other minimized communities. I often hear in meetings how wonderful this building is, how it is so historical, and how it is so special to many. But from another perspective, it is also the symbol of the government which displaced, and attempted to erase, an entire people through legislation. This legislative process took away their rights, their way of life, their language, their own way of governing. The question becomes, how to make this place one where someone would consider visiting and to feel welcome?

I have often felt troubled and frustrated with the insensitivity of what objects are displayed, where they are placed, or how they are chosen. For example, I am expected to “understand” that certain things are works of art and therefore inherently acceptable. This is where implicit bias and micro-aggressions play an integral part... when one is not aware of such bias and micro-aggression

- unless and until it is brought to light - it will continue.

Today I am bringing to light the fact that there is a woman for whom several of us on the Board have advocated for. This is not the one whom has been named in one of your previous meetings. This is someone who spent her entire lifetime serving in countless way our State and country during the 20th century - not just speaking once in front of the Legislature. This woman is Flora Jane Coutts.

Flora Jane Coutts was born Sept. 25, 1897, in West Charleston, Vt., the oldest daughter of Flora Mable Longeway and Robert M. Coutts.

Her commitment to serving others in so many areas, including in the Vermont State House, is an outstanding example of someone who should be recognized for all she gave to the State of Vermont during her lifetime. What better way than to include her portrait in the State House collection, in a prominent place. As the Vermont legislature resolution describing and honoring Flora after her death concludes "...Flora Coutts, (was) one of Vermont's most highly esteemed citizens, who served the people of her community and the state, as well as people throughout the world in an exemplary fashion." Here is a brief summary of her life and contributions, with links to detailed information listed at the end:

She graduated from Hardwick Academy and received a certificate from Johnson Normal School in 1917.

She enrolled in Boston University at 18 and took graduate

courses at Cornell and Pratt.

She taught school in Vermont, Cleveland, Ohio, and Korea from 1921 to 1925.

Her accomplishments include:

- working for the Vermont Extension service, from 1925 to 1936
- establishing the first Vermont 4-H club in 1929; she was the first full time 4-H agent in Orleans County.
- organizing tree planting to restore deforested places
- establishing the Coutts-Moriarty Camp on Salem Lake, Derby Vt. This camp still exists, providing summer camp for youth and educational opportunities to school children
- running her own business from 1936-1937.

She served:

- as the first Executive Secretary of the Orleans County Development Association.
- as Executive Secretary of the Vermont Association for the Crippled
- on the Northeastern Vermont Development Association and was intimately involved in the establishment of Jay Peak and Burke Mt ski resorts
- as the second woman in the Vermont Senate - the first woman to serve for two terms (1937-38 and 1939-40). While there she served as the Chair of the Senate

Education Committee during her first term and the Senate Public Health Committee during her second term.

- as a representative for Newport in the Vermont House for six terms (1961-1972). During her tenure she served on the House Government Operations and Education Committees. Though encouraged by some representatives to run for Speaker of the House in 1965, she declined.

During World War II she was club director for the American Red Cross and was stationed in India, Burma and China from 1943 to 1945. During that time she walked the Burma Road with the refugees - an experience that traumatized her so greatly that she was unable to speak about it in later years.

She was a member of the state Personnel Board and active in a number of local civic groups.

She held many offices including:

- President of the Vermont Business and Professional Women's Club
- Assistant Director of the 350th Champlain Valley Festival
- Vice Chair of the VT Republican Executive Committee
- delegate to the 1940 Republican Convention in Philadelphia.

As I noted in the opening and it is worth repeating:
“...Flora Coutts, (was) one of Vermont’s most highly esteemed citizens, who served the people of her community and the state, as well as people throughout the world in an exemplary fashion”. She deserves the recognition and open acknowledgment of her dedication and service to the state of Vermont.

Links to sources of information :

Flora Jane Coutts (1897 -1983) Vermont Historical Society:

<https://vermonthistory.org/documents/findaid/coutts.pdf>

The description of Flora Jane Coutts papers, the Vermont Historical Society:

<https://snaccooperative.org/ark:/99166/w65j0ng1>

This Place in History: Flora Coutts (approx. 4 minute movie)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UX4DSawMIOU>

Summer 2019 Lake Front Magazine: Remembering Flora Coutts (page 6)

<chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://files.secure.website/wscfus/10542565/25196098/lakefront-summer-2019-issue.pdf>

March 18, 1983 Obituary: The Berkshire Eagle, Pittsfield MA (some information is inaccurate):

<https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-berkshire-eagle-flora-jane-coutts-k/39312666/>

The Women in the State House exhibit. Vt Digger
February 5, 2020

<https://vtdigger.org/2020/02/05/final-reading-progressives-flop-on-paid-leave-bill-act-250-conversation-focuses-on-racial-justice/>

For further information, please also refer to the “Women in the State House” exhibit in the State House lobby where there is mention of Flora Coutts as one of the first women to serve in the Assembly and believed to be of Abenaki heritage.