

A Fraiche Perspective

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March was Women's History Month and, although the course of the history of women's achievements is intertwined with heroic men and times, it is especially important to the culture and values of Baker Donelson to commemorate this month which honors the contributions and achievements of women. Learning about the tenacity, courage, creativity and success of women collectively and individually is inspirational to all.

The women of Baker Donelson have strong female role models in history and in the history of the Firm. Past and future Diversity Matters newsletters have highlighted a number of women lawyers who were first in their fields and held the longevity record at the Firm. Many have remained at Baker Donelson their whole careers. Thus, the Women's Initiative joins companies, communities, schools, libraries and organizations to focus their observations on the women leaders in history who have paved the way for us all. Highlighting the contributions of women in history and in the history of your own institution is an exercise in celebration and delight.

The Women's Initiative is dedicated to advancing and celebrating our female professionals, our clients, potential clients and community organizations that focus on the special needs and deeds of women. A few weeks ago, I had the great privilege of sitting next to Eileen McDonnell, Penn Mutual's President and CEO, the presenting sponsor and national advisor of Vision 2020. Ms. McDonnell had asked me, as one of two national delegates from Louisiana to Vision 2020 (<http://www.drexel.edu/vision2020/>), to enjoy a presentation of Kate Campbell Stevenson's performance of "Women: Back to the Future." Kate is a professional theatrical actress and singer with a one-woman show that brings to life some of the most memorable female characters in American history: Abigail Adams, Sacajawea, Lucy Stone, Eleanor Roosevelt and Bessie Coleman. Her Broadway-quality inspirational performance included touting Vision 2020 as she was also the delegate for her home state of Maryland. I was deeply moved by her talented "can do" singing, monologue and poetic depiction of these amazing women. As she changed costume and did her make-up on stage to portray each character, Kate captivated me and made me think about other women trailblazers. Kate's website provides more details about these women, including the especially fascinating Bessie Coleman.

Bessie Coleman, who was born in Texas in 1892, was the child of sharecroppers, and she picked cotton with her 12 siblings. Dreaming of adventure, she saved her money to travel to France where she attended aviator school and became the first black woman to receive a license from the Federation Aeronautique Internationale. She appeared in her first air show in the U.S. in 1922 and opened her own aviation school for African Americans. Bessie Coleman met her demise in April 1926 after falling from her plane. She was brave beyond imagination.

We don't all fly planes, but we can truly soar in our commitment to clients and community. Our initiative is all about building opportunity for women to achieve their goals as leaders and successful lawyers.

Bessie Coleman

