

# First Candle: First Candle Honors Women's History Month

Alison Jacobson



Saving babies. Supporting families.

*First Candle's efforts to support families during their most difficult times and provide new answers to help other families avoid the tragedy of the loss of their baby are without parallel.*

*"We are taking this opportunity to call attention to women who have made lasting advances in maternal and infant health – advances we value in our work to reduce the rates of Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID) and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)."*

**It is March and that means Women's History Month.**

We are taking this opportunity to call attention to women who have made lasting advances in maternal and infant health – advances we value in our work to reduce the rates of Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID) and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). We all know there are too many to list them all, but among them are:

*"She was first a nurse and then entered the New England Female Medical College, becoming the first Black woman in the U.S. to earn a medical degree. She tended to underserved communities and inspired other Blacks to pursue a career in medicine."*

**Dr. Rebecca Lee Crumpler** (1831-1895). She was first a nurse and then entered the New England Female Medical College, becoming the first Black woman in the U.S. to earn a medical degree. She tended to underserved communities and inspired other Blacks to pursue a career in medicine. The first woman in the U.S. to earn a medical degree was **Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell** (1821-1920), who went on to study obstetrics further.

**Elisabeth Bing** (1914 -2015). Born in Germany and trained in England, she was a physical therapist who emigrated to the U.S. and co-founded [Lamaze International](#), which supports a holistic approach, natural childbirth methods, and parental empowerment.

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**Mary Francis Hill Coley** (1900-1966). A Georgia native, she apprenticed in midwifery after her marriage and, for more than 30 years, delivered over 3,000 babies across a four-county swath. In 1952, she was featured in the Georgia Health Dept.-sponsored training documentary [All My Babies](#), which highlighted her work's scope and families' living conditions. In 2002, the film entered the

Library of Congress's National Film Registry. In 2005, she was featured in exhibits at the Anacostia Smithsonian Museum for African American History and Culture, the Columbia University School of Nursing, and the Mailman School of Public Health.

**Dr. Martha Lay Eliot** (1891-1978) and **Dr. Virginia Alexander** (1899-1949) were pioneers in public health. Dr. Eliot addressed maternal and children's health and was the first woman president of the [American Public Health Association](#). Dr. Alexander, a Black physician, did graduate work in public health and was part of a network of Black medical professionals who identified the effects of systemic racism in health care.

**Eunice Kennedy Shriver** (1921-2009). Her dedicated efforts led to the founding the [National Institute of Child Health and Human Development](#) in 1962. In 1994, NICHD led a coalition of organizations and agencies in launching the Back to Sleep (now Safe to Sleep) public health campaign, of which we were part, which promoted infant safe sleep practices and resulted in a 50% drop in sleep-related infant deaths.

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This year's WHM theme is Women Who Advocate for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. We have learned through our decades of educating healthcare professionals and families that infant health relies on maternal health, and the health of both may depend on

#### About First Candle

First Candle, based in New Canaan, CT, is a 501c (3) committed to eliminating Sudden Unexpected Infant Death while providing bereavement support for families who have suffered a loss. Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID), which includes SIDS and Accidental Suffocation and Strangulation in Bed (ASSB), remains the leading cause of death for babies one month to one year of age, resulting in 3,500 infant deaths nationwide per year.

social forces.

The U.S. continues to report disparities in maternal and infant mortality along racial and socioeconomic lines. We applaud all women on civilization's front lines working to improve maternal and infant health outcomes and save lives.

Learn more about [Women's History Month](#) at <https://womenshistorymonth.gov/> and the [National Women's History Alliance](#) at <https://nationalwomenshistoryalliance.org/our-history>.

**Disclosure:** *The author is the Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer of First Candle, a Connecticut-based not-for-profit 501(c3) corporation.*

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