

# Girls STEAM Project Talladega County, AL

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*AAUW advances equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, philanthropy and research.*

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The Girls STEAM Project goal is to help seventh and eighth grade girls in Talladega County expand their horizons in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) with an Art component.

## **Maria Mitchell – America’s First Professional Female Astronomer**

Maria Mitchell (pronounced Ma-RYE-ah) was an astronomer, librarian, naturalist, and above all, educator. She discovered a comet through a telescope, for which she was awarded a gold medal by the King of Denmark. She was then thrust into the international spotlight and became America’s first professional female astronomer.

Born to Quaker parents William and Lydia Mitchell on Nantucket on August 1, 1818, Mitchell was an avid learner. The Quaker tradition taught that both boys and girls should be educated and Maria received an education at local schools and from her father’s tutoring. Her father was a great influence on her life; Maria developed her love of astronomy from his instruction on surveying and navigation. At age 12, Maria helped her father calculate the position of their home by observing a solar eclipse.

By 14, sailors trusted her to do vital navigational computations for their long whaling journeys. Maria pursued her love of learning as a young woman, becoming the Nantucket Atheneum’s first librarian. She and her father continued to acquire astronomical equipment and conduct observations.

On October 1st, 1847, Maria was sweeping the sky from the roof of the Pacific National Bank on Main Street, where her father was the Cashier. She spotted a small blurry object that did not appear on her charts. She had discovered a comet! After achieving her fame, Maria was widely sought after and went on to achieve many great things. She resigned her post at the Atheneum in 1856 to travel throughout the US and

Europe. In 1865, she became Professor of Astronomy at the newly founded Vassar College.

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*Watch for fun and educational events for Talladega County 7th and 8th grade girls in future Girls STEAM Project Newsletters.*

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Maria was an inspiration to her students. It was Vassar College that Maria felt was truly her home. She believed in learning by doing, and in the capacity of women to achieve what their male counterparts could. "Miss Mitchell" was beloved by her students whom she taught until her retirement in 1888, due to failing health. She died in 1889, and was buried next to her parents in Nantucket's Prospect Hill Cemetery. (Excerpt Credit: "About Maria Mitchell", Maria Mitchell Association)

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## AAUW: Seeking Success for Girls in STEM

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### **More Women and Minorities Taking Computer Science Courses**

According to [new data](#), the number of women and underrepresented minorities who took an Advancement Placement (AP) computer science course increased from 2016 to 2017. One in five students in those classes were underrepresented minorities, and one in four were women. While these gains are noteworthy, women and minorities are still far from reaching parity in the computer science and engineering fields. [AAUW research](#) reveals more about this pervasive issue, and we urge continued recruitment of women into STEM majors, enforcement of Title IX to improve school climates for women and girls, and the continued collection of data that's disaggregated and cross-tabulated by gender. Only then will we begin to address the gaps in these high-wage, high-demand fields. (Source: AAUW in the Statehouse, August 16, 2017)

### **Want to be involved with the American Association of University Women (AAUW) Girls STEAM Project?**

Share your interests and passions with the Girls STEAM Project Co-Directors to find a perfect fit for you. Be a part of the action to begin today to prepare for future Scientists, Computer Technologists, Engineers, Artists, and Mathematicians. Are you interested in planning a program to introduce young girls to women in STEM fields? Volunteer in an area you feel comfortable. Be a productive member of your community. Email [audrey5190@yahoo.com](mailto:audrey5190@yahoo.com), or call 205 249-7788 to learn more.

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