



# Nettie Depp

## Life and Accomplishments

### Monument for KY State Capitol

Written and Compiled by:  
Amanda Matthews, Sculptor  
Audrey Fields, Intern for Monumental Women of KY

#### Content Overview

I.	Nettie Depp Personal History	2
	a. Education	2
	b. Career Highlights	2-3
	i. Elected Superintendent of Schools 1914-1915 & 1916-1917	3-4
	c. Suffrage & Other Political Involvement	5
	d. Final Years and Death	5
	e. Honors & Awards	5
II.	Monument Honoring Nettie Depp for KY State Capitol	6
	a. Brief History of Project	6
	i. Beginning – 2014	6
	ii. Unanimous Vote – 2017	7
	iii. Monumental Women of Kentucky – 2020	7
	b. Design of Bronze Sculpture, Details & Symbolism	7
	i. Stance	7
	ii. Clothing	7
	iii. Book	8
	iv. Hat and Hatpin	9
	v. Signet Ring	9
	vi. Buttons	9
	vii. Cameo	10
	viii. Artist Statement & About the Artist	10
	ix. Bibliography	11

**SUMMARY:** Nettie Depp represents extraordinary leadership as a teacher, principal, elected official, and outspoken advocate for suffrage and equal access to public education for all Kentuckians, regardless of race or ethnicity. In 1913, seven years before women earned full voting rights, Depp was elected as Superintendent of Barren County Schools, becoming the first female officeholder in the county. In May 1920, Depp participated as a voting member of the delegation creating the Kentucky League of Women Voters in Louisville. Her powerful public addresses, writing, and notable work in office reflect Depp’s passion as an advocate for full suffrage, resistance to corruption in government, and above all, as a stalwart activist on behalf of marginalized Kentuckians. Depp will be honored with bronze statuary in the State Capitol, becoming the first bronze statue honoring a woman on state-owned land in Kentucky’s 229-year-history. Her image will help fill a void of sorely lacking icons in Kentucky honoring the accomplishments of women and minorities, and will serve as a proxy for many other unsung heroes who have dedicated their time, talents, and hearts in service to our great Commonwealth.

## **Nettie Depp Personal History**

Nettie Bayless Courts Depp (1874-1932) was the daughter of John Burks Depp (1845-1927), a member of the Kentucky House of Representatives, and of Mariba Elizabeth Reneau (1846-1928). Depp was one of six children. She became a teacher and principal, an avid education reformer, and was eventually elected superintendent of schools, making Depp the first woman elected to public office in Barren County, Kentucky.

### **Education**

Nettie Depp was educated in the common schools of Barren County and was an eventual graduate of Liberty Female College in Glasgow, Kentucky. After completing her formative education, Depp taught in various schools, fortifying her desire to expand her knowledge and become a professional educator. She enrolled at Southern Normal School and studied under brothers Dr. Henry Hardin Cherry and Thomas C. Cherry, the former of which became Depp's mentor. As a student, Depp embraced the Cherry brothers' philosophies on education such as the *Declaration on Principles and Policies for Southern Normal School*, which promoted pedagogic ideologies including:

- To be progressive and to use modern methods and equipment while rejecting all worthless educational fads.
- To fight against ignorance, and for higher education and the liberation of the human soul.
- To instill in the minds of the students the great truth that every person is created to do something, to be a producer.
- To lead the student to understand that a broad and liberal education is essential to the highest degree of success in any endeavor in life.



On June 5, 1908, Depp earned a degree in education from Western Kentucky State Normal School, the first Barren County student to earn a degree from the institution.

### **Career Highlights**

Prior to her attendance at Southern Normal, Depp taught in numerous schools including Bethel School, Glasgow Junction, and Temple Hill (where she served as principal), as well as others outside of her native Kentucky. During her time working in Scottsville, Kentucky, she wrote a letter to Dr. Henry Cherry of her success in public speaking on behalf of education reform:

*“I tried to show the people the advantages the school gives and that they should use them as their own. If I only made one person see this in such a way that he will find his way into the school I shall feel that my little talk was not in vain.”*

As a teacher, Depp was a stalwart supporter of education for all children, an unpopular sentiment at the time given the general societal contempt for marginalized peoples such as girls and racial minorities. In March of 1907, she wrote:

*“Within the walls of that building, boys and girls have been molded into educated men and women. Often upon entering, they could be compared to coarse rough ironware as it is dug from the earth. Here, they are placed under the best teachers that can be secured*

*anywhere and are carried through a thorough course of drawing out, until they, like the iron ore after it has been sheltered, heated and drawn out again and again, becomes the finest wrought steel."*

A resounding advocate for education, Depp often focused on its accessibility as a right, not a privilege. In a newspaper column sharing the recent success of Bethel School, Depp editorialized with a message to parents:

*"One word to school people, and most especially parents: Our governmental laws teach that wherever there is a right there is a corresponding duty. Parents, do you realize that one of the greatest rights your children can enjoy is the right to attend school? If it is a right, it is indeed and in truth your duty to send them. You cripple them for life when you fail to educate them. Education means more than it did when you were children. Its value is above all the gold in the world..."*

Depp was also an advocate for fair pay for schoolteachers, having experienced lack of fair pay herself, as she recounted in another letter to her mentor. In a newspaper column relating to tax dollars, she wrote:

*"Now, I can tell you why I place the schools first. It is this: We teachers take the children and teach them twenty days in the month for a little more than fifty-five cents each. Shame on you and all the rest of that class that would place higher value upon the sheep industry than you do upon the education of your people!"*



### **Depp Elected Superintendent of Schools**

While teaching, Depp apparently grew weary of the role of politics in public schools. Experienced and determined to enact change, Depp was an outstanding candidate for the upcoming superintendent election. Local school superintendents were not selected by the elected members of the school board;

rather, would-be superintendents were elected by the voters and were considered county officials. Recognizing Depp as a popular educator armed with a degree, both the Democratic and Republican Party committees viewed her as a highly qualified candidate and asked her to run on their ticket. In a response dated September 28, 1909, Depp ended her statement with this quote:

*"May God give us men and women that will work for true interest of their country."*

Determined to show that local voters would support her candidacy, her advocates produced a petition bearing the signatures of 85 Barren County voters. She accepted the challenge and agreed to run as a representative of the Democratic Party more than a year before the 1913 General Election.

Depp was the first woman to run for public office in Barren County and the county's first female officeholder on January 1, 1914. In addition to a modest salary, the superintendent was provided an office and an apartment in the county courthouse.

### **1914-1915**

In her biennial report to the Kentucky Superintendent of Public Instruction for 1915, Depp shared successes and areas needing improvement in Barren County Schools. By this point, she had built 6 new schools houses, repaired 15 others, dug water wells, and built numerous outbuildings. But most astounding was her public, documented advocacy for equal education of black and white children. Like communities across the nation, Barren County's schools were segregated by race. Providing educational opportunities for African American students presented unique concerns. The vast majority of the African American population in Barren County were sharecroppers who moved from farm to farm. Depp clearly worried about how best to serve children of color when she reported:

*"We need some new [school] houses for colored children, as this population moves from place to place so rapidly that we need to put these [school] houses on wheels to keep up with the yearly moving."*

Depp used the powerful voice of her elected position to address the Kentucky Superintendent of Education and publicly advocate for stricter enforcement of the Compulsory Education Laws to be addressed at the next Kentucky General Assembly, undoubtedly because these laws improved literacy and discouraged child labor practices. One of Depp's greatest local accomplishments was orchestrating the creation of Barren County's first four-year high school, where enrollment swelled from 20 to 70+ students and faculty doubled in size.

### **1916-1917**

For the second biennium of her term, Depp was pleased with improvements in compulsory school law. During the biennium, she had overseen the construction of 7 new schoolhouses, the repair of 35 existing schoolhouses, prepared plans for 4 others that needed extensive repairs or replacement, and installed numerous new wells. Reporting on her third and fourth years as superintendent, Depp stated:

*"We feel that we have done nothing brilliant, nothing to boast of; we have simply been hunting for the right way and for the best methods, and as we have found them, we have gladly adopted them."*

During Depp's term in office, Barren County was assigned a county agent, A.C. Young, through the University of Kentucky Agriculture Extension Service. Young collaborated with Depp to establish corn and tomato clubs within the public schools. According to Depp's report, the clubs eventually

became the first 4-H Clubs in the county. The new high school had also grown rapidly from 70 students to 106 in 1916.

Depp concluded her final report, stating:

*"During the four years we have been able to meet debts amounting to \$19,000 and we are justly proud that we can hand over the office keys to Mr. W.M. Totty, the newly elected superintendent, with no debt to impede further progress."*

### **Suffrage & Other Political Involvement**

While Depp never ran for public office again, she remained active in political work and suffrage for women. She was welcomed into the Barren County Democratic Party at its county convention on May 1, 1920. Her stature as a former elected official assured Depp's full involvement. She was appointed to the Resolutions Committee of the Barren County Democratic Party's local convention through which she helped write a number of resolutions including an endorsement for President Woodrow Wilson's re-election. At the same meeting, Depp was one of 28 local women selected as voting delegates to the Kentucky Democratic Party convention, joining 35 male voting delegates to complete Barren County's delegation.

On May 4, 1920, Depp was one of five Barren County women who attended and participated in the Kentucky League of Women Voters meeting in Louisville, Kentucky as the organization transformed itself from the former Kentucky Equal Rights Association.

### **Final Years and Death**

After her term as superintendent, Depp was highly sought after. She continued to serve as a teacher and principal until her health was depleted by breast cancer, ending her career in education in 1931. She died of breast cancer on August 3, 1932. Her funeral was held at Refuge Church of Christ in Eighty-Eight, Kentucky. An estimated 1,500 people attended her funeral, which was moved outdoors in an effort to accommodate the crowd.

### **Honors & Awards**

In July 2013, Nettie Depp was honored with a Kentucky Historical Society marker (#2397) installed on the south-west corner of the lawn of the Barren County Courthouse in Glasgow, Kentucky. The marker was sponsored and funded by the Glasgow Business & Professional Women's Club.

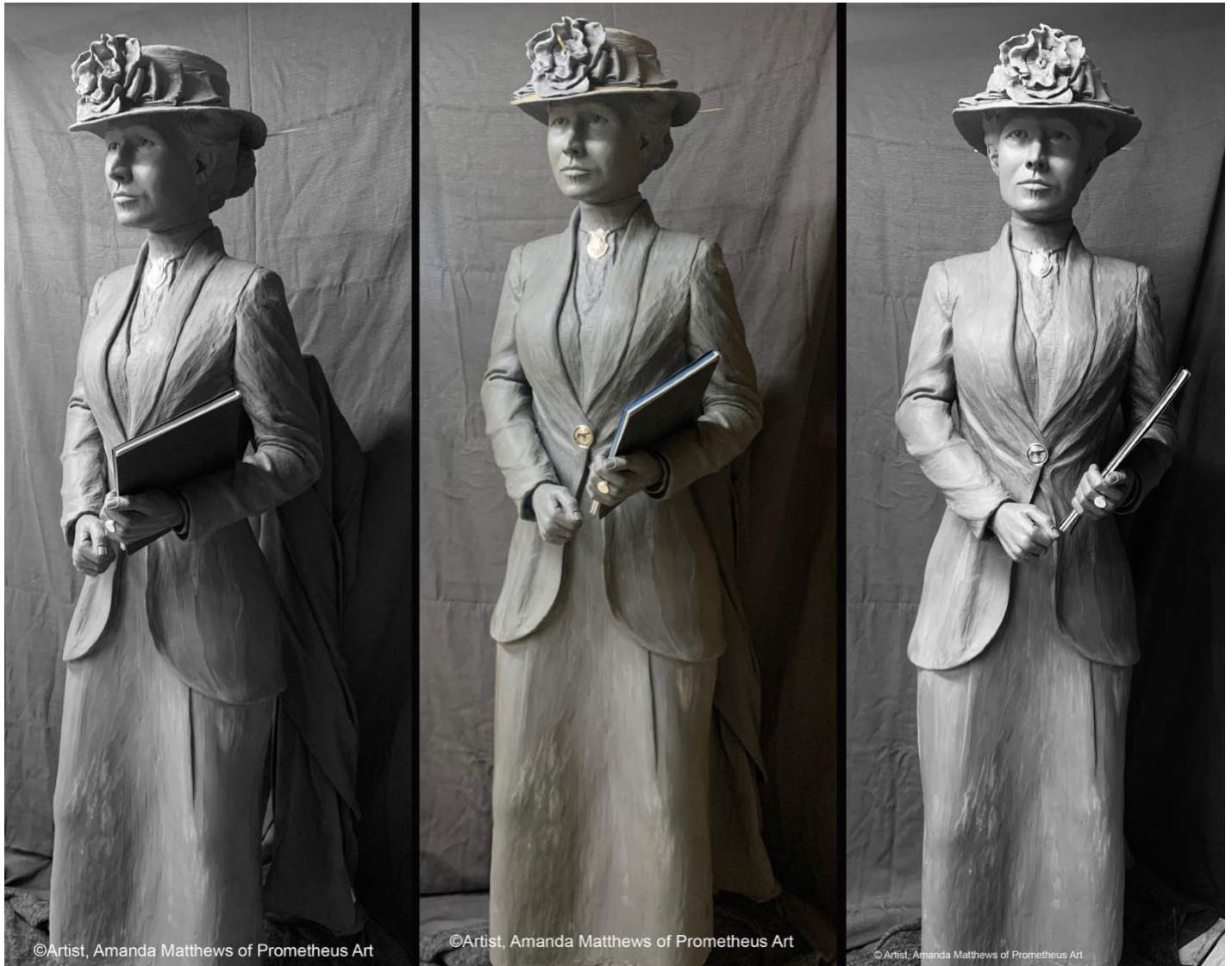
Western Kentucky University enshrined Nettie Depp in the WKU Hall of Distinguished Alumni on October 26, 2018. She is the first graduate of one of WKU's seminal institutions to be so honored.

Nettie Depp has been inducted into the Kentucky Women's History Project, developed by the Kentucky Commission on Women, an agency of the Office of the Governor.

Depp was celebrated, along with 46 other notable Kentucky women in the recent Award-Winning Documentary, *Dreamers and Doers: Voices of Kentucky Women* by Michael Breeding Media. Please enjoy this clip about Nettie from the film: <https://vimeo.com/122843108>

## **Monument Honoring Nettie Depp for KY State Capitol**

In 2014 while researching gender equity issues for another project, Amanda Matthews came across an article from September 2014 in the Courier Journal, which stated "In fact, the closest thing to a woman honored by a full-scale statue on public property in Kentucky is Carolina, Gen. John Breckinridge Castleman's horse." Thus began Matthews' commitment to honor a woman in the most esteemed building in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, the Capitol, for the first time in Kentucky's 229-year history.



Sculpture in-progress in clay

### **Brief History of Project**

#### **Beginning – 2014**

In the beginning stages of this project (2014-2015), Matthews worked closely with Eleanor Jordan, who was appointed by Governor Steve Beshear as Executive Director of the Kentucky Commission on Women, an agency of the Office of the Governor. Jordan is also a former Kentucky State Representative, having served from 1996-2000, and now serves as an Honorary Member of the recently formed Monumental Women of Kentucky Committee. Jordan had recently spoken in 2013 at the dedication of the Historical Marker honoring Depp when she and Matthews met. Ultimately,



Jordan and the Commission on Women decided to select Depp as an appropriate candidate to honor with a bronze sculpture intended for placement in the Kentucky State Capitol building.

In December 2015, Governor Matt Bevin took office. Matthews then began working with Leslie Nigels, State Curator of the Historic Properties Advisory Commission (HPAC).

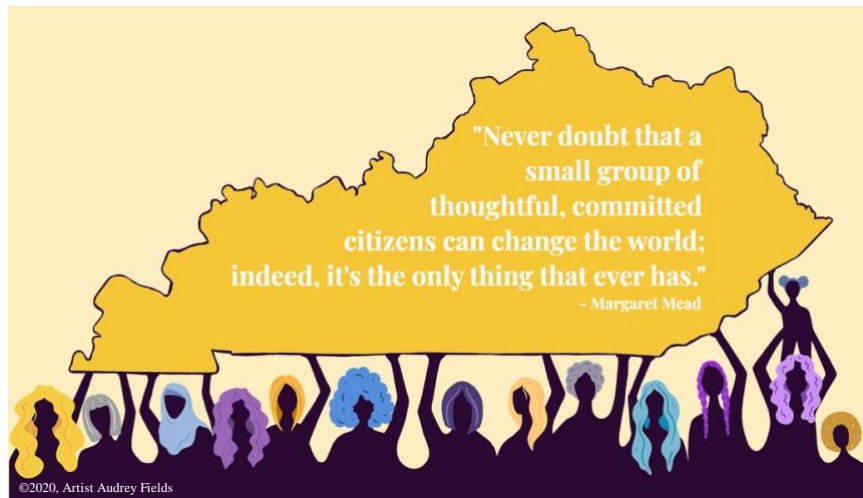
### **Unanimous Vote – 2017**

In 2017, HPAC offered a unanimous vote in support of the sculpture honoring Depp for the State Capitol.

### **Monumental Women of Kentucky – 2020**

In 2019, Governor Andy Beshear took office. In 2020, the Monumental Women of Kentucky Committee formed as a state government-organized committee comprised of 14 members under the umbrella of HPAC. The committee is tasked to oversee the process of ensuring that Kentucky welcomes its first monument honoring a woman, Nettie Depp, in the State Capitol.

The Monumental Women of Kentucky Committee is led by Honorary Chairs Kentucky First Lady, Britainy Beshear and Lieutenant Governor/Secretary of Education, Jacqueline Coleman. Rebecca Byers and Victoria Meyer serve as Co-Chairs. The remaining committee members include Carol Mitchell, Kentucky State Curator and Director of HPAC, and Amanda Matthews, Sculptor.



Logo for Monumental Women of KY Committee

## **Design of Bronze Sculpture, Details & Symbolism**

### **Stance**

Nettie Depp's commemorative monument portrays her stance as slightly contrapposto, which was born in Classical Greek sculpture and later revived in Renaissance sculpture. Depp is looking down slightly, and although rare for a visionary to be portrayed this way, it is quite intentional. The artist believes this will represent her connection to and advocacy for children, who will view her likeness from a lower-than-eye-level position.

### **Clothing**

1910-1920 period-specific clothing and shoes chosen for Depp reflect a similar style worn by her in photographs, while also representing couture appropriate for someone visiting the State Capitol during that time. She is wearing an Edwardian style vested suit with a lace shirt and ascot.

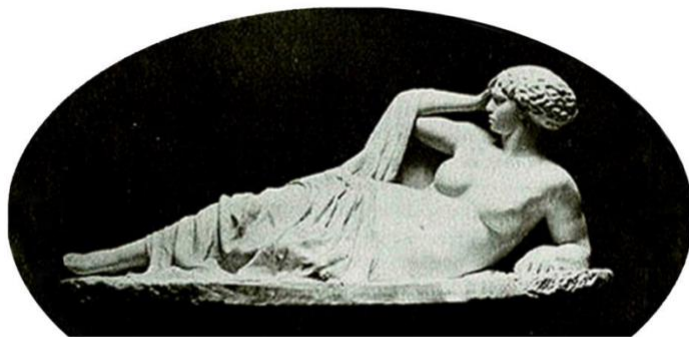
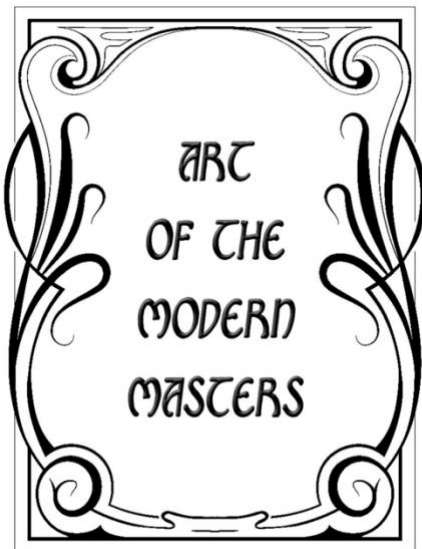


### **Book held by Depp**

The book design is a bold and significant symbol of the sculpture, rendered in the Art Nouveau style (1837-1901). It represents conveyance of knowledge in general, as well as the fact that Depp prioritized the addition of art classes to the school curriculum while in office. It also reflects the importance of public art as a catalyst for positive social change. Clearly displayed is the work of noted American female sculptor, Anne Whitney, who was on the front end of the New Woman movement and fought for women's rights, education rights, and the abolition of slavery.

The book title reads *Art of the Modern Masters* and prominently showcases Whitney's revolutionary 1864 sculpture, *Africa*, of a beautiful African American woman rising from bondage and is titled as such purposely to advocate for the emancipation of an entire race of human beings. Created during the Civil War, it clearly and profoundly expresses Ms. Whitney's beliefs about the abolition of slavery. It was exhibited in Boston and New York in 1864 and 1865.

Whitney, who was one of the few female sculptors to achieve success in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, believed that rather than follow an "acceptable path for women" in the mid-1850s to explore her interest in poetry, she could more fully express her viewpoints about social causes through art.



**AFRICA 1864,  
BY SCULPTOR, ANN WHITNEY**



## Hat and Hatpin

Hats and hatpins were all the rage in the early 1900's. It would be an obvious omission of period details to leave out such an iconic part of women's couture during that time. "The bigger the better" was the popular idea surrounding hatpins as well. Depp is wearing a woman's fedora style hat, adorned with a bold poppy flower on the front, commonly considered a symbol of suffrage. Her dragonfly hatpin was an ostentatious sign of the times. The dragonfly serves as a strong representation of wisdom and transformation. Finally, the feathers reach prominently upward and serve as a sign of high honor (not yet shown in images).



## Signet Ring

The signet ring portrayed in the sculpture was inspired by Depp's own signet ring. Although her ring is clearly visible in images, the details of it are not. The new design of the signet ring includes the symbol of the goddess moon, the name ARTEMIS spelled in classic Greek letters, the sacred deer of Artemis which symbolizes new adventures, and finally the date of 2020 written in the Greek numbers of BK, which are also the artist's mother's initials. (Image on left below)



## Buttons

The jacket buttons were designed and hand-engraved in the Edwardian style (1901-1914). Sleek and beautiful, they feature different dog silhouettes, which is typical of this era and a playful nod to Depp's connection to children. (Image on right above)

## Cameo

The cameo was inspired by Depp's actual lyre-shaped cameo. The lyre is an attribute of the Greek god Apollo, representing music and wisdom. Depp also added music courses to the curriculum in Barren County schools. The re-design of the cameo includes the moon symbol and face of the Greek goddess Artemis, who was known for "illuminating the darkness." Artemis' virtues, noticeably similar to Depp's own moral values, include:

- Defending human and civil rights
- Protecting the vulnerable
- Defending the powerless and underrepresented
- Fostering education and health
- Eliminating prejudice and discrimination



**Artist Statement:** My work reflects my commitment to civil rights, women's contributions to society, and raising the voices of unity and inclusion through public art. I am dedicated to honoring those who have taken up the mantle of fairness and justice against the odds and who always help others along the way. We are all born from the same stars, sculpted from the same source, contain the same life, and are each seeking our place in the universe. I believe the Nettie Depp sculpture will alter the trajectory of Kentucky's story by honoring a deserving woman in a place of prominence and help change the obstinate norm that has excluded many valuable voices in the discourse of civil rights and equality for all.

**About the Artist:** Matthews is an internationally recognized, award-winning sculptor/designer of public art, and CEO of Prometheus Foundry, LLC. She has received 22 professional grants for her work, and several business awards including NAWBO Business Owner of the Year STRIVE award for KY/So IN. Her work is in many notable collections including museums, public parks, government buildings, and municipalities. Matthews has also been featured in 300+ media articles worldwide including The New York Times, Washington Post, BBC World News, NPR *All Things Considered*, C-SPAN3, USA Today, and most recently in Smithsonian Magazine where her upcoming work in New York City is listed 3<sup>rd</sup> of 9 "Must-See Outdoor Art Installations of 2020" internationally.

Bibliography (In order of appearance)

Roe, Amy. "Nettie B. C. Depp (1874-1932)." *ExploreKYHistory*,  
explorekyhistory.ky.gov/items/show/342.

"Nettie Depp." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 12 June 2020,  
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nettie\_Depp#cite\_ref-36.

Terry, William S. (1981). *The Biography of Nettie Bayless Courts Depp*.

"Association to Change Name: Suffrage Organization to be known as League of Women Voters". *The Louisville Courier-Journal*. March 28, 1919.

"Name and Purpose of Women's Organization Changed". *The (Maysville, KY) Public Ledger*. April 17, 1920.

"Women Voters Summoned". *The Cincinnati Enquirer*. April 18, 1920.

"Kentucky League of Women Voters Will Hold Convention May 3". *The Owensboro Messenger*. April 29, 1920.

"Kentucky Women Organize League of Women Voters". *The Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer*. May 4, 1920.

"Barren County Ladies in Attendance". *The Glasgow Times*. May 12, 1920.

*DREAMERS & DOERS (FILM)*, [www.kywomenshistoryproject.com/dreamersanddoers/](http://www.kywomenshistoryproject.com/dreamersanddoers/).

Gerth, Joseph. "A Louisville First: Statue Honoring a Woman." *Journal*, 17 Sept. 2014,  
[www.courier-journal.com/story/life/faith/2014/09/16/louisville-first-statue-honoring-woman/15714563/](http://www.courier-journal.com/story/life/faith/2014/09/16/louisville-first-statue-honoring-woman/15714563/).

"Eleanor Jordan." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 28 Sept. 2019,  
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eleanor\_Jordan.

"3 To Join WKU's Hall of Distinguished Alumni during Homecoming 2018." *Media Relations*,  
[www.wku.edu/news/articles/?view=article&articleid=6694](http://www.wku.edu/news/articles/?view=article&articleid=6694).

Brammer, Jack. "In 2018, Kentucky's Capitol Will Finally Get a Life-Size Statue of a Woman." *Kentucky*, Lexington Herald Leader, [www.kentucky.com/news/politics-government/article191206714.html](http://www.kentucky.com/news/politics-government/article191206714.html).

"Anne Whitney." <https://www.watertown-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/638/Anne-Whitney?BidId=>, Watertown, Massachusetts Government Site.

"Anne Whitney." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 1 May 2020,  
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne\_Whitney.

"Anne Whitney." *Smithsonian American Art Museum*, [americanart.si.edu/artist/anne-whitney-5367](http://americanart.si.edu/artist/anne-whitney-5367).