

Women's History

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Independence Declared & "Post"ed

The Declaration of Independence was written and signed by thirty-nine men whose names are duly chronicled and historically known. Albeit the publisher, whose name is neither duly chronicled nor historically known, was declaredly a woman of note.

In colonial America, Katherine Goddard was a distinguished publisher, a position which did not come to her easily because of her gender. When she was nineteen, and oldest of four children in a prominent family, her father, a doctor and the postmaster of New London, Connecticut, died. Katherine watched as her younger brother, William, was designated to be head of the family. He was given substantial inheritance funds with which to start a business. In the 18th Century (1757) this was the typical patriarchal pattern of passing down family wealth.

The inheritance enabled William to leave New London for Providence, Rhode Island where he established the first newspaper there, the Providence Gazette. Though Sarah Goddard adhered to the gender protocol of the day by fostering her son, she also fostered her daughter in this new family business when she moved with Katherine to Providence to help William. The Gazette had very few subscribers.

Three years after they arrived, William left for greater publishing opportunities in New York and Philadelphia. Katherine and Sarah stayed on and continued to publish the Gazette. They opened a bookshop and added a bindery to their growing enterprise. But three years later, they sold their businesses to go help William in Philadelphia with his "grander" printing pursuits which included founding the Pennsylvania Chronicle. Two years later when Sarah died, Katherine continued on her own to manage and publish the Chronicle.

In 1773, William repeated his seemingly insatiable quest for bigger and better and moved to Baltimore to start that city's first newspaper, the Maryland Journal. While in Baltimore, he became deeply invested in establishing a national postal system. Once again, Katherine followed to help her brother publish, but she would no longer accept taking control under the banner of his name. The official masthead of the Journal credited the rightful publisher and read: "Published by M. K. Goddard."

Additionally, while she published the Journal, owned and operated her bindery and her bookshop, she was appointed to manage the Baltimore post office. Thus, she became the first woman postmaster in the colonies. Her reputation, her political agency, and her publishing skills were adroit. When the Declaration of Independence was to be published, Katherine was chosen by the Continental Congress of 1777 to print it. At the very bottom

of this first official U.S. document that did not mention the rights of women, she documented that it was: "Printed by Mary Katherine Goddard."

(Women's) History Repeats Itself: In the 20th Century (1948), in the typical patriarchal pattern of passing down family wealth, thousands of shares of Washington Post stocks were transferred to Phil and Katharine Graham by Katharine's father who owned the Post. Phil was given the larger number of shares because, according to Katharine's father, no man should be in the position of working for his wife. Katharine writes of how, at the time, she not only concurred, but was in complete accord. After Phil's ruinous years and ultimate suicide in 1963, the floundering Washington Post flourished when: Published by Katharine Graham.

Sources:

Enterprising Women: 250 Years of American Business, Virginia G. Drachman,
Personal History, Katharine Graham