

BFF Women Journalists-II: My column last month was inspired by the words of award-winning journalist and popular television host Christiane Amanpour who spoke of how the free press is, “the BFF of the people and not the enemy of the people.” More here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nd0Blxbgpuw>. Her words prompted me to suggest she author a book expanding her friendly rhetoric and, awaiting Ms. Amanpour’s book, prompted my November column recalling ten historic women journalists from my previous columns, gathered together in one column to support them, their profession and the free press. This month, still awaiting Ms. Amanpour’s book, I recall five more women journalists from my previous columns, again, gathered together in one column to support them, their profession and the free press.

Maria Stewart (1802-1879) was America’s first black journalist. Her abolitionist essays (1831-33) were published by William Lloyd Garrison in his newspaper the *Liberator*. Stewart's first publication called upon black Americans to organize against slavery in the South and to resist racist restrictions in the North. She called for black unity, economic progress, collective action, the value of education, and women’s rights, most notably that women participate in all aspects of community life. In an 1832 speech to an audience of both men and women, Stewart stated that free African Americans were not much better off than when in slavery:

Look at many of the most worthy and most interesting of us doomed to spend our lives in gentlemen's kitchens. Look at our young men, smart, active, and energetic, with souls filled with ambitious fire; if they look forward, alas! What are their prospects? They can be nothing but the humblest laborers, on account of their dark complexions; hence many of them lose their ambition, and become worthless...

The male leaders of the free-black community were intolerant of such an outspoken female journalist who had the audacity to speak publicly. Stewart was forced to leave Boston and her public-speaking career and went to New York City where she taught in Manhattan and Long Island’s public schools. She also continued her activism joining women’s organizations including a black women’s literary society, published her collected works in 1835, and attended the 1837 Anti-slavery Convention of American Women in NYC.

countHerhistory-June/2008 and <https://ehistory.osu.edu/biographies/maria-stewart>

Jane Grey Swisshelm (1815-1884) in 1850 became the first woman to sit in the press gallery of the United States Senate. Her domineering husband forbade her to read. But read she did, as well as write, and even publish. She published newspapers in three different cities, one being Pittsburgh where, under Pennsylvania law, a woman’s wages went to her husband. When Swisshelm learned he could make money from Jane’s writings, he allowed her to write. And write, she did and launched her own paper the *Pittsburgh Saturday Visiter*. Her editorials on slavery had a national readership of abolitionists. In 1857, she left her husband, moved to Minnesota and published the *St. Cloud Visiter* and continued to write against slavery. After an article about prominent politicians who were keeping slaves in free areas of the state, her presses were burned,

her type tossed into the Mississippi, and a note left warning her not to challenge local politics to avoid more serious consequences. She restarted her paper in less than two months as the *St. Cloud Democrat* that contained articles on women's rights, equal pay for equal work, school racial integration, and politics. In Washington, DC, she founded and edited *The Reconstructionist* publication reporting political news such as then-president Andrew Johnson's leniency towards the secessionist states. Here, too, her presses were set aflame.

countHerhistory-june/2008 and

<http://pacivilwar150.com/ThroughPeople/Women/JaneGreySwisshelm.html>

Mary Ann Shadd Cary (1823-1893) was born free in Philadelphia where she became a teacher. When Congress passed the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, Cary, age twenty-seven, and her family fled to Canada. There, in 1853, she established the *Provincial Freeman*, a weekly publication for blacks in Canada. As such, she became the first black woman newspaper publisher in North America and first woman publisher in Canada. Criticism from black men made publishing difficult for her, but publish she did. Upon the death of her husband in 1860, she returned to the states with her children where she served as a recruiting officer in Indiana to enlist black volunteers for the Union Army. After the Civil War, she taught in black schools in Wilmington and Washington, DC. In DC, she attended Howard University School of Law, graduated as a lawyer in 1883 at age sixty, becoming only the second black woman in the United States to earn a law degree. She wrote for the newspapers *National Era* and *The People's Advocate*.

countHerhistory-June/2008 and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Ann_Shadd

Elizabeth Jane Cochran (Nellie Bly) (1864-1922) as a teen, read a sexist column which prompted her to write a fiery rebuttal to the editor at the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*. Impressed, he asked her to join the editorial staff. Improper at the time for women to write publicly, he requested she choose a pseudonym. She wrote on the plight of working women. But her investigative exposé of heinous conditions for female factory workers got her moved to the women's society pages. At age twenty, she followed that move with a move of her own to Mexico as a *Dispatch* foreign correspondent to report on the lives of the Mexican people under the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz. Her reports would become her first book, *Six Months in Mexico*, but threatened her with immediate arrest. She returned to the states where, reassigned to social reporting, she left the *Dispatch* and, at age twenty-three and broke, moved to New York City. There she landed an assignment with the *New York World*, a Joseph Pulitzer newspaper, to investigate rumors of brutality and neglect at the Women's Lunatic Asylum for which she agreed to feign insanity and get committed. Her reporting became her famous book, *Ten Days in a Madhouse*. For her next venture she received approval for a trip around the world miming Jules Verne's 1873 book, *Around the World in Eighty Days*. Her trip of 72 days, 6 hours, 11 minutes and 14 seconds set a new world record which, of course, she reported. As Bly traveled the world by steamship, railroad, rickshaw and sampan, she demonstrated female independence from men and that travel was safe and fun for single women.

countHerhistory-March/2010

Winifred Mallon (1880-1954) began her newspaper career for the *Chicago Tribune* in 1902 as a Washington staff reporter. After her first column that covered First Lady Edith Roosevelt, she covered women's suffrage and passage of the 19th Amendment. She was



Part Of *The New York Times* Staff: Left-Front: Winifred Mallon

hired by the *New York Times* in 1929 as the first female “political” writer to cover news on a regular basis. At the time, Mallon was a veteran reporter with over twenty-five years’ experience. She was one of the twenty-eight organizers and former secretary and president of the Women's National Press Club. And, unbeknownst at the time of her first column, she ultimately covered seven presidents’ wives from Edith to Eleanor: Helen Herron Taft, Ellen Axson Wilson/Edith Wilson, Florence Mabel Harding, Grace Anna Goodhue Coolidge, and Lou Hoover.

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http://bytesofhistory.org/Cemeteries/DC_Congressional/Obits/M/Obits_Mallon.pdf and
<http://www.firstladies.org/biographies/firstladies.aspx?biography=32>