Female Imprimatur: Women in the Lawbook Trade

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FEMALE IMPRIMATUR: 
WOMEN IN THE LAWBOOK TRADE

Boston College Law Library
Daniel R. Coquillette Rare Book Room
Fall 2020/Spring 2021
FEMALE IMPRIMATUR: WOMEN IN THE LAWBOOK TRADE

BOSTON COLLEGE LAW LIBRARY
DANIEL R. COQUILLETTE RARE BOOK ROOM
Fall 2020/Spring 2021

Curated by:
Laurel Davis & Mary Sarah Bilder
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Part of our inspiration for this exhibit was the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment in August 2020. Despite the challenges of pursuing this in the age of COVID-19, we could not let the occasion pass without connecting it in some small way to women and the books in the Rare Book Room. As we thought about the significance of that constitutional amendment—along with its shortcomings, particularly for women of color—we were motivated to dig into our collections for signs of women in the lawbook trade.

Many thanks to everyone who has helped with the exhibit, with special gratitude to the following: Helen Lacouture, for assisting with the painstaking search of our catalog for imprints with women’s names—this involved searching multiple variations of names, including Latinized versions, and doing needle-in-haystack searches for common Anglo-American women’s names like Elizabeth, Jane, and Ann; Lily Olson, for creating the amazing catalog cover; Avi Bauer, for creating the exhibit webpage; and Filippa Anzalone and Dan Coquillette for their constant support for special collections.

Most imprints featured on the cover are from our books, but a handful of the images were obtained from the collections of other libraries. We are so grateful to the libraries that shared images of the following:


FEMALE IMPRIMATUR: 
WOMEN IN THE LAWBOOK TRADE

Women were involved in the creation of manuscripts in the pre-printing world, with nuns working as scribes in the Middle Ages. After the introduction of Johannes Gutenberg’s press to Western Europe in the 15th century, women immediately became involved in the various aspects of book production. This was mirrored in the British colonies. In fact, the first printing press in what is now the United States arrived in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1639 under the care of Elizabeth Glover, whose husband had died en route from England.

Much of women’s work in the early book trade remains largely invisible. As book historian Maureen Bell notes, women typically “appear in records only after the deaths of the men whom they succeeded, and many of the women’s lives remain completely blank except for brief periods of documented activity occurring after or between marriages.” Title pages often do not name a specific printer at all or supply only a first initial, making it difficult to identify traditionally female names.

Because of these limitations, we were thrilled to unearth so many examples in our collection. Many of our findings came from having leads to specific names via existing literature and past exhibits at other institutions. We also combed dictionaries of printers for references to traditionally female names and ran hundreds of catalog searches for variations on known names (for example, Elizabeth Nutt, Eliz. Nutt, and E. Nutt), as well as shot-in-the-dark searches for common English names like Elizabeth, Ann, Jane, Hannah, and Sarah.

It is important to note that all of the women we identified in our collection were, to our knowledge, relatively privileged White women with a foothold in the business world through their families. Many other women were performing tasks that largely remain uncredited, including papermaking, making and setting type, creating woodcuts and engravings for illustrations, cleaning the print shop and equipment, folding pages, stitching gatherings, binding books, and performing countless other tasks that go into the production and sale of a book.
INITIAL CONFUSION

Because of the lack of records about women’s work and the fact that full names often are not supplied on title pages, it is easy to underestimate the role of women in the book trade. Without leads and clues provided in the existing literature by book historians and exhibitions such as the Yale Law Library’s “Evidence of Women” (2015, curated by Anna Franz), we surely would have missed many women printers and booksellers in our collection. It is vital to share findings and sources so that we all continue to uncover the contributions of these women.


R. Bonwicke is bookseller Rebecca Bonwicke, misidentified in one source as “Mr. R. Bonwicke, imminent bookseller in St. Paul’s church-yard.” Other sources describe Rebecca as an astute businessperson who formed a printer/bookseller collaboration (known as a “conger”) with other women in the trade. Note: no printer is listed along with the booksellers on this imprint—it could have been a woman, but that information is not visible.

*Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette*


Elizabeth (Leake) Richardson was part of a printing family and married master printer Samuel Richardson around 1733. After his death in 1761, she appeared as printer of at least six books, all with Catharine Lintot, with whom Samuel had held the patent to print lawbooks. Lintot (see Cabinets 4 & 10) also came from a printing family.

*Gift of James S. Rogers*
INVISIBILITY DURING MARRIAGE

Historian Maureen Bell writes that “the existence of the man effectively blots out any record of activity by the woman. Whether or not she was active in the business during his lifetime, transactions were usually recorded in his name, imprints carried his name, and legally the business belonged to him.” Typically, it was only after the death or incapacity of a printer or bookseller husband (or father) that women’s names appeared on title pages.


Printer Robert Redman’s wife, Elizabeth (Pickering) Redman (d. 1562), probably was involved in the production of this book. She took over the business when he died in 1540. Known as England’s first woman law printer, Elizabeth is the named printer on about ten books before she remarried, including a 1541 *Magna Carta* (image below).

*Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette*

*The Great Charter called i[n] Latyn Magna Carta with Duyers Olde Statutes*. Imprint at London in Fletestrete by Elizabeth wydow of Robert Redman[n] dwellyng at the sygne [sign] of the George next to Saynte Dunstones churche, [1541?].

*Image courtesy of Harvard Law School Library, Historical & Special Collections.*

In addition to marrying a printer, Elizabeth Flesher grew up in a book trade family. She continued printing for more than 15 years after her husband James Flesher’s death. It is hard to imagine that she was not somehow involved in his work on this 1666 book, though any work she did was uncredited.

*Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette*


George and Hannah Sawbridge raised a family and ran a printing and bookselling business near St. Paul’s Cathedral. Hannah (see next page) likely was involved in the business well before George’s 1681 death, when she first appears on imprints.

*Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette*

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**THE WIDOW EMERGES**

The Stationers’ Company, London’s printers guild, provided that a woman could take over a printing business after her husband’s death. The widow could register the right to print books, hire apprentices, print under law patents, and generally run the business just as her husband had. Some widows quickly wrapped up affairs and moved on; others continued in the trade for years.


Similar guild rules existed in Paris, allowing women a path into businesses that typically would be off-limits. Charlotte Guillard is the first woman known to have printed a lawbook, a 1519 edition of Justinian’s *Institutes*. She was the widow of
two printer-booksellers, Berthold Rembolt (d. 1518-19) and Claude Chevallon (d. 1537). Her name appeared on imprints after each of their deaths. Guillard eventually blended their printing devices to create her own device, shown here, with “C.G.” near the center.

Gift of Michael H. Hoeflich


Between her husband’s 1681 death and her own in 1686, Hannah Sawbridge appeared as printer or bookseller on over 50 books. We have identified five of Hannah's books in our collection. None feature her full first name—each says “H. Sawbridge”—illustrating how easy it would be to overlook her.

Gift of Frank Williams Oliver


This beautifully printed book came from a partnership involving Elizabeth Flesher, widow of James Flesher (d. 1670). She took over the shop after James’s death and ran it until 1688. We have identified three of Elizabeth Flesher’s imprints in the collection, all of which are featured in this exhibit.

Gift of Frank Williams Oliver
BEYOND WIDOWS

Many women joined the book trade through printer husbands, who themselves had apprenticed (often with their own parents) and worked up to the status of master printer. However, other women were born into trade families and had been exposed to the business since childhood. This held true in the American colonies as well. For example, Mary Katherine Goddard, printer of the first copy of the Declaration of Independence with all of the signatures, was part of an early American printing dynasty.

[Sir Geoffrey Gilbert], *The Law of Evidence*. London: Printed by Catherine Lintot, Law-Printer to the King, 1760.

Misidentified as the widow of printer Henry Lintot in some sources, Catherine [sometimes spelled Catharine] actually was his daughter. She inherited a decades-old family business, including a law patent worth £30,000. She printed about a dozen law books before marrying and retiring from the business by 1768.


Sarah Cotter began appearing on imprints in 1751 following the death of Joseph Cotter. Book trade directories state that she was a relative but not his widow. She probably was his daughter or sister and became a huge figure in the Dublin book trade, specializing in the printing and sale of lawbooks.

Elizabeth Flesher’s father was London bookseller Cornelius Bee, so she grew up around the trade before marrying printer James Flesher.


Lydia Bailey was a Philadelphia printer for the majority of the 19th century. She took over the family printshop after her husband Robert’s death in 1808. She served as the official City Printer for 20 years, printing ordinances and agency reports. She also printed novels, religious texts, and poetry, including a collection that she mailed to James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. Printing historian Leona Hudak states that “the high quality of her printing was universally recognized.” Lydia worked with her son William until her retirement in 1861 at age 82.

Printer and bookseller Elizabeth Watts was the widow of Richard Watts. Soon after the publication of this book, she married bookseller Rev. Stewart Lynch. She printed and sold books as Elizabeth Lynch until her death in 1794, when she was succeeded by her son Henry and then his widow. Elizabeth is listed as bookseller on a volume of chancery reports printed by Sarah Cotter in 1765; both women specialized in lawbooks and operated on the same Dublin street.


In the eighteen years between her husband’s death and her last imprint in 1688, Elizabeth Flesher’s catalog included lawbooks like this 1673 edition of Glanville, religious texts, Ovid’s Metamorphosis, and Shakespeare’s King Lear.

Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette
Printing and bookselling businesses were often family operations, with spouses, siblings, parents, and children working side by side. Shops were often in the same building as the family home, making the boundary between the domestic and the professional quite permeable. Like male printers, female printers (including Ann Franklin, widow of Benjamin Franklin’s printer brother and former boss James) often worked alongside their children.


Ann Catharine Green was the official printer for the province of Maryland from 1767 until 1775. She printed the laws of Maryland, other official government publications, blank legal forms, and a newspaper. Her sons and grandson also worked in the print shop.


This book provides another example of the invisibility that comes with the tendency to only supply initials on title pages: the S. G. here refers to Sarah Griffin, who worked with her son Bennet (B. G.). Sarah’s mother-in-law, Anne Griffin, had run the shop for years before transferring it to her own son, Edward.

*Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette*
Elizabeth Nutt (c. 1666-1746) was a force within the London book and newspaper trades for decades in the 18th century. This sampling of her law imprints provides a glimpse into the arc of her professional life, which mirrored that of other female printers in many ways. But because she was so prolific, we know more about her. For instance, she was known for pushing for freedom of the press and frequently found herself in jail for printing items that displeased government officials. In a 1730 search warrant, Nutt and printers Ann Dodd and Ann Smith are accused of “publishing two false, scandalous and seditious libels” (Hunt, “Hawkers, Bawlers, and Mercuries”).


Like many women printers, Elizabeth Nutt took over after her husband’s death. John Nutt died in May 1716.

R. Nutt is Elizabeth’s son Richard. He came onboard in 1722. She also ran multiple newspaper and pamphlet outlets in London with her daughters, Alice, Catherine, and Sarah, who sometimes were arrested alongside their mother in various censorship disputes or had to mind the shops while she was in custody. 

Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette


This book (right) is the latest in our collection with Elizabeth on the imprint. By 1741, imprints typically read “R. Nutt and B. Nutt,” for sons Richard and Benjamin. Elizabeth died in 1746 around age 80.

THE PROLIFIC ELIZABETH NUTT

Elizabeth Nutt’s name appears on hundreds of imprints as the printer and/or seller of various types of books, from histories to dramas to religious texts. Lawbooks constitute a significant percentage of her catalog because she inherited the law patent that had been assigned to her husband. We have at least forty of her lawbooks in our collection, including case reports, treatises, abridgments, dictionaries, and “Everyman” works aimed at non-lawyers. This cabinet contains most of our holdings of her imprints that are not displayed in other cabinets. The list that follows
represents all of Elizabeth Nutt’s imprints that we have identified in our collection, with an asterisk next to titles that appear in other cabinets:

Giles Jacob, *The Grand Precedent* (1716)*
The Reports and Entries of Sir Edward Lutwyche, Kt., Serjeant at Law (1718)
The Law-French Dictionary (1718)
Giles Jacob, *The Modern Justice* (1720)
The Law of Commons and Commoners (1720)
Modern Reports, or, Select Cases Adjudged in the Courts of King’s Bench (1720)
John Rastell, *Les Termes de la Ley* (1721)
Christopher Saint German, *Doctor and Student* (1721)*
Les Reports du tres Erudite Edmund Saunders (1722)
John Tremaine, *Placita Coronae, or, Pleas of the Crown* (1723)
Giles Jacob, *The Laws of Liberty and Property* (1724)
Giles Jacob, *The Student’s Companion* (1725)*
Modern Cases Argued and Adjudged in the Court of King's Bench at Westminster (1725)
Reports of Cases Decreed in the High Court of Chancery (1725)
An Abridgment of the First Part of My Lord Coke’s Institutes (1725)*
John Cowell, *A Law Dictionary, or, The Interpreter of Words and Terms* (1727)
Robert Gardiner, *Instructor Clericalis* (1727)
Giles Jacob, *Lex Mercatoria, or, The Merchant’s Companion* (1729)
Law Quibbles; or, A Treatise of the Evasions, Tricks, Turns and Quibbles (1729)
Giles Jacob, *A New Law-Dictionary* (1729)
William Nelson, *The Office and Authority of a Justice of Peace* (1729)

Giles Jacob, *A New Law Dictionary* (1732)

*A Treatise of Feme Coverts: Or, the Lady’s Law* (1732)*

Giles Jacob, *The Common Law Common-plac’d* (1733)

*Modern Cases, Argued and Adjudged in the Court of Queen's Bench at Westminster* (1733)

*The Attorney's Pocket Companion* (1733)

Martin Wright, *An Introduction to the Law of Tenures* (1734)


*The English Pleader* (1734)

*The Reports of Sir Henry Yelverton* (1735)


Giles Jacob, *A New Law-Dictionary* (1736)

Matthew Hale, *Historia Placitorum Coronæ, the History of the Pleas of the Crown* (1736)

Giles Jacob, *Every Man His Own Lawyer* (1736)

John Fortescue, *De Laudibus Legum Angliae* (1737)

Francis Bacon, *Law Tracts* (1737)

*A Report of all the Cases Determined by Sir John Holt* (1738)


*Baron and Feme: A Treatise of Law and Equity, Concerning Husbands and Wives* (1738)*

*The Student’s Law Dictionary* (1740)*
PRINTING THE LADY’S LAW

We were surprised by the number of women who printed and sold lawbooks. These women sometimes even came together to form “congers,” associations that could wield more power than a solo printer. However, very few early lawbooks focus on women. Of the handful of books in our collection that do focus on women and the law, three feature Elizabeth Nutt on the imprint.

A Treatise of Feme Coverts: Or, the Lady’s Law. In the Savoy [London]: Printed by E. and R. Nutt, and R. Gosling, 1732.

One of the earliest books on the subject, this treatise examines the doctrine of coverture, under which a wife lost her legal identity at the time of marriage. The advertisement opposite the title page features books printed for Catharine Lintot’s family: her grandfather Bernard and father Henry.


Appended to Gilbert’s work on trusts is his treatise on dower, a woman’s right
to a life estate in one-third of her husband’s property (which often was property that transferred to him from her family upon marriage under the doctrine of coverture).


This is the final edition of the first English treatise on the law of husbands and wives. Many of the legal concepts discussed would have affected Elizabeth Nutt and other female printers personally, first as married women and then as widows administering their deceased husbands’ estates and running businesses.
THE LAW PATENT

In most sectors of the book trade, members of the Stationers’ Company (the printers guild) would register their “copy” (i.e. their right to print a work). Law printing worked differently. The King or Queen’s Printer held the exclusive right to print statutes. And the Crown would grant a monopoly to specific printers in the form of a patent to print the common law. Regular litigation ensued over the boundaries. For example, did a statutory abridgement with case references fall within the Queen’s Printer’s right to print statutes or the common law patent?


The Latin phrase in this imprint (one of the many challenges of searching for these books!) means “in the shop of Jane Yetsweirt, widow of the late Charles Yetsweirt.” Jane’s late husband had been granted the common law printing patent after printer Richard Tottel’s death in 1593. Jane’s name appears on a dozen imprints between Charles’s 1595 death and her surrender of the law patent in 1597.

To the right, a 1597 Jane Yetsweirt imprint from our collection, not on display in the exhibit due to its fragility.

These law printing rights often were assigned. For example, patent holder Edward Sayer assigned his printing rights to Elizabeth Nutt’s husband John, which she then inherited.

*Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette*

*The Commentaries, Or Reports of Edmund Plowden*. In the Savoy [London]: Printed by Catharine Lintot, and Samuel Richardson, Law Printers to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1761.

In 1741, Elizabeth Nutt or one of her children transferred their assigned right to Henry Lintot, whose right passed to his daughter Catharine at his death. Samuel Richardson, who is listed here as a printer with Elizabeth Nutt, passed his own partial right to the law patent to his widow, another Elizabeth. She printed several books with Catharine Lintot after Samuel died, including one of the books featured in Cabinet 1.

*Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette*
Lydia R. Bailey (Philadelphia printer, active 1808-1861)
Rebecca Bonwicke (London bookseller, active 1677-1706)
Elinor Cotes [catalog cover only] (London printer, active 1652-1670)
Sarah Cotter (Dublin printer and bookseller, active 1751-1792)
Elizabeth Flesher (London printer, active 1671-1688)
Ann Smith Franklin [catalog cover only] (Newport, Rhode Island printer, active 1735-1763)
Ann Catharine Green (Annapolis, Maryland printer, active 1767-1775)
Sarah Griffin (London printer, active 1652-1673)
Charlotte Guillard (Parisian printer, active 1519-1557)
Elizabeth Holt [catalog cover only] (New York printer, active 1780s)
Catharine Lintot (London printer, active 1759-1762)
Elizabeth (Watts) Lynch (Dublin printer and bookseller, active 1762-1794)
Elizabeth Nutt (London printer and bookseller, active 1716-1741)
Elizabeth Pickering Redman (London printer, active early 1540s)
Elizabeth Leake Richardson (London printer, active 1760s)
Clementina Rind [catalog cover only] (Williamsburg, Virginia printer, active 1770s)

Hannah Sawbridge (London printer and bookseller, active 1681-1686)

Anna Seile [catalog cover only] (London bookseller, active 1661-1667)

Jane Wotton [catalog cover only] (London bookseller, active 1718-1726)

Jane Yetsweirt (London printer, active 1590s)

Note: These active dates are rough estimates based on catalog searches and information from trade directories and other sources. They likely underrepresent the activity of these printers since the dates do not capture uncredited work while husbands, fathers, and brothers were alive and at least nominally running the business.
SOURCES & SUGGESTIONS


