

MARCH IS WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH
~ Honoring Women & Books ~

Special to Rare Book Hub, San Francisco

March 1st, 2024

By Maureen E. Mulvihill

Princeton Research Forum, NJ.

Rare Book Collector (early women writers)

Guest Writer, Rare Book Hub (2016 -)



Disha Sancheti (permission forthcoming)

The Colors of Women's History Month

Royal Purple: Sororal Power & Dignity

Green: Hope & Vision

White: Clarity of Achieved Goals

See Webpage by Disha Sancheti

< [linkedin.com/pulse/colors-womens-history-month-holidaychannel](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/colors-womens-history-month-holidaychannel) >



WHILE WOMEN certainly achieved hard-won victories with the Suffrage Movement and the Feminist Movement, it was not until 1987 that the United States Congress passed Public Law 100-9 designating the entire month of **March as Women’s History Month**.

Preceding this victory was **International Women’s Day, March 8th**, officiated 1911 and honoring March 8, 1857, when female textile workers marched in New York City to protest unfair working conditions and unequal rights for women. This was one of the first organized strikes by working women, demanding safe working conditions, shorter work days, and decent wages. But precious little was done until a great tragedy happened in lower Manhattan: the **Triangle Company Shirtwaist Factory Fire**, Saturday, March 25, 1911. Within some 20 minutes, 146 women workers (mostly Jewish and Italian immigrants) were killed. As onlookers reported, many of the women joined hands in solidarity and prayer as they jumped from the roof of their employer’s building.

Since 1995, each U.S. president has issued from the White House an annual Proclamation on March as Women’s History Month. As President Biden recently stated:

“During Women’s History Month, we celebrate the countless women who have fought tirelessly and courageously for equality, justice, and opportunity in our Nation. We reaffirm our commitment to advancing rights and opportunities for women and girls in the United States and around the world. We are building on the legacy of recognized trailblazers and unsung heroines who have guided the course of American history. ... Women have been on the front lines, fighting for and securing equal rights and opportunity throughout our country’s history as abolitionists, civil rights leaders, suffragists, and labor activists. Women continue to lead as advocates for reproductive rights, champions of racial justice, and LGBTQI+ equality.”

<womenshistorymonth.gov> <loc.gov/womens-history-month>



Throughout the month of March, the contribution of women will be acknowledged in various creative ways at bookstores, libraries, campuses, and museums. And many booksellers will showcase in their March online posts and print catalogues selected offerings associated with women: hats off to Kelmscott Bookshop, Maryland, offering 28 titles. And we send a wave to our many trade associates: James Cummins, New York; Paul Dowling, Maryland; James Gray, Massachusetts; Veery Books, New York; and in Europe, Asher Books, Netherlands; James Burmester, Bristol UK; and in London, Peter Harrington, Maggs Bros., and Bernard Quaritch; as well as many other sellers whose inventory includes dedicated categories related to women.

Rare Book Hub is in the spirit, and we welcome this opportunity to commend several women in the book trade who have won our attention and respect. In our many intersections since the 1980s -- with book dealers, institutions, and with members of ILAB, ABA, ABAA – we are reminded of distinguished book women who have passed on, and we are greeting a new generation of book women coming to the fore.

Here is short list of this guest writer’s favorites. These individuals are exemplars; they represent the best of women’s contribution to books and to the business of books:

◆ **Women Book Collectors**

Abby Ellen Hanscom Pope, 1858-1894, Brooklyn, New York. See the Women Bibliophiles Project, online essays and original research by Emi Hastings, Curator, Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. New insights and information on Mrs Pope, as well as the formation and importance of the Pope Library.

Mary Hyde Eccles, 1912–2003, Four Oaks Farm, Branchburg, New Jersey; early years, Detroit. Member, Hroswitha Club of Women Book Collectors (see listing, below). First woman elected to the Grolier Club, New York. Respected collector of Samuel Johnson and his circle. The Donald & Mary Hyde Collection of Dr Samuel Johnson donated to Harvard (some 4000 volumes; 5500 letters and manuscripts; 5000 prints, drawings, and objects). Lady Mary, Viscountess Eccles, famously said, “A collector must have three things: resources, education, and freedom. Only a few women have had all three, but times are changing!”

Hroswitha Club, 1944-2004, Northeast U.S. An early group of women book collectors; a dedicated early network, including Mary Hyde Eccles and Henrietta Bartlett. For a first-ever appreciation, see Kate Ozment, *The Hroswitha Club and the Impact of Women Book Collectors* (Cambridge Elements online, 2023); see Ozment lecture, YouTube (Urbana).

Paula Peyraud, 1947-2008, Chappaqua, New York. Devoted collector of Georgian women writers and visual artists; collection sale, Bloomsbury Auctions, New York, May, 2009. Detailed auction report, “Literary Property Changing Hands,” with auction highlights, buyers’ list, and images (*Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Fall, 2009; online digital copy, Project Muse, courtesy ILAB).

Patricia Pistner, Naples, Florida. Respected collector of miniature books; Grolier Club exhibition 2019, over 900 selections; online feature, “Behold, the Tiniest of Books,” *New York Times*, March 7, 2019. Book author, *The Pistner House: A Master of Miniature* (2001). Guest Speaker, Florida Bibliophile Society, 2012; included in the Society’s website (see homepage carousel of collectors and rarities).

◆ Women Book Dealers, Book Sellers

Leona Rostenberg & Madeline B. Stern (1908-2005 / 1912-2007), New York.

Lifelong companions and business partners: 60 years in the book trade (mostly early European imprints; e.g., the Elzevier printers). Memoirs: *Old Books, Rare Friends* (1997); *Bookends: Two Women, One Enduring Friendship* (2001); etc. Rostenberg was President, ABAA, 1972-1974. Papers, Grolier Club, 46 boxes. Dedicatée, “Feminism and the Rare Book Market” (*Scriblerian*, Autumn, 1989; online, ProQuest). See Michael Stillman’s appreciation, Rare Book Hub (Monthly Articles, April 1st, 2005).

Joyce Meskis (1942-2022), Tattered Cover Books, Denver, Colorado. Opened, 1974 under Meskis’s management. Proprietor and manager for 41 years. See tribute, “A Pioneer of Indie Book Stores & Readers’ Rights,” Rare Book Hub, February 1st, 2023, with photos.

Gretchen Treu & Business Partners, A Room Of One’s Own, Madison, Wisconsin. Opened, 1975. One of the earliest, most successful independent feminist bookstores. A fixture in downtown Madison, with a strong selection in feminist writers and women’s issues. An inspirational guide in the ‘70s, when literary feminism was ascendant. (Its muse is Virginia Woolf.) .

Heather O’Donnell, Honey & Wax, 9th Street, Brooklyn, NY. Opened, 2011. O’Donnell entered the book trade with impressive academic credentials and book experience. “Here at Honey & Wax, we take a particular interest in the evolving role of women in the rare book trade, both the buying & selling side.” All best to Honey & Wax!

Georgia Court, Bookstore1Sarasota, Florida. Opened, 2011. Stocks an international selection of women writers; hosts women writers for book signings and presentations. A busy, successful cultural hub for city residents and visiting tourists. Profile: “We’re Going to be Here When It’s Over,” by Ilene Denton, *Sarasota Magazine* (April, 2020).

◆ And not overlooking ...

Belle de Costa Greene (1879-1950). Distinguished African-American librarian. Greene managed and developed the personal library of J.P. Morgan and effectively ‘ran’ the Morgan Library in New York for 43 years. “She turned an exclusive private collection [of books, manuscripts, visual art] into a major public resource” (website, The Morgan Library and Museum). Recent biography, *An Illuminated Life* by Heidi Ardizzone (Norton, 2007).

E. Millicent Sowerby (1883-1977). First woman cataloguer, Sotheby’s; cataloguer to Wilfred Michael Voynich and to A.S.W. Rosenbach. Major credit: *Catalogue of the Library of Thomas Jefferson*, 5 vols., with her annotations (Library of Congress). Memoir, *Rare People & Rare Books*, with introduction (second edition) by Edwin Wolf, Rosenbach biographer with John F. Fleming.

Sarah Funke Butler, Literary Agent. Founder, Funke Literary LLC. Specialist in literary archives; private curator for rare book collections. Recent engagements: Curator, Bloomsyear Reading of *Ulysses* (Thornwillow Press, NY); Collection Manager, Dobkin Family Collection of Feminism. Twenty years with Glenn Horowitz Bookseller, NY. See *Fine Books & Collections* (April 23, 2022). Contact <sarah@funkeliterary.com>.

Gerda Lerner and Elaine Marks, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Early advocates (1970s) of dedicated courses in women’s history and literature.

◆ **Essential Digital Resources**

(women writers / women in cultural history)

The Orlando Project: Women’s Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present. A continuing resource in the new field of feminist digital humanities; early project planning dates to mid-1990s. Team: Patricia Clements, Founding Director; Isobel Grundy, Research Director; Susan Brown, Technical Director; see Team link at website <<https://www.artsrn.ualberta.ca/orlando/>>. This online textbase includes dedicated author entries; also an Exhibits section of author portraits, frontises, and title-pages. See website for link to attractive videos, with on-camera commentary by team members. Publisher, Cambridge University Press; updated twice annually. Honoring International Women’s Day (March 8th) and Women’s History Month, *Orlando* will be free and open access, March 8th-March 31st (for access, see online matches: Orlando Open Access March).

Women Writers Online, Northeastern University, Boston. Julia Flanders, Director; Sarah Connell, Associate Director. An online collection of 460+ texts written or translated by women, 1526-1850. Visit <wwp.northeastern.edu/wwo>. Honoring Women’s History Month, this digital resource is free and open access in March.

The New Historia. Founder & Director, Gina Luria Walker (The New School for Social Research, NY). An Open-Access Site. A network of global researchers recovering women in history; a dynamic, growing collection of biographical and career ‘Schemas’ documenting female figures (literary, political, cultural); a platform for collaboration, communication, community-building. Engages guest writers for commentary and opinion pieces. “The New Historia is igniting a revolution in knowing about women. We are giving voice to the silenced and making the invisible visible.”

We hope that supporters of **Women’s History Month, March 2024**, will honor this continuing landmark by wearing a splash of purple, green, and white. And by your colors we shall know you.

