
Alms for Oblivion: The History of Women in Early American Graphic Design

Ellen Mazur Thomson

*Time hath, my Lord, a wallet at his back, Wherein he puts
alms for oblivion, A great-siz'd monster of ingratitude...*

William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*

When Linda Nochlin's article "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" appeared in 1971, it generated enormous interest in neglected work by women artists.¹ Nochlin challenged traditional art historians to analyze the institutional and ideological structures that distort what women have accomplished or were unable to achieve. She warned that women must "face up to the reality of their history and of their present situation, without making excuses or puffing mediocrity. Disadvantage may indeed be an excuse; it is not, however, an intellectual position."² Since then, feminist historians have explored the limitations placed on women in pursuing their artistic careers, as well as the representations of those women who did succeed.³ Graphic design historians, however, have only recently faced the biases in their own field and begun to identify individual women and document their position in graphic design history.

Martha Scotford Lange began this process by showing that the major texts used to teach graphic design concentrate on the work of a limited number of "great men" and that, graphic design historians, either consciously or unconsciously, have created an unacknowledged canon that excludes women.⁴ She suggests that cultural history, rather than art history, would provide a better model for historians to follow.

This essay is the result of preliminary research into the conditions that governed the role of women in early modern American graphic design. By concentrating on the period from approximately 1850 to 1920, the beginning of "professionalization," this essay explores the extent and character of women's participation in this development. While it is important to recover the names of individual designers, it is equally important to understand some of the conditions and attitudes that determined the fortunes of women graphic designers by examining their treatment in both literature of the time and later.

During this period, graphic design emerged as a profession, one that developed in response to social changes and technologies

-
- 1 Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *Art News*, 69, 9 (January 1971), 22–39, 67–71. This article also appeared as "Why Are There No Great Women Artists?" *Women in Sexist Society. Studies in Power and Powerless*, ed. Vivian Gornick and Barbara Moran. (New York: Basic Books, 1971) and *Art and Sexual Politics*, ed. Thomas B. Hess and Elizabeth C. Baker. (New York: Colliers, 1971).
 - 2 Nochlin, *Art News*, 70.
 - 3 Feminist art historians have expanded Nochlin's agenda considerably. For an overview of feminist art criticism and art history in the 1970s and 1980s, see Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," *Art Bulletin* LXIX, 3 (September 1987), 326–357.
 - 4 Martha Scotford Lange, "Is There a Canon of Graphic Design History?" *AIGA Journal of Graphic Design*, IX, 2 (1991), 3–5, 9. Lange analyzed the contents of five well-known histories: James Craig and Bruce Barton's *Thirty Centuries of Graphic Design*, Alan Fern and Mildred Constantine's *Word and Image*, Steven Heller and Seymour Chwast's *Graphic Style*, Philip B. Meggs' *A History of Graphic Design*, and Josef Mueller-Brockman's *A History of Visual Communication*.

- 5 See Howard Leathlean, "The Archaeology of the Art Director?" Some Examples of Art Direction in Mid-Nineteenth-Century British Publishing," *Journal of Design History* VI,4 (1993), 229–45, and Ellen Mazur Thomson, "Early Graphic Design Periodicals in America," *Journal of Design History*, V II,2 (1994), 113–126.
- 6 W. A. Dwiggins first used the term "graphic design" in 1922 to describe professions involved in the design of commercial printing, commercial illustration, type design, and advertising design. I have followed these general parameters. "New Kind of Printing Calls for New Design," *The Boston Evening Transcript*, (August 29, 1922), Graphic Arts Section, Part III, 6.
- 7 See Lange, *op.cit.*, for the omission of women designers from major graphic design texts.
- 8 The recognized "great men" of early graphic design were trained in a variety of fields and spent their professional lives in a wide range of activities that now constitute professional design practice. They are, nonetheless, first identified as "printers" in the literature. For example, William Addison Dwiggins (1880–1956) worked in advertising for twenty years, and in a long and successful career was a calligrapher, illustrator, prolific writer, and master puppeteer, as well as a typographer and book designer.
- 9 The classic histories, Henry Sampson's *A History of Advertising from the Earliest Times* (London: Chatto, 1874. Reprint. Detroit: Gale Research, 1974) and Frank Presbrey's *The History and Development of Advertising* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Duran, 1929. Reprint. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1968) ignore advertising artists, although Presbrey does include some information on the development of art departments in agencies. Daniel Pope in *The Making of Modern Advertising* (New York: Basic Books, 1983) describes the increased use of illustration in advertising but not the illustrators themselves. More surprising, given the authors' abundant use of illustration, is *Advertising in America* by Charles Goodrum and Helen Dalrymple (New

York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990). that generated an enormous amount of printed material for mass consumption. The concept of graphic design and the professional graphic designer evolved in the United States during the second half of the 19th century.⁵ Previously, compositors, printers, typographers, and artist-engravers designed as part of their craft. The revolution in press and paper technology, photography and photomechanical reproduction, and transportation and business practices encouraged specialization and professionalism. By 1900, art directors, commercial-art managers, layout artists, and illustrators, sometimes called "designer," were recognized professionals.⁶ Those trained in printing, typography, engraving, and illustration moved into separate art departments of advertising agencies, book and magazine publishers, or worked as free-lance designers. Relying on basic texts of graphic design history one would assume that women were marginal if not absent in this transformation.⁷

In part, the omission of women from design history occurred because historians have emphasized graphic design's roots in relation to printing's history. By doing so, they remove graphic design from its cultural context, and thus tend to ignore or de-emphasize the impact of the advertising industry and new theories of art and education on visual communication.⁸ Arguably, advances in transportation technology that linked the continent by rail and ship, and the advent of mass marketing and widespread literacy that spurred the growth of newspapers and magazine publications are as significant as the revolution in print technology that occurred at the same time. Unfortunately, advertising historians have ignored the visual aspects of advertising, concentrating instead on the work of advertising agents, copy writers, and agency heads.⁹ Feminist art historians, even when they include illustrators in their histories, are inclined to ignore the commercial aspects of their work.¹⁰ Art historical models, as noted above, are often based on the great men and monuments model and fail to go beyond narrations of lives, assessments of influence, and progressions of styles.

York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990).

There is a brief discussion of advertising art in one chapter "Art, Artists, and Illustrators," but both text and pictures feature the work of James Montgomery Flagg, J.C. Leyendecker and Norman Rockwell. Jessie Willcox Smith is the only woman mentioned and she is represented by a small black and white reproduction. A perfect example of Lange's canon.

- 10 Nonetheless, the two most useful biographical references in graphic design are concerned with women artists. See Chris Petteys, *Dictionary of Women Artists: An International Dictionary of*

Women Artists Born Before 1900

(Boston: G.K. Hall, 1985), and Charlotte Steifer Rubinstein, *American Women Artists from Early Indian Times to the Present* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1982).

One of the problems encountered in any attempt track women is that of multiple surnames and cross-references are not always used. Also, many women and men signed their work with initials instead of first names and some first names are gender neutral—a problem in identifying signatures in published work incases when it is signed. And most advertisements and magazine illustrations were not signed.

- 11 This paper does not, for example, address issues of class or ethnicity as it was manifest in different aspects of the profession. African-Americans, Native Americans and European immigrant groups were involved in the printing industry and produced material for their own communities. Both Anthea Callen and Roger B. Stein have examined the effect of the Arts and Crafts movement on upper class women, or women whose economic status gave them a great deal of leisure time. See Anthea Callen, *Women Artists of the Arts and Crafts Movement 1870–1914* (New York: Pantheon, 1979) and “Sexual Division of Labor in The Arts and Crafts Movement.” *Woman’s Art Journal*, V (Fall/Winter 1984–1985), 1–6. And Roger B. Stein, “Artifact as Ideology: The Aesthetic Movement in Its American Cultural Context,” *In Pursuit of Beauty*. (New York: Metropolitan Museum, 1986), 22–51. The advertising profession was dominated by white Protestant males from rural backgrounds. For a sophisticated analysis of advertising as a cultural phenomena, see T.J. Jackson Lears, “Some Versions of Fantasy: Toward a Cultural History of American Advertising, 1880–1930” *Prospects* Vol. 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 349–405, especially page 356.
- 12 Cheryl Buckley, “Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design,” *Design Discourse: History Theory Criticism*, ed. Victor Margolin (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989), 262.
- 13 The National Academy of Design began in 1826 in New York City. It was joined by: Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, including a School of Design for Women (1859), the Art Students League (1875), the Society of American Artists (1877), the Society of Decorative Art (1877), and the Metropolitan Museum of Art School (1880). The Massachusetts State Normal School in Boston was established in 1873 and the Lowell Free School of Industrial Design, allied with the Boston Institute of Technology was opened to women. The Rhode Island School of Design was founded in 1877. Other include: the University of Cincinnati School of Design,

In describing women’s experiences in the printing and advertising industries, and in commercial illustration, I hope to highlight the areas in which women participated in graphic design, as well as show how their experiences reveal the profession’s ties to other aspects of American culture.¹¹

In a pioneering article, Cheryl Buckley argues that women’s roles in all aspects of the design field have been defined by “the sexual division of labor, assumptions about femininity, and the hierarchy that exists in design.”¹² During the second half of the nineteenth century many women worked in the printing industry, but in limited capacities. They were gradually forced out of the printing trades because male-dominated unions argued that the work was too physically demanding even as technology made it less so. Women also worked in the advertising industry but are absent from its history because they were unable to reach higher levels of management where their names would be associated with particular campaigns.

The women’s movement, identified with the fight for voting rights, grew in power and forced the nation to confront “the woman question.” The number of schools and colleges, including schools of fine and applied art open to women, increased dramatically.¹³ This was in part a result of theories expounded by John Ruskin and William Morris, and their influence in the American Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts movements.¹⁴ Changing attitudes towards the applied arts and women’s education gave women illustrators new opportunities, but often encouraged them to work on domestic subjects and in a decorative style.

At the same time, women were ignored in the literature. A good example of this can be seen in the case of Frances Flora Bond Palmer (1812–1876), known as Fanny Palmer. Palmer was one of three full-time lithographers on the staff of Currier & Ives. All but forgotten since her death, modern feminist art historians have revived her memory.¹⁵ Born and trained in England, she emigrated

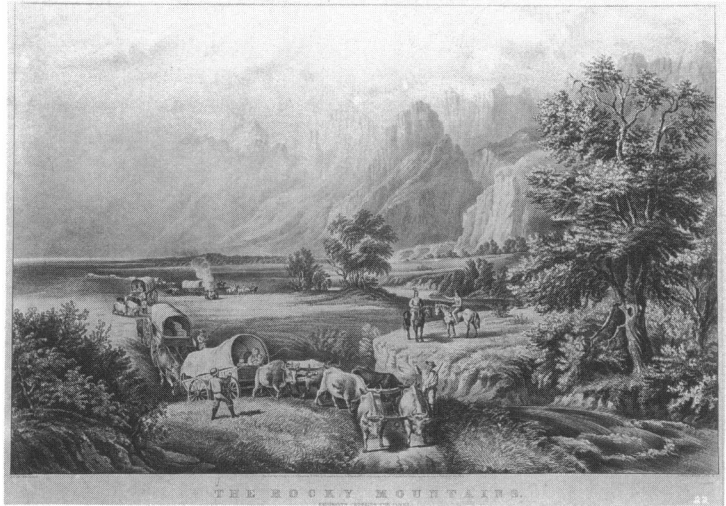
the St. Louis Art Academy, the Art Institute of Chicago, the School of Drawing and Painting at the Museum of Art in Boston, the School of Design in San Francisco (1873), the Indianapolis School of Art, and in Philadelphia: the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art, the Philadelphia School of Design, The School of Industrial Art. In Baltimore, the School of Design of the Maryland Institute and the Decorative Art Society.

- 14 See Callen, *Women Artists of the Arts and Crafts Movement* and “Sexual Division of Labor,” and Stein, “Artifact as Ideology,” op cit.

- 15 Basic information on Fanny Palmer can be found in Henry T. Peters’ *Currier & Ives: Printmakers to the American People* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1942), 26–29. Peters summarizes her life and identifies the prints known to be hers. Otherwise she is absent from graphic history until Mary Bartlett Cowdrey’s “Fanny Palmer, An American Lithographer,” *Prints: Thirteen Illustrated Essays on the Art of the Print* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), 219–234 and her entry in *Notable American Women* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1971), III, 10–11. Charlotte Steifer

Illustration 1

"Rocky Mountains," Frances Flora Bond Palmer (1812–1876)



to New York in the 1840s. Palmer was responsible for over 200 Currier & Ives lithographs; she made the original drawings and transferred them to the stone. She worked in a tremendous range of subject matter: landscapes, cityscapes, hunting scenes, still lifes. She made prints of trains, steamships, buildings, and dramatic battles from the Civil War, subjects not defined as "feminine." Her "Rocky Mountains, Emigrants Crossing the Plains" (1866) was one of the company's most popular prints and was found in homes throughout the country. She contributed to the technical aspects of commercial lithography. She developed a method of printing a background tone and, with Charles Currier, improved lithographic crayons. Although she was unusually gifted and productive, her historical fate is, nonetheless, typical. Palmer was an employee, so her work was not recognized as that of an individual but subsumed under the Currier & Ives imprint. She supported an alcoholic husband and her children, yet in her obituary she is identified only as her husband's wife, or in the less than felicitous terms of that day, "a relict of Edmund S. Palmer of Leicester, England." She is mentioned only as a part of Currier & Ives history until feminist art historians became interested in her work.

To understand the positions women found in the graphic design profession, we must turn to documentary sources that provide a broader picture of the profession and its history.

Note 15, continued

Rubinstein included Palmer in *American Women Artists* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1982), 68–70 and wrote in depth about her in "The Early Career of Frances Flora Bond Palmer (1812–1876)," *The American Art Journal*, XVII, 4 (Autumn 1985), 71–88.

Documentation

Literature outside the usual scope of design history often illuminates important aspects of the graphic design profession. The relationship between the struggling printers' unions and women who worked in the printing trade was discussed in union journals and the popular press of the period. Modern histories of women work-

- 16 For bibliographical information, see Martha Jane Soltow and Mary K. Wery, *American Women and the Labor Movement 1825–1974*. (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1976). Especially useful histories on women in the printers' union include: Elizabeth F. Baker, *Technology and Women's Work* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964); Mary Biggs, "Neither Printer's Wife Nor Widow," *The Library Quarterly*, L, 4 (1980); Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle* (Cambridge: Belnap Press, 1959); Philip Sheldon Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement I* (New York: Free Press, 1979); George A. Stevens, *New York Typographical Union No.6* (Albany: J. B. Lyon, 1913), 421–440; Barbara Mayer Wertheimer, *We Were There* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).
- 17 For guides to women's periodicals see Maureen E. Hady, *Women's Periodicals and Newspapers From the 18th Century to 1981* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982); Nancy K. Humphreys, *American Women's Magazines* (New York: Garland, 1989); Mary Ellen Zuckerman, *Sources on the History of Women's Magazines, 1792–1960* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991). On the history of the suffragette press see Lynne Masel-Walters, "To Hustle with the Rowdies," *Journal of American Culture*, III, 1 (Spring 1980).
- 18 A fine example is the work of Carroll D. Wright, chief of the Bureau of Statistics of Labor, whose study appeared in 1889 as *The Working Girls of Boston* (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1889. Reprint. New York: Arno, 1969). It was undertaken "to ascertain the moral, sanitary, physical and economic conditions of the working girls of Boston," including those in the printing trades. [p. 1] Wright concluded that, "the working girls are as respectable, as moral, and as virtuous as any class of women in our community; that they are making as heroic a struggle for existence as any class is a fact which all the statistics prove." [p.120] And in case anyone missed the point, he spelled it out: "...girls cannot work hard all day and be prostitutes too." [p.121] See also Edith Abbott and Sophonisba P. Breckinridge, "Employment of Women in Industries," *Journal of Political Economy*, 14 (January 1906), 14–40; John R.

ers also document the conditions of women in the trades.¹⁶ Trade unionism developed early in the printing industry, which saw itself as progressive and open to new ideas and technologies. However, the ambivalence union members felt toward female workers explains as much about the situation women faced in the design profession as it does about the precarious situation of trade unionism itself.

Histories of the women's movement, either by participants or by modern feminist writers, are excellent sources because many suffragettes published and edited newspapers and magazines as part of their activities.¹⁷ Susan B. Anthony and Amelia Jenks Bloomer were allied with women trying to find jobs in the printing trades and their confrontations with local and national printing unions are well documented.

During the second half of the 19th century a tremendous number of art and design schools opened throughout the country and many of them accepted women students. The published histories, original charters, and early annual reports of these institutions describe the ideological basis for education in the applied arts and explain why women were encouraged to pursue careers in design.

If women's presence in the work place generated heated arguments about trade unionism and women's rights, it also attracted the attention of statisticians and economists.¹⁸ Unfortunately, most statistics on the nineteenth century American work force defy easy interpretation. Compilers defined categories broadly and changed their definitions over time. The umbrella category of "printing and related professions," for example, included printers, typographers, compositors, and bindery workers.¹⁹ The category "engravers" included those who worked on precious stones and metals, e.g., silversmiths, as well as those who copied illustrations onto metal plates for mechanical reproduction. Within these limitations, however, statistics describe the position of women workers in the larger picture of economic development.

Commons, *Documentary History of American Industrial Society* (Cleveland: 1910–1911); United States Women's Bureau, *Women at Work: A Century of Change*, no. 161. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1933).

- 19 Women also worked in printing establishments as typesetters or operators on hand presses, but there is insufficient information to determine who designed type or page layouts. We know that bideries employed women in significant numbers, see Abbott and Breckinridge.

Trade magazines for printers, typographers, and advertisers first appeared in the 1850s; by 1880 their numbers had increased dramatically.²⁰ They reflect the prevailing attitudes of their professions towards women and only unintentionally reveal women's participation. Unfortunately, as will be seen in the discussions that follow, these journals often preferred to ignore them.

Histories of art, particularly of American graphics illustration and biographies of American women artists, contain information on women who worked as illustrators for magazines, books, and posters. They continue to emphasize painters, sculptors, and "fine" printmakers untainted by commercialism, although women art historians have written about individual women illustrators.²¹ By concentrating on broader cultural issues rather than individual artists, a few art historians have shown how particular movements, such as the Aesthetic and the Arts and Crafts, have influenced educational and professional opportunities for women.²²

Printers

A significant number of men associated with the beginning of graphic design began their careers in printing establishments and so it is logical to look for women there as well.²³ From the colonial period on, women were well represented in the American printing industry.²⁴ Several presses, including the first press in North America, the Cambridge Press established in 1639, were run by women.²⁵ It is often argued that women only became printers because it was their family's trade, but this was just as true for male printers. Girls, however, were trained in the printshop at home in contrast to boys who often learned their craft during a period of apprenticeship. The issue of apprenticeship, became a critical one for women professionals. There is no doubt that some women printers attained the respect of their profession. For example, *The Typographic Advertiser* (1869) carried an obituary for Lydia R. Bailey, a widow, who took over her husband's printing establishment. It noted that from 1808 to 1861:

[h]er office was one of the largest in Philadelphia. She instructed forty-two boys into the mysteries of typography; and some of our present prosperous master-printers served their apprenticeship under her. For a considerable period she was elected City Printer by the Councils; and her imprint was well known. She had great energy and decision of character.²⁶

Moreover, the editor saw Bailey's achievements in the wider context of political and economic rights:

Of late days we hear much talk about women's rights. Something may probably come of it to women's advantage: how we may not forecast. There is certainly room enough for improvement in the condition of many women; but will the privilege of suffrage bring it about?²⁷

20 Thomson, op.cit.

21 See citations in "illustrators" section below. It should be noted, however, that many of these monographs are narratives of "the life and work." An notable exception is Ann Barton Brown's *Alice Barber Stephens: A Pioneer Woman Illustrator*. (Chadds Ford, Pa., Brandywine River Museum, 1984). Barton puts Stephens career in context by discussing educational and professional opportunities for women, the treatment of women illustrators by the popular press, and the struggle of women to be taken seriously as professionals.

22 Anthea Callen in her studies of the Arts and Crafts has demonstrated that despite its iconoclastic theories, the movement reinforced patriarchal ideology even as it opened opportunities for women in the arts. See Callen *Women Artists of the Arts and Crafts Movement*, op. cit. and "Sexual Division of Labor in The Arts and Crafts Movement," op.cit.. In Roger B. Stein's essay on the Aesthetic Movement, he examined its intellectual and cultural implications showing how it dealt with the "women question," by encouraging middle class-women to pursue an arts education that would not threaten the status quo. See "Artifact as Ideology," op. cit.

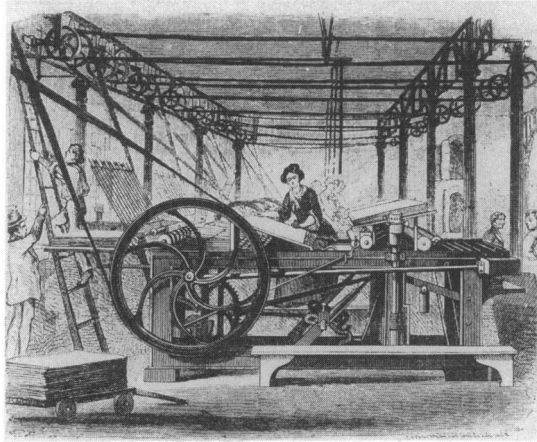
23 This does not modify my contention that exclusive concentration on printing history is unfortunate.

24 Leona M. Hudak, *Early American Women Printers and Publishers 1639-1820* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1978), 2.

25 Elizabeth Harris Glover established the Cambridge Press, the first press in North America, in 1639. Her husband, Jose Glover, wishing to set up a printing business, boarded a ship from England with his family, a press, and printing supplies. He died en route. See Hudak, op. cit., 9-19.

26 *Typographic Advertiser* XIV, 3 (April 1869), 1.

27 Ibid.



Earnings in Boston; 1831	
687 men earned	\$1.50/day
395 women earned	\$.50/day
215 boys earned	\$.50/day

Women not linked by family ties to printing were interested in the printing trade because it was relatively open to them and offered higher wages.²⁸ Nonetheless, women earned considerably less than men. In Boston in 1831, for example, men earned three times as much as women and boys in the printing industry.²⁹

By 1880, the average weekly earnings for women in all trades was \$6.03, whereas in printing and publishing earned \$6.61, or over 9% more.³⁰

In 1853, the suffragette and dress reformer, Amelia Jenks Bloomer, began publication of *The Lily: A Ladies' Journal Devoted to Temperance and Literature*. In 1854, she tried to hire a woman apprentice but the printers refused to work under this condition and struck both her paper and that of her husband. Bloomer persisted and finally found three women and three men to publish both papers; she paid them equal wages.

By the end of the Civil War, the number of women in printing had increased. For example, in 1868 there were 200 women typesetters in New York City, constituting 15–20% of printing trade workers.³¹ The printing trades attracted an increasingly larger percentage of women workers as shown in *Table 1*.³² Despite the introduction of new technologies that raised worker productivity, an increase in demand for printed matter allowed the total number of workers in printing to expand.³³ Women workers continued to be concentrated in typesetting. In 1870, 3.7% of compositors were women; in 1880, 4.7%; in 1890, 9.9%; and in 1900, 10.3%.³⁴

The local printing unions that had existed during the first half of the 19th century, eventually formed a national organization, the United Typographical Union in 1852. In contrast to the union's tradition of progressivism, these all-male organizations exhibited great ambivalence towards unionizing women workers. Many printers hired women at lower wages under the guise of giving them an opportunity to learn the trade and women worked as scab labor during strikes. The unions had two options, either fight for equal wages and unionize women, or ban them from the industry.

The attitude of the printing trade journals of the period reflect these contradictions. In 1884, the editor of the *The Inland Printer* wrote:

28 Edith Abbott, "Harriet Martineau and the Employment of Women in 1836," *Journal of Political Economy*, XIV (1906), 615.
 29 Wertheimer, op. cit., 92.
 30 Wright, op. cit., 82–83.
 31 Foner, op. cit., 145.
 32 H. Dewey Anderson and Percy E. Davidson, *Occupational Trends in the United States*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1940), 300.
 33 Ibid., 301. While printing material increased by more than 760% from 1899 to 1929, only 120% more workers were employed. Ibid., 309.
 34 Lois Rather, *Women As Printers*, (Oakland, Ca.: Rather Press, 1970), 25.

Table 1: Number and percentage distribution of female gainful workers in printing, and allied industries, 1870–1930

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920
Printing, and Allied Industries	4,233	8,947	23,771	31,613	45,090	45,274
Percent of Women Workers	40.8	39.1	51.6	53.8	59.4	55.8
Engravers	29	103	303	453	538	561
Percent of Women Workers	0.3	0.4	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.7

The printers employed on the *Evening Wisconsin*, of Milwaukee, twenty-three in number, are on a strike because the manager of that sheet insisted, after several remonstrances, on paying the female compositors, members of the Cream City Typographical Union, twenty-eight cents instead of thirty-three cents per thousand ems—the union scale—as paid to the male compositors; and this, too, in the face of the admission that the women did better work than a majority of the men.

The action of the union in making the cause of the girls its own is worthy of all commendation. Of course, no protective organization could tolerate, for a moment, a sliding scale arrangement, all its members, irrespective of sex, age or nationality, being required to observe the *minimum* rate of wages. Any other policy would be suicidal. The standard raised—“equal pay for equal work”—is one which will command the sympathy of every right-minded citizen; and it is needless to add that those now engaged in this struggle have our warmest wishes for their success.³⁵

Despite these sentiments, the very same editors advocated barring female students from trade schools and accused any woman who wanted such training—or indeed worked in the trades—of being selfish by taking jobs away from men with families to support. Although they did not all subscribe to the idea that women were incapable or less hard working, editors argued that the printing trades required a greater amount of time to develop skills and that many women workers left as soon as they married. Some of the arguments appeared in the form of patriarchal sermons on the need to protect women from the dangers of the trade: their exposure to materials dangerous to health, women’s supposed frailty and inability to carry heavy forms, and their proximity to “unsuitable” printed matter.³⁶ Other argued that women lacked training, that they were incapable of doing anything but the most straightforward jobs

35 *The Inland Printer* 1, 6 (March 1884), 10.

36 The rhetoric used by both sides is fascinating. A printshop owner recommended hiring women typesetters and wood engravers because they were more obedient, did not use foul language, and cost considerably less. He concluded:

At least let women have a fair opportunity to do something else besides get married. What man is there who would not resent being told that his chief ambition in life should be to be a father? Yet women are told daily that they should devote twenty years of a lifetime in the preparing for motherhood, at least ten years in bearing children, and the rest of their lives in recovering from the effects. If they prefer to think that the world is populated sufficiently, or that to bear a child does not call for sacrifice of a lifetime, they are snubbed, and especially so when they show any inclination to compete with men in trades. “Male Versus Female Labor,” *Art Age*, III, 25 (August 1885), 14.

because few had served an apprenticeship. Women, indeed, accounted for only 9.7% of all apprentice typesetters.³⁷ But the most troubling issue, and the primary focus of the opposition, was that women worked for lower wages and were used by employers to fight unionization. It was on this issue that the suffragette leader, Susan B. Anthony, entered the fray.

Anthony encouraged women to learn typesetting by taking jobs they were offered by printers, even during strikes. It is unclear if she really lacked an understanding of the need for worker solidarity as some writers charge, or if she, unlike women unionists, considered male workers so unsympathetic that they would never voluntarily integrate their shops. In a report of her fight for admittance to a union convention, printed in the *Workingman's Advocate* in August 1869, Anthony said she represented:

...a class of women that had no husbands, and who were on the street penniless, homeless and without shelter. Now, I ask you what we are to do with these girls? Shall we tell them to starve in the garrets because the printers, by their own necessities, open their doors and give a slight training to a few girls for a few weeks? Shall I say to the girls, "Do not go in, but starve?" or shall I say, "Go in, and get a little skill into your hands, and fit yourselves to work side by side with men?" I want to ask the Co-operative Union of New York how many girls they have taken to learn the type-setting business? How many women have you ordered each department or establishment to take as apprentices, and to train in the art of type-setting?³⁸

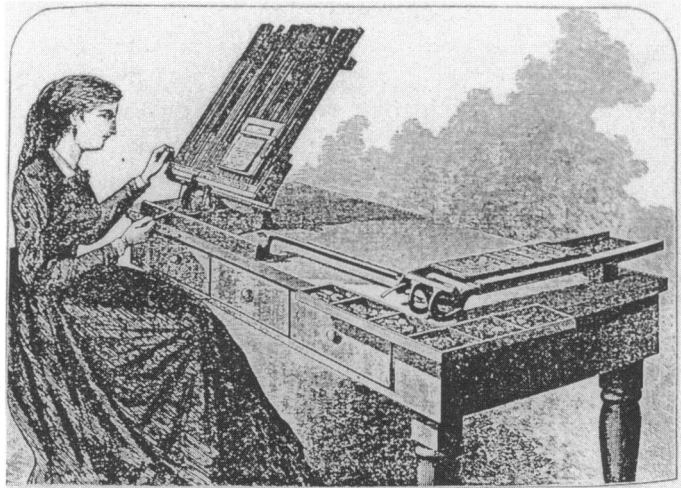
Union leader Augusta Lewis clashed with Anthony over these tactics. Lewis (c.1848–1920), a journalist and typesetter, believed that by preserving union solidarity and by foregoing the immediate advantage of work, women would eventually find an equal place in union shops. Lewis founded the Women's Typographic Union No.1 in October 8, 1868 and urged women members not to accept nonunion work. A year later, the United Typographical Union became the first national union to admit women, and in 1870, Lewis was elected corresponding secretary of the national organization. Yet Lewis was shortly disillusioned by the union's treatment of its women members:

[We] have never obtained a situation that we could not have obtained had we never heard of a union. We refuse to take the men's situations when they are on strike, and when there is no strike if we ask for work in union offices we are told by union foremen 'that there are no conveniences for us.' We are ostracized in many offices because we are members of the union; and although the principle is right, disadvantages are so many that we cannot much longer hold together.³⁹

37 Biggs, *op. cit.*, 438. Biggs notes that the percent of women apprentices in printing was high compared to women in other skilled trades and that there is some reason to believe the percentage of men who actually underwent a six-year apprenticeship was also relatively small. Certainly the trade journals complained of this and supported technical education for boys to make up the deficiency.

38 "Proceedings, National Labor Union, August 1869," *Workingman's Advocate* VI, 5 (September 4, 1869) and reprinted in *America's Working Women*, ed. by R. Baxandall, L. Gordan, and S. Reverdy (New York: Random House, 1976), 112–113.

39 From a report given by Lewis at the International Typographers convention in 1871 and cited by Stevens, *op. cit.*, 437.



Brown's Patent Type-setting machine was introduced during the 1860's by Oren L. Brown

The continued resistance to women in printing is evident in the attention they received in the trade journals. In the 1880s and 90s, the *Inland Printer* attacked women in the printshop, using a series of arguments to disparage their competence.⁴⁰ The catch, of course, was that when women did succeed they were derided as unfeminine and grotesque. In describing an itinerant printer he met in western Ohio, one writer claimed:

She was dressed plainly but neatly in what might be called a cross between a traveling and office suit of brown color. The toughened expression on her face indicated that she was familiar with the tricks of the profession, versed in the study of vulgarity. No tender, trusting female was she, but a hardened, suspicious, masculine woman.⁴¹

When the journals were not questioning women's abilities, they ignored them. However, they were quick to take umbrage at similar treatment from women. For example, the *Inland Printer* (1883) reprinted an article from a British trade journal reporting that women compositors in Boston published a journal called *Elle*:

This paper is veritable man-hater; not the slightest mention of man in any shape or form is to be found in its columns, neither is the genus homo allowed to hawk it!⁴²

The notice is doubly significant. *Elle* does not appear in any of the standard sources on magazine literature and it is possible that no copies have survived. We know of its existence now only because it irritated the editors of a mainstream journal.

The introduction of new technology, particularly the Mergenthaler Linotype, beginning in the 1880s, might have increased opportunities for women. The typographer's union admitted that women learned to work with the system more quickly, but also

40 *Inland Printer*, I, 1 (October 1883), 1; VII (October 1889), 108-09; VII, (June 1890), 819-20; IX (July 1892), 875-876; X, 5 (February 1893), 195; X, 6 (March 1893) 501.

41 F. M. Cole, "Lady Compositors," *Inland Printer*, VII, 2 (November 1889) 109.

42 "Woman as Compositors," *Inland Printer*, VII, 8 (May 1890), 820.

- 43 Baker, op. cit., 44. Employers also preferred to retrained male typesetters already working in their shops, see Harry Kelber and Carl Schlesinger. *Union Printers and Controlled Automation* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 8.
- 44 Baker, op. cit., 45.
- 45 The experience of women printers in the territories and states in the West was somewhat different. In a pictorial study of frontier journalism, numerous photographs from state archives show women working as editors, printers and compositors. See Robert F. Karolevitz, *Newspapering in the Old West* (Seattle: Superior Publishing, 1965), especially "Printers in Petticoats," pp. 173–180. Karolevitz also includes photographs of women in printing classes in state universities as well as in a special school for Native Americans.
- 46 Edna Martin Parratt, "Women Printers," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, LVI, 1 (January 1952), 42–43. Often cited, this was only a brief reply to an item on women printers. The names of other women printers can be found in Rather, op.cit.
- 47 Butterfly Press publishers were Margaret Hunter Scott, Alice Rogers Smith, Amy Margaret Smith, and George Wolfe. They edited *The Butterfly Quarterly* from 1907 to 1909. See Susan Otis Thompson, *American Book Design and William Morris*, (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1977), 206.
- 48 The exception is a profile in an exhibition catalog published by Women in Design, Chicago, *Ten Years: Women in Design Chicago Anniversary Exhibition, 1988*. It is clear, however, that the authors were unable to determine the extent of Bertha Goudy's contribution to the design of books issued by the press.
- 49 Eventually her political commitment led Starr to abandon design for political activism. "If I had thought it through, I would have realized that I would be using my hands to create books that only the rich could buy." *Notable American Women*, op. cit., 352.
- 50 For a biographical sketch and extensive bibliography on De Kay, see *In Pursuit of Beauty*, op. cit., 418–419.
- 51 *The Craftsman*, II, 1 (April 1902), 33–34.

charged that they lacked endurance. In the end the union insisted that only fully qualified (i.e., male printers), should be allowed to use them.⁴³ In typesetting, traditionally the one printing profession in which women significantly competed for work, they lost ground. By 1900, only 8% of women belonged to unions, compared with 32% of men. Only 10% of compositors were women, while only 700, or 5.8%, operated typesetting machines.⁴⁴ Barred from the apprentice system and trade schools and betrayed by the trade unions ostensibly representing them, working class women rarely followed men who made the transition from the printshop into the design of printed material.⁴⁵

The private press movement, with its emphasis on the highest standards of presswork, was based on William Morris' Kelmscott Press and the English Arts and Crafts tradition. It inspired American printers and designers from Boston to San Francisco. But women are excluded almost completely from its history although from fragmentary records we know that their presses existed.⁴⁶ In San Francisco, the Women's Cooperative Printing Union was founded in 1868 and survived until 1880. In 1873, two sisters, trained designers and wood engravers, founded Crane and Curtis Company there. Women ran the Chemith Press in Minneapolis in 1902 and the Butterfly Press from 1907 to 1909 in Philadelphia.⁴⁷ Bertha Goudy, who operated the Village Press with her husband, Frederic Goudy, is fulsomely praised only in studies of her husband's life and work.⁴⁸

Women book designers gained opportunities and recognition as the private press movement grew. In 1901, *The Craftsman* devoted a whole issue to book binding and printing. Women wrote the articles and it featured women's binderies along with the work of presses inspired again by Morris' Kelmscott Press. Helen Marguerite O'Kane designed books for the Elston Press, owned by her husband. She also worked for commercial presses. Ellen Gates Starr, a colleague of the social worker Jane Addams, was also a disciple of William Morris and shared his beliefs on art and socialism. Starr studied book design in England with T. Cobden-Sanderson at the Doves Press and returned to Chicago to establish a bookbindery in the 1890s.⁴⁹ Helena De Kay Gilder is now remembered for one book cover: a gold peacock feather on a plain blue ground that captures the essence of the Aesthetic style.⁵⁰

Modern historians regard the relative openness of the Arts and Crafts movement to women's participation in applied arts for their success in this field, but contemporary observers, even participants, ascribed their abilities to gender-specific skills. T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, Starr's teacher, is quoted as saying:

[w]omen ought to do the best work in book-binding, for they possess all the essential qualifications of success: patience for detail, lightness of touch, and dexterous fingers.⁵¹



Illustration 4
 Double page from "Sonnets from the Portuguese."

Alice C. Morse, an accomplished book cover designer, also claimed that women possessed an inherent ability:

Women seem to have a remarkable faculty for designing.

Their intuitive sense of decoration, their feeling for beauty of line and harmony of color, insures them a high degree of success.⁵²

52 Alice C. Morse, "Women Illustrators," *Art and Handicrafts in the Woman's Building of the World's Columbian Exposition*, Chicago 1893, ed. Maud Howe Elliot (Paris and New York: Goupil and Company, 1893), 75.

There are several examples of work by women in Susan Otis Thompson's "The Arts and Crafts Book," *The Arts and Crafts Movement in America 1876-1916* ed. Robert Judson Clark. (Princeton University Press, 1972), 93-116 and her *American Book Design*, op. cit. See also Wendy Kaplan, "The Art That Is Life" *The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, 1875-1920* (Boston: Little, Brown for the Museum of Fine Arts, 1987) for reproductions of work by women with extensive captions by Thompson.

53 For a history of the Boston group, see Mary Spain, *The Society of Arts and Crafts, 1897-1924*, (Boston and New York: The Society, 1924).

It is no coincidence that the Arts and Crafts Societies, that began in 1897, in Boston and New York, and spread to cities and towns in other parts of the country, were one of the few clubs to include women.⁵³ However, when the prestigious Society of Printers was founded in 1905 in Boston, no women were members. In 1911 fourteen men began "The Graphic Group" in New York, dedicated to the "highest in the art of printing." They later formed the nucleus of what became, in 1914, the American Institute of Graphic Arts.

Advertising Artists

Although women were immediately recognized as important targets for advertisers' messages, they were rarely mentioned in the early advertising journals as practitioners and are absent from advertising histories until the 1920s.⁵⁴ Information about women in the advertising industry appears fortuitously in advertising trade journals that were not sympathetic to them, but intermittently championed the work of individual women. More frustrating to the researcher are journal reports on design contests in which women's names appear regularly as winners, suggesting that there must have

been a significant number of trained and employed women in the field.

With its very first issue in 1891, *Profitable Advertising* sounded the derisive note that it sustained throughout. Although somewhat incoherent, the ridicule and warning were impossible to ignore:

The Boston Globe is encouraging women to become "writers on business," female "Powers," as it were; scientific experts, etc. O, General Taylor, this is too much. And offering prizes for advertisements, too, written by women! Great guns! there are about 6,946 male scientific advertising experts in the United States who will soon with Othello raise the very devil about their floundering occupation. The result will be more disastrous than the female typewriter craze. Of course the women will cut rates. Boys, get together, formulate a union and boycott *The Globe*. Or start the women off on writing advertisements for pants. Would they succeed? Well, would they? They would find virtues in pants us poor males never dreamt of.⁵⁵

Women's participation on the editorial staff of any trade journal was extremely rare and, given prevailing attitudes, even when they were present, editorial policy was not enlightened.⁵⁶ Kate E. Griswold began at *Profitable Advertising* as manager and became editor in October 1893. In June of that year, an article appeared that she may have written. Signed "Miss Progress," it was a diatribe against uniform wage scales. The writer acknowledges that women have been limited in their professional opportunities in the past "but that day has gone."

Oh, no, we are not ranting "women's righters" in the common acceptance of the term. We have no fondness for women who disgust men, as well as members of their own sex, by their arbitrary methods of attempting to secure what they are pleased to sum up as their "rights."⁵⁷

Even when women's work was noticed, their achievements were attributed to their femininity. *Advertising Experience's* February 1898 issue featured advertising photographers, Beatrice Tonnesen and her sister, Clara Tonnesen Kirkpatrick. In praising their work, the editors claimed: "[t]he fact that the Tonnesens are women photographers has no doubt made it possible for them to secure a better class and a larger selection of models that could be secured by a male photographer."⁵⁸

Indeed, photography may have provided an entry for some women into advertising although there is very little research in this area. Photography was a fad in the 1890s and many of the women who began at the time preferred to remain "amateurs" devoted to personal artistic expression. We do know of some who did become

54 Library terminology can also present difficulties. The subject heading "Women in advertising" retrieves material on women as subjects/objects of advertisements. "Women as professionals in advertising" is the relevant heading, but it pulls up very little material at present.

55 "Editorial Squibs," *Profitable Advertising* I, 1 (June 1891), 9.

56 In addition to Kate Griswold, who eventually became publisher of *Advertising Experience*, several other women gained prominence in advertising management and journalism at the turn of the century. See "No Sex in Success?" *The Ad-School: A Practical Advertiser* I, 7 (July 1901), 11.

57 "Women in the Business World," *Profitable Advertising*, III, 1 (June 15, 1893), 37.

58 "Photography in Advertising," *Advertising Experience*, VI, 4 (February 1898), 24.

59 Clarence Bloomfield Moore, "Women Experts in Photography," *Cosmopolitan*, XIV, 5 (March 1893), 580–90. Although he was more interested in their aesthetics and most of the women appear to consider themselves "amateurs," some were involved in commercial photography. The best known, Frances Benjamin Johnston (1864–1952) sold her architectural and portrait work to magazines and periodicals. Moore coyly notes that "Cornelia J. Needles has been offered substantial sums" by a prominent firm dealing in soap.⁵⁹

60 C. Jane Gover, *The Positive Image. Women Photographers in Turn of the Century America*, (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1988), xvii.

61 S. C. de Soissons, "Ethel Reed and her Art," *The Poster*, (November 1898), 199–202.

One can understand that women have no originality of thought, and that literature and music have no feminine character, but surely women know how to observe, and what they see is quite different from that which men see, and the art which they put in their gestures, in their dresses, in the decoration of their environments is sufficient to give us the idea of an instinctive and peculiar genius which each of them possess. [199–200]

It is interesting to compare this to another writer of the period who began his essay on women illustrators by claiming that until recently women only showed "intellectual achievement" in "the direction of literature, and the governing of kingdoms." Samuel G. W. Benjamin. *Our American Artist*, (Boston: D. Lothrop, 1881. Reprint. New York: Garland, 1977). There was no agreement, apparently, on the exact nature and extent of female ability.

62 Ibid., 202.

63 Pettesy, op. cit. For biographical material and examples of work by women poster artists, see Victor Margolin, *The American Poster Renaissance: The Great Age of Poster Design*, (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 1975), and Carolyn Keay, *American Posters of the Turn of the Century* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1975).

64 Ibid.



professionals and worked in portraiture and photojournalism.⁵⁹ In a study from a feminist perspective, C. Jane Gover shows that from 1890 to 1920 photography was a profession adopted by economically secure women who found in it a measure of personal freedom and yet remained firmly tied to Victorian gender definitions:

The camera provided women with the means of stepping beyond the private, domestic space. At the same time, the women's lifestyles and imagery sustained middle class ideology as it celebrated the domestic ideal and woman's place as nurturer.⁶⁰

Unfortunately, Gover, like most photography historians, does not consider advertising photography, although she does mention Beatrice Tonnesen in other contexts.

Advertising posters also provided work for many illustrators, including a significant number of women. Ethel Reed is perhaps the most famous. For a short period, she designed book posters for the publisher Lamson, Wolfe and Company of Boston. She was the only woman to be the subject of a profile in *The Poster* magazine. Its author began this article with a lengthy dissertation of women's limited abilities in general and women artists' lack of artistry in particular.⁶¹ He then praised Reed, because, she:

knows well the marvelous secret of design and colours, and while she executes pictures with clever hands, she sees with her own and not masculine eyes; her work has feminine qualities, one sees in it a woman, full of sweetness and delicacy, and this is the greatest praise one can bestow upon a woman.⁶²

Several other women first gained recognition as poster artists. Florence Lundborg of San Francisco designed a series of advertisements for *The Lark* as well as book illustrations and murals, Blanche McManus designed posters and illustrations for books and magazines and, in 1911, became art editor of *American Motorist*.⁶³ Helen Dryden designed posters, stage scenery, illustrated for magazine and worked as an industrial designer, including automobile designs for the 1937 Studebaker.⁶⁴

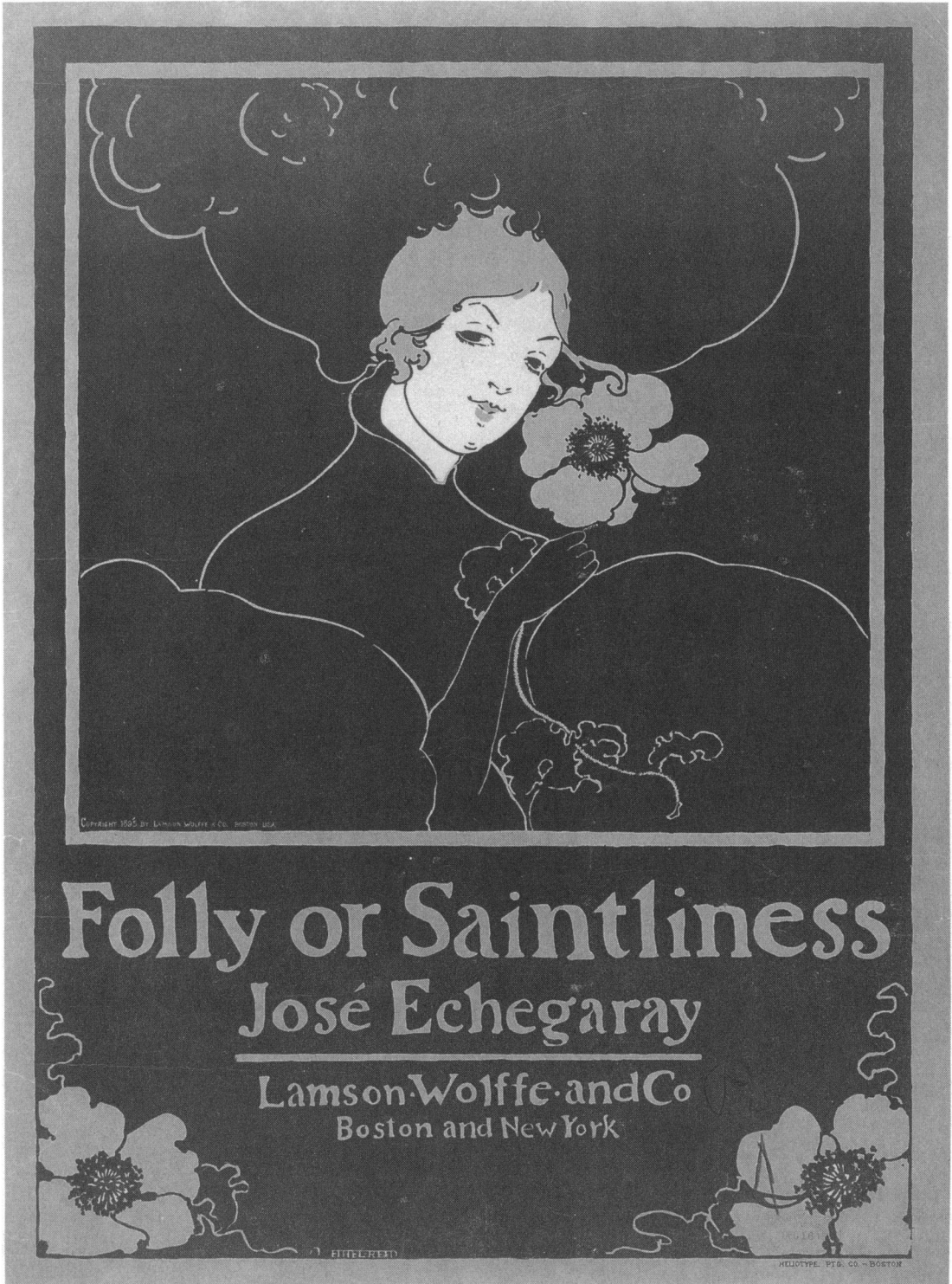


Illustration 6

"Folly or Saintliness," by Ethel Reed.

- 65 See *Notable American Women*, op. cit., 201–202. The article about Hokinson also mentions her friend, Alice Harvey Ramsey, another designer and cartoonist. Edwina Dumm (1893–?) was the only syndicated female cartoonist of the period. She was responsible for “Cap Stubbs and Tippee,” “Tippee,” and “Alec the Great” and is included in Martin Sheridan, *Comics and Their Creators* (New York: Luna Press, 1944). See also Maurice Horn, *The World Encyclopedia of Comics* (New York: Chelsea House, 1976).
- 66 Alice Rouillier, “The Work of Elizabeth Colwell,” *The Graphic Arts*, IV,4 (March 1913), 237–248.

Advertising art was rarely signed and, therefore it is difficult to identify the artist. Jessie Wilcox Smith, was an exception; her name appeared prominently on all of her work. She produced advertisements throughout her career for Campbell Soup, Eastman Kodak, and Ivory Soap. [Illustration 8: Kodak Advertisement] Helen Elna Hokinson, who later became famous for her *New Yorker* cartoons, designed advertisements for department stores in Chicago and New York.⁶⁵

Graphic Arts, begun in 1911, profiled leading printers, designers, and advertising artists. In 1913, Elizabeth Colwell was the first and only woman to be featured.⁶⁶ Colwell, a Chicago designer, did publicity for Marshall Fields and for Cowan Company. She designed bookplates and was known for her lettering and her work as a book designer. The editor, Henry Lewis Johnson, acknowledged:



Illustration 7 (right)
“The Lark,” by Florence Lundborg.

Illustration 8 (above, left)
Kodak advertisement by Helen Elna
Hopkinson.



- 67 *Ibid.*, 237.
- 68 Petteys, *op. cit.*
- 69 Helen Woodward, *Through Many Windows*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1926. Reprint. New York: Garland, 1986).
- 70 *Ibid.*, 147. On this subject, Woodward, who initially resisted the suffragette message, wrote: "About 1909 the women began to change. In a few years the desire for the vote was nearly universal with them. That desire was focused by the suffrage propaganda, but it grew exactly as grew the self-respect of the women who worked. Their wages went up before the wish for suffrage came, not afterward."
- 71 *Ibid.*, 102–103.

[i]t has been an axiom among designers, although just why it is hard to say, that women cannot do good lettering. Miss Colwell with many other women designers, offers direct proof to the contrary.⁶⁷

From other sources we know that Colwell was also a typographer and that she designed "Colwell Hand Letter."⁶⁸

Helen Rosen Woodward, a pioneer in advertising, wrote an autobiography that gives an overview of the practice of advertising, as well as the sexism and anti-Semitism encountered by workers at the turn of the century.⁶⁹ When Woodward began in New York in 1903, agents were not only expected to plan campaigns, but to design ads, write copy, as well as hire and direct illustrators. At that time women earned \$18 a week, men \$25.⁷⁰ In 1926 she wrote:

[t]he difference between the pay of men and women for the same work has largely disappeared in the advertising business but it is still hard for women to get positions where the bigger money lies.⁷¹

Small Things
of the highest distinction at *small prices* are better than large things of no distinction. The moral—
Shop at
COWAN'S
Four floors full of the world's most notable objects of *Beauty and Usefulness*—the prices a marvel of moderation and sanity.
See for yourself.
W.K. Cowan & Co.
203-207 Michigan Ave.
The Fine Arts Building

Illustration 9
Examples of work by Elizabeth Colwell.

BRING IN WOOD

AND HELP WIPE DISHES

BOYS HAVE TO WORK &

AND BE GOOD.

Raymond
Litchaw
Colwell.

HIS
BOOK



This was corroborated by Taylor Adams, who began his advertising career in the 1920s:

Women began flowering in the creative departments of agencies in the '20s, but you could hardly have said they were prevalent. With a single outstanding exception, they were either temporary tokenists hired for specific tasks (such as "influencing" decision makers of client or prospect) or more often anonymous foot-sloggers who rarely made it to title or stockholder.⁷²

In fact, the work of most advertising artists, male and female, was unsigned and ephemeral. And although trade magazines encouraged higher standards of composition, drawing, and typography, little is known about the people who created professional advertisements.

Illustrators

To the degree that the proponents of the Aesthetic movement and the Arts and Crafts movement broke down barriers between fine and applied art, they raised many of the crafts traditionally associated with women to a new legitimacy. They also encouraged the establishment of schools to train women in the arts, although their motives here were not straightforward. Walter Smith, an English Arts and Crafts proponent who became Massachusetts State Director of Art Education, saw the arts as a way to divert women from their struggle to gain political power:

We have a fancy that our lack of art schools and other institutions where women can learn to employ themselves usefully and profitably at work which is in itself interesting and beautiful, is one of the causes which drives them to so unsex themselves as to seek to engage in men's affairs. Give our American women the same art facilities as their European sisters, and they will flock to the studios and let the ballot-box alone.⁷³

In the United States, the first applied art school for women began in Philadelphia at the behest of Sarah Peter, a wealthy philanthropist, under the auspices of the Franklin Institute. The School of Design for Women opened on December 3, 1850 with a class of 94 students and expanded rapidly.⁷⁴ The arguments for its establishment, found in the Franklin Institute proceedings, reflect the ideology of the Aesthetic movement: the legitimacy of the applied arts and women's contribution to them, the development of women's "natural" ability as related to her domestic life, and the non-threatening nature of women's contribution. Peter was very explicit. She wanted "to enlarge the sphere of female occupation" without endangering male employment and or upsetting women's traditional sphere:

-
- 72 Taylor Adams, "Early Women in Advertising—All Uphill," *How It Was In Advertising 1776–1976* (Chicago: Cain, 1976), 30.
- 73 Walter Smith, *The Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition Illustrated*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barrie, 1877), 95–96. In this catalog of works appearing in the 1877 Centennial International Exhibition, Walter Smith praised Englishwomen for their expertise in needlework, a skill learned at new schools of applied design. I am indebted for this citation to Roger B. Stein, op. cit., 28–30. See also works by Callen, op. cit..
- 74 *First Annual Report of the Committee on the School of Design for Women* (Philadelphia: The School, 1852), 2–4. A complete early history of the school can be found in T.C. Knauff, *An Experiment in Training for the Useful and Beautiful*. (Philadelphia: The School, 1922). The curriculum was divided into three departments: drawing (a basic course for all students), industrial design (including textile, wallpaper, oil clothe, carpet, and furniture design), and wood engraving and lithography (illustration for the arts, sciences and natural history). From its first year in existence, students obtained patents and sold their work to manufacturers and publishers.

- 75 *Proceedings of the Franklin Institute of the State of Pennsylvania, for the Promotions of the Mechanic Arts, Relative to the Establishment of a School of Design for Women* (Philadelphia: The Institute, 1850), 1.
- 76 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 77 The importance of these institutions in graphic design education remains to be explored. The best sources I have found on early design education for women are Arthur D. Efland, *A History of Art Education: Intellectual and Social Currents in Teaching the Visual Arts* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990), and Thomas Woody, *A History of Women's Education in the United States 2v.* (New York: The Science Press, 1919) II, 75–80.
- 78 In New York City alone the following clubs were in operation: The Century, Lotus, Grolier, the Society of Illustrators, the Salmagundi Club (1871), the Tile Club (1877), and the New York Etching Club. Many clubs and societies published their charters, constitutions, and membership lists. The only discussion I have found on the importance of illustrator's club occurs in James Best's *American Popular Illustration* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984), chapter 5, "The Social and Artistic Context of Illustration."
- 79 *Ibid.*, 120
- 80 Ann Barton Brown, Alice Barber Stephens, *op. cit.*, 24–25. Stephens (1858–1932) studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and the Philadelphia School of Design for Women and began as a wood-engraver for Scribner's. For a contemporary view, see Julius Moritzen, "Alice Barber Stephens," *The Twentieth Century Home*, II, 5 (December 1904), 45–46.
- Emily Sartain (1841–1927), also began as an engraver. See Ellen Goodman, "Emily Sartain: Her Career," *Arts Magazine* (May 1987), 61–65; Phyllis Peet, "Emily Sartain, America's First Woman Mezzotint Engraver," *Imprint* (Autumn 1984), 19–26; Phyllis Peet, "The Art Education of Emily Sartain," *Women's Art Journal* (Spring/Summer 1990), 9–15.
- 81 Conway is the subject of *That Red Head Gal: Fashions and Design of Gordon Conway 1916–1936*, (Washington, D. C.: American Institute of Architecture Foundation, 1980).

I selected this department of industry, not only because it presents a wide field, as yet unoccupied by our countrymen, but also because these arts can be practiced at home, without materially interfering with the routine of domestic duty, which is the peculiar province of women.⁷⁵

The Institute's chairman expanded Peter's argument. Women are especially adept at decoration and, therefore this would not cause an economic problem:

their quick perceptions of form and their delicacy of hand very especially fit them; while even should they, in these and similar branches of labor, finally supplant men entirely, no evil could occur, especially in a country like ours, where such broad fields for male labor lie entirely unoccupied.⁷⁶

A large number of art schools for women, or open to women, were founded in the United States beginning in the 1870s.⁷⁷ Although women were allowed greater opportunities in art education, they were blocked from membership in artist clubs. Perhaps because illustrators did much of their work in isolation, they formed a large number of these groups and their importance cannot be overestimated.⁷⁸ Many began as informal sessions for sharing work and evolved into social occasions for editors, printers, publishers, and other potential employers to meet with artists. In short, they provided opportunities for professional advancement. Although not specifically barred, women were not members. The Society of Illustrators, founded in 1901, had 96 members by 1911, all male, and four associate members, the most successful women illustrators of the time: Elizabeth Shippen Green, Violet Oakley, May Wilson Preston, and Jessie Wilcox Smith.⁷⁹ One of the few clubs for professional women artists was founded in 1897 in Philadelphia. Led by Alice Barber Stephens, an illustrator and teacher at the School of Design, and by Emily Sartain, an artist and director of the School, the Plastic Club provided the same kind of community and publicity that male illustrators had found so useful.⁸⁰

In the 1880s and 1890s, the need for illustrations, for magazine covers and stories, outdoor advertisements, and popular fiction swelled as the number of periodicals, newspapers, and advertising posters grew. Technological developments such as steel-line engravings, the half-tone printing process, and four-color printing, combined with the growth of literacy to create a huge market for the mass circulation magazine and advertising.⁸¹

Historians celebrated these decades as the Golden Age of Illustration. Three notable chroniclers of the time, Hopkinson Smith, Frank Weitenkampf, and Henry Pitz, included women illustrators in their discussions, but always grouped them together and then selected two or three for praise.

82 Hopkinson Smith, *American Illustrators*, (New York: Scribners, 1892). Rosina Emmett (Sherwood), once so popular, is now forgotten. Examples of her work are reproduced in Morse, op. cit. Mary A. Hallock Foote (1847–1938) was singled out for praise by almost every illustration historian but has received little serious attention. Foote, like Stephens, began her career in engraving and transferred to illustration; she studied with William J. Linton, the famous wood-engraver, at Cooper Union Institute of Design for Women.

Although she spent most of her adult life in remote areas of the American West raising a family (her husband was a mining engineer), Foote wrote and illustrated 16 novels and contributed illustrations regularly to popular magazines on Western subjects. She is not, however, included among the *Fifty Western Illustrators*, a widely respected bibliographic reference by Jeff Dykes (Flagstaff, Ariz.: Northland, 1975). See *Notable American Women*, op. cit., 643–645 and her autobiography, *A Victorian Gentlewoman in the Far West*. (San Marino, Ca.: The Huntington Library, 1972), an astonishing document of hardship and disappointments told as a cheerful adventure.

83 Frank Weitenkampf, *American Graphic Art*, (New York: Holt, 1912. Reprint. Johnson Reprint, 1970), 189–90.

84 Ibid. Even modern references treat male and female illustrators differently. Walt and Roger Reed's *The Illustrator in America, 1880–1980* (New York: Madison Square Press, 1984) is organized in a series of brief biographical sketches arranged by decade. Women are included, but their marital status and children, if any, are always mentioned. The men's entries, on the other hand, contain only professional information.

85. Rubinstein, *American Women Artists*, op. cit., 159. Feminist art historians have written on the women artists of this area. See: Christine Jones Huber. *The Pennsylvania Academy and Its Women, 1850–1920* (Philadelphia: The Academy, 1974); Helen Goodman, "Women Illustrators of the Golden Age of American Illustration," *Woman's Art*

Hopkinson Smith was an illustrator and his *American Illustrators* was a dramatized account of the activities in New York illustrator clubs he frequented. In it he reviewed and praised American male illustrators and showed their work in beautiful reproductions. Since women were not members of the clubs, Smith mentioned them only in a review of the annual Water Color Society exhibition. While he made fun of most women artists ("their devotion to mild-eyed daisy and the familiar golden-rod standing erect in a ginger jar of Chinese blue...."), he allowed exceptions: Rosina Emmett, Mary Hallock Foote, and Alice Barber Stephens.⁸² Although they are praised, their work is not discussed or shown.

In *American Graphic Art* (1912), Weitenkampf also placed women illustrators in a separate category. Indeed, he remarked that the disruption of his chronological organization was "brought about by the convenient classification by sex."⁸³ And he, too, commended the work of Foote and Stephens. Weitenkampf believed that the illustrations of Howard Pyle's women design students "exemplify various possibilities resulting from the application of the female temperament to illustration."⁸⁴

Many women illustrators did specialize in domestic subjects, and some, though not all, worked in a decidedly decorative style. Howard Pyle was not only a famous illustrator, but an equally important as a teacher at the Drexel Institute in Philadelphia and at his own school for professional illustrators at Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania. A third of his students at Chadds Ford were women.⁸⁵ Pyle himself used a dramatic, realistic approach to illustrating, as did many of his male students. Henry Pitz, in *The Brandywine Tradition* (1968), concluded that women were naturally drawn to another style and subject matter:

The women artists, with a few exceptions, give the impression that they formed a consistent school somewhat different from the men.... Their almost unfailing sense of the decorative, a shared technique and their natural inclination toward feminine, homely, reposeful subjects are there in almost every picture.⁸⁶

To what degree Pyle was responsible for the separate style and technique of his female students is uncertain. Oakley, Shippen, and Smith were all advanced pupils before they studied with Pyle, and they worked in proximity and supported each other professionally throughout their lives. One can also imagine that art directors encouraged a particular subject matter; illustrators then, as now, were classed as specialists in a particular genre.

Women illustrators from 1890 to 1910 were successful by any standards. Their work was published widely, they were known by name to the public in an age when popular illustrators were celebrities, and they supported themselves and their families. But in a 1912

Illustration 10

"Looking for Camp," by Mary Hallock Foote.



newspaper article, "Qualities That make for Success in Women Illustrator," the author is clear what qualities gained women illustrators adherents:

The field of illustration has been steadily widening for women since those days in the early 70s when Addie Ledyard's pictures of ideally pretty children with sweeping eyelashes won our young hearts and Mary Hallock Foote, whose quality of exquisite tenderness, rather than the strength of her drawing, brought her ardent admirers, was illustrating her own and other people's stories.⁸⁷

Conclusion

Women graphic designers were allowed to work at jobs that took advantage of their culturally defined sex-specific skills. Since they had smaller hands, they were thought to be able typesetters. Their supposed affinity with the decorative and domesticity made them illustrators of women and children. They were encouraged to participate in those careers in which they did not threaten male economic advantage. When they ventured beyond those limits they were belittled, vilified, or "disappeared" from history.

It is clear that women participated in significant though not overwhelming numbers in all aspects of graphic design. Art and design schools were open to women or established specifically to train women. The prevailing ideologies during these periods, the Aesthetic Movement and the Arts and Crafts Movement, elevated the status of applied arts, including the decorative and domestic arts, and allowed women to participate more fully. Nonetheless, women were still seen as having specific abilities associated with their gender. The exceptions proved the rule; historians who praised a chosen few were justified in ignoring the majority.

Note 85, continued

Journal, (Spring/Summer 1987), 13–22; Charlotte Herzog, "A Rose by Any Other Name: Violet Oakley, Jessie Wilcox Smith, and Elizabeth Shippen Green," *Woman's Art Journal* (Fall 1993/Winter 1994), 11–16.

- 86 Henry Pitz, *The Brandywine Tradition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 178.
- 87 F. R. Marshall, "Qualities That Make for Success in Women Illustrators," *Public Ledger*, Philadelphia, (December 15, 1912), 1.

Since the graphic design process is a collective effort, and since women rarely headed advertising agencies, publishing houses, or magazines, their contributions are hard to document. The record of women's participation in early graphic design is meager unless the researcher goes beyond standard design histories to statistical studies, suffragette histories, documents and institutional histories of art and design schools and artists' clubs, and to the trade journals. A definitive history of women in graphic design, including the biographies and work of poorly known women, would right the balance. It would also provide a realistic view of the cultural, political, social and economic conditions in which graphic design began.

The author is grateful to Victor Margolin for his criticisms and advice on an earlier draft of this paper.

Alms for Oblivion: The History of Women in Early American Graphic Design

Author(s): Ellen Mazur Thomson

Source: *Design Issues*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Summer, 1994), pp. 27-48

Published by: [MIT Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1511627>

Accessed: 27-02-2016 18:12 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



MIT Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Design Issues*.

<http://www.jstor.org>