



Economic Woman

From Eliza Pinckney to Oprah



WOMEN'S WORK? A traveling exhibition offers engaging examples:

Elizabeth Murray (1726-1785), a colonial "she-merchant" who ran a dry-goods shop in Boston—nothing unusual in that—but who insisted on a prenuptial agreement protecting her economic autonomy. By law, married women of the day had no right to buy or sell property in their own names or to make contracts.

Rebecca Lukens (1794-1854), who, at age 31, took over her late husband's Brandywine Iron Works and spent her days not in the kitchen but overseeing hot furnaces, the only woman iron manufacturer of her era. The exhibition includes a grand model of the mill.

Maggie Walker (1867-1934), an African-American entrepreneur who led a black insurance company, founded a department store, and established a bank, becoming



The first printing press in British North America was owned by a woman—Elizabeth Glover of Cambridge—and between 1639 and 1820 more than 25 American women owned or operated printing establishments. Mary Katherine Goddard (1738-1816), opposite, printed the first copies of the Declaration of Independence with the typeset names of the signers. A respected newspaper publisher and postmistress, she was for a time the center of information in Baltimore. She took over the *Maryland Journal* from her brother and ran it with distinction, although he later wrested control of it from her when his own career faltered. What began in sibling loyalty ended in embitterment.

Eliza Pinckney (1722-1793), who helped introduce to the colonies the cultivation of the valuable cash crop indigo, made her family's plantations thrive in a way that changed the economy of the South Carolina colony. She boldly dismissed an overseer who had sabotaged her crop and went on to excel through astute financial management in a business world of men. She never questioned the institution of slavery, on which her profits relied, but she opened a school for slaves and taught her slaves to read. The 1779 plate showing French indigo, below, was loaned to the exhibition by the Arnold Arboretum. The jars hold the final product of indigo processing and were loaned by the Harvard University Herbaria.



The exhibition features large panels depicting each of the women: at left, the pyrotechnic Martha J. Coston (1826?-1902?), shown with part of the patent drawing for an improvement to the Coston flare in 1871. Widowed at an early age, with four young sons, she found sketches for a flare in her husband's papers, perfected the idea and patented it, founded the Coston Supply Company, forcefully derailed an attempted patent infringement, and became a wealthy woman. Her Coston Night Signals helped give the North naval superiority over the South in the Civil War by enabling blockading Union ships to communicate over long distances. Above are twentieth-century versions of Coston's flares; they remained standard U.S. Coast Guard equipment for many decades.

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the first woman bank president in the United States. And Hetty Green (1834-1916), called the richest woman in the world, the "world's greatest miser," and "the Witch of Wall Street."

Enterprising Women: 250 Years of American Business makes the point that women have always been an im-

portant force in the American economy. Brilliantly staged, with interactive and evocative settings, the exhibition focuses on some 40 women, including leaders of today—Oprah Winfrey, for instance.

The exhibition was organized by the Schlesinger Library of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study and the National Heritage Museum in Lexington, Massachusetts. It is made possible by support from Ford Motor Company and AT&T. The curator is Edith P. Mayo, who rounded up objects from more than 75 lenders. The historian is Virginia B. Drachman, RI '79 and '01, Stern professor of American history at Tufts University, who has written a lively book to accompany the exhibition, bearing the same title and available in both hardcover and softcover at the exhibition or in hardcover from the University of North Carolina Press. The project manager is Jane Knowles, archivist of the Schlesinger Library. The exhibition will continue at the Heritage Museum through February 23 and then travel to the New-York Historical Society, Atlanta History Center, National Museum of Women in the Arts (Washington, D.C.), Los Angeles Public Library, and Detroit Historical Museum. (See www.enterprisingwomenexhibit.org for dates.)

The exhibition sparked ancillary events, among them a two-day conference at the Radcliffe Institute, funded by Morgan Stanley, on "Women, Money, and Power," that explored cross-cultural and historical issues involving gender, markets, and entrepreneurship. At it Nancy Koehn, professor of business administration at the Business School, commended the exhibition for its contemporary resonances. She quoted an observation attributed to Mark Twain: "History doesn't repeat itself, but sometimes it does rhyme."

Juana Briones (ca. 1802-1889), left, was the first female householder in Yerba Buena, now San Francisco, where she raised cattle, sold milk and produce, kept a tavern, practiced midwifery, tailored, and cured many an ailing sailor with herbal remedies. In 1844 she obtained a legal separation from her husband, for drunkenness and nonsupport, and with this independent legal status could acquire land in her own name. At 42, she bought a 4,440-acre ranch, La Purísima Concepción, in what is now Palo Alto, where she raised horses and cows, farmed, rented to tenants, and prospered. Although she could neither read nor write, she kept control of her land. Spurred by a hard-driving will to succeed, she was lauded for her achievements and loved for her charity.



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Lydia Estes Pinkham (1819-1883) "brewed and bottled her personal remedy for women's ills in her kitchen and made a fortune promising women that they could find health and strength in her unique concoction of herbs," writes Virginia Drachman in *Enterprising Women: 250 Years of American Business*, the book that accompanies the exhibition. "Her message was simple and appealing: women held the key to their own health. All they needed to do was adopt a healthy regimen of mild exercise, a nutritious diet, and hygiene; wear loose-fitting clothing; and take her Vegetable Compound when needed." She had testimonials. And her own face on the product epitomized womanly strength and dignity. The compound was approximately 38 proof. The counter display, above, and products from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are loaned by the Schlesinger Library.

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"America's Sweetheart" Mary Pickford (1892-1979), left, was born Gladys Smith in Canada. She became the family breadwinner, on stage at age 6, upon the death of her alcoholic father. She started acting on Broadway at 14 but aspired to the more lucrative world of the movies and persuaded mogul D.W. Griffith to hire her. She starred in such movies as *Poor Little Rich Girl*, *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, and *The Little Princess*, and by 1917 commanded \$350,000 per film. She was Hollywood's first international superstar and the first woman to own a production company—a sweetheart on screen, but a tough businesswoman off. With partners Griffith, Charlie Chaplin, and soon-to-be-husband Douglas Fairbanks, she founded United Artists, an innovative studio owned and operated by artists, which surprised skeptics by doing well. She spearheaded the founding of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 1927 and won an Oscar for her role in *Coquette* in 1929. The exhibition features a short film by and about her.



“The Great Achievement of the Harper Method is the women it has made.” —Martha Matilda Harper

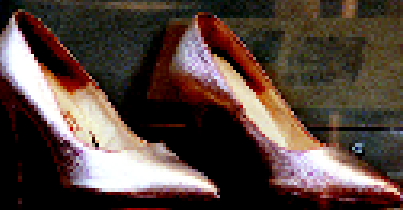
Madame C.J. Walker (1867-1919), left, was raised in a dirt-floor shack in Louisiana and became the wealthiest African American of either sex of her day, living lavishly in Westchester County. She sold hair care for women of her race, and she trained a nationwide network of agents to run Walker System hair salons, sell her products, and better themselves. Martha Matilda Harper (1857-1950), above, who began her career as a domestic servant, had hair that hung to the floor, an advertisement for the hair tonic that she mixed at night and a neighbor sold door to door. She opened an up-market salon in Rochester, New York, and went on to become a franchiser, licensing shops to more than 300 others, who practiced the Harper Method exactly. The exhibit features a salon with both women's products and artifacts, including the formidable wave machine for setting hair (at rear.)





I dreamed I was a knockout
in my *maidenform* bra

Maidsform is now a leading name in the world of women's apparel. It is the only brand name that has been registered in 100 countries. It is the only brand name that has been registered in 100 countries. It is the only brand name that has been registered in 100 countries.



THE MAIDENFORM BRA
The Maidenform bra is a symbol of the American woman's desire for freedom and independence. It is the only brand name that has been registered in 100 countries. It is the only brand name that has been registered in 100 countries. It is the only brand name that has been registered in 100 countries.



Ida Rosenthal (1886-1973), above, right, turned a small dressmaking operation into the Maiden Form Brassiere Company (renamed Maidenform, Inc. in 1960) in an enduring partnership with her husband, William. She had the executive brains; he was the designer and technical innovator. They had "an uncanny ability," writes Virginia Drachman, "to know precisely what the American woman wanted to put between her body and her blouse." They brought the techniques of mass production to the manufacture of intimate apparel, writes Drachman, "revolutionizing women's fashion from the inside out." (In World War II, they departed somewhat from their usual line and made a "pigeon vest," a pouch to protect carrier pigeons being carried by parachuters into North Africa.) Their "I dreamed..." advertising campaign ran for 20 years. The example above appeared in 1961; the photographer was Richard Avedon; the bra was an Arabesque, size 34C.

*"Nature made woman with a bosom,
so why fight nature?" —Ida Rosenthal*

Enterprising Women re-creates the executive office of Olive Ann Beech (1903-1993), right, a cofounder with her husband of Beech Aircraft, an airplane manufacturer active from barnstorming days to the aerospace age. On display are her desk, furnishings, stationery, a designer suit (Galanos), aviation-industry awards, model planes, pieces of Wedgwood, and assorted accretions, including this clown reading the company news. She started work as a secretary, married the boss, and later ran their new company with executive skill and financial acumen during an illness that struck him and after his death. Widowhood propelled her, as it had Martha Coston and Rebecca Lukens, to power and prominence in a male-dominated world. During World War II, Beech Aircraft, under her direction, employed 14,000 people and built more than 7,400 military planes. In 1945 sales reached \$122 million. "Being a woman isn't a handicap," she said. "Ability is the measure of an executive—not gender."



Ruth Handler (1916-2002), right, cofounded the Mattel Toy Company with her husband, with whom she had two children, Barbara and Ken. She created the voluptuous Barbie doll in 1959; boyfriend Ken followed in '61 (see first appearances below). After breast cancer and a mastectomy, Handler launched Nearly Me, a manufacturer of breast prostheses. "When I conceived Barbie," she said, "I believed it was important to a little girl's self-esteem to play with a doll that has breasts. Now I find it even more important to return that self-esteem to women who have lost theirs."

Earl Tupper invented Tupperware (foreground case at right) in 1942, but it languished on department-store shelves. Enter Brownie Wise (1913-1992), the marketing magician of Tupperware Home Parties Incorporated. She recruited a workforce of stay-at-home moms and homemakers—women meeting society's expectations in their suburban homes, but isolated—and they built a multimillion-dollar enterprise throwing parties in the comfort of those homes to sell plastic kitchenware to their friends.

