

PIONEERS? WHERE ARE THE FEMALE BLAEUS?

Alice C. Hudson
Chief, Map Division, NYPL
The Research Libraries
5th Avenue & 42d Street
New York, NY 10018
F 212-921-2546
E-mail: hudson@nyplgate.nypl.org

It is probably an error to seek women pioneers in early cartography. That is not to say there weren't women who did a lot, created a lot, published a lot, etc. But the question arises, as it did in the art world -- where are the female Rembrants? Where are the women Blaeus, Orteliuses, Mercators? Are there not great women cartographers?

Many women worked in the fields of art and cartography from their very beginnings. However, cultural constraints on women prevented the very concept, or viability of a woman Rembrandt, or Mercator.

The women are there, but literally behind the veil of social and cultural constraints that continue to this day. Anonymous was often a woman according to Virginia Woolf. Well, in the world of early maps, unsigned colorists; names masked by initials; widows and heirs without their own names; women in cartographic tomes, but not in their indexes; are all lost to us unless unveiled by accident or design. Both women and men who have contributed to the cartographic arts, but who happen to be engravers, colorists, publishers, etc, often drop from the hallowed bibliographic record, because libraries everywhere do not record their names. They are not "authors," and not quite worthy of recognition.

The difficulties in realizing women's history in cartography is mirrored by the history of women silversmiths, and other trades. Substitute the word cartographer for silversmith or artist in women's history texts and the story is much the same.

Reflecting the research of Mary McMichael Ritzlin and Alice Hudson, this paper will lift the veil on some of the hidden history of women in cartography. It will show concretely, via a brieflist of nearly 200 pre-twentieth century women involved in all aspects of mapmaking, that women were indeed workers in the vineyard. Unlike much of cartographic historiography, it is not great names, or important maps, or grand reputations that are sought, but the truth of women's participation in the grand endeavor to map our world.