

# TREND & Tradition

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# GOING TO WORK

## FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS IN 18TH-CENTURY WILLIAMSBURG

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
DAVE DOODY

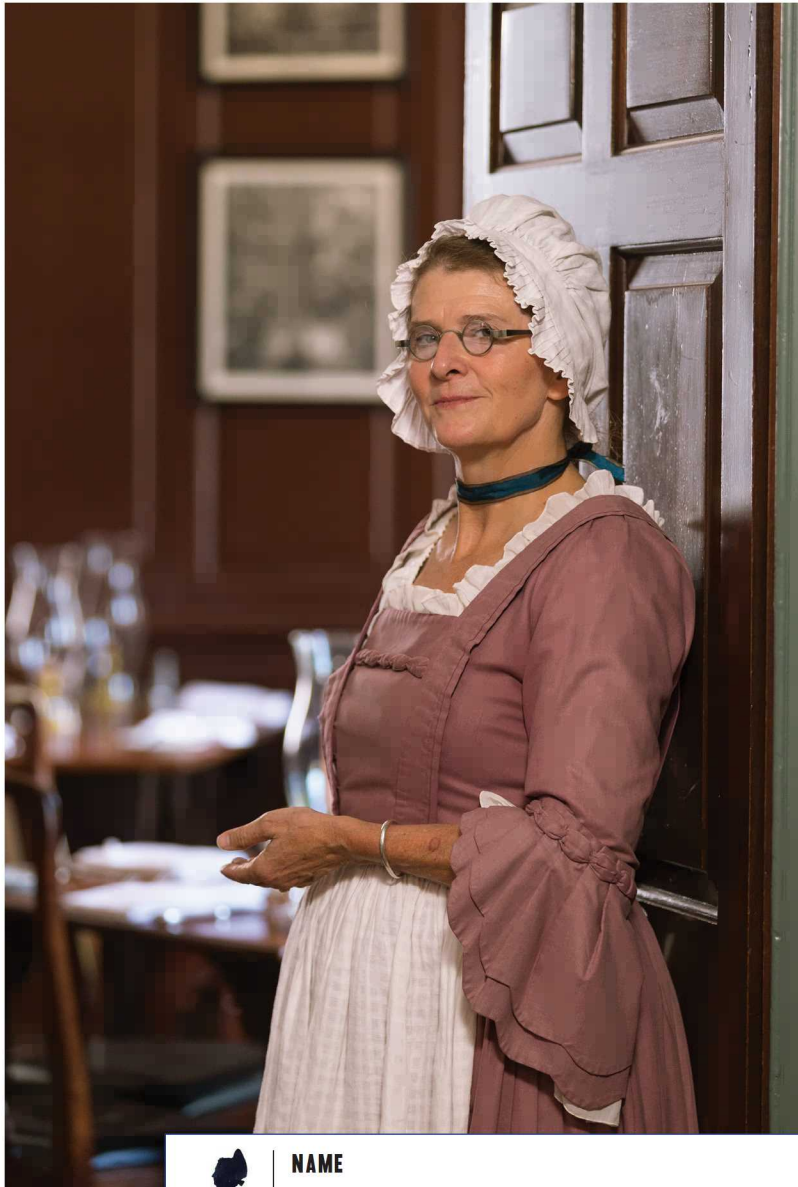
‘An unaffected desire to please, an indefatigable attention to my business ...’

Clementina Rind  
in a notice to readers in  
*The Virginia Gazette*

**D**riven by circumstance and necessity, women in the 18<sup>th</sup> century sometimes worked outside the home. Marriage stripped women of some legal rights, essentially designating them as dependents and curtailing their rights to issue contracts, to control their property, to sue and even to keep wages that they earned. Called coverture, its origin was in English common law, where women essentially relinquished their legal and economic identities in exchange for their husbands' support and protection.

But these restrictions did not apply to unmarried and widowed women of the time. They could manage their own businesses and could be found in all the occupations practiced in the Colonies that did not require formal education, although they were excluded from the ministry, law and the military. They could buy and sell property, though because of their gender, they could not vote or hold office.

Here are the stories of four such entrepreneurs - all women of Williamsburg in the 18th century.



NAME

Jane Vobe

JOB

Tavern Keeper

YEARS

1765-1785

▶ Jane Vobe was a widow in 1765, running a tavern “where all the best people resorted,” according to a French traveler writing in his diary. Members of the Burgesses, the Governor’s Council and the gentry frequented her tavern. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were among her patrons. Sometime in the 1750s, she gave birth to a son, David Miller, whose father, Robert Miller, was bursar at the College of William & Mary. After serving as a

Jane Vobe’s attention to detail at her tavern included guest amenities that were the 18th-century version of reward points and chocolate on the pillow.

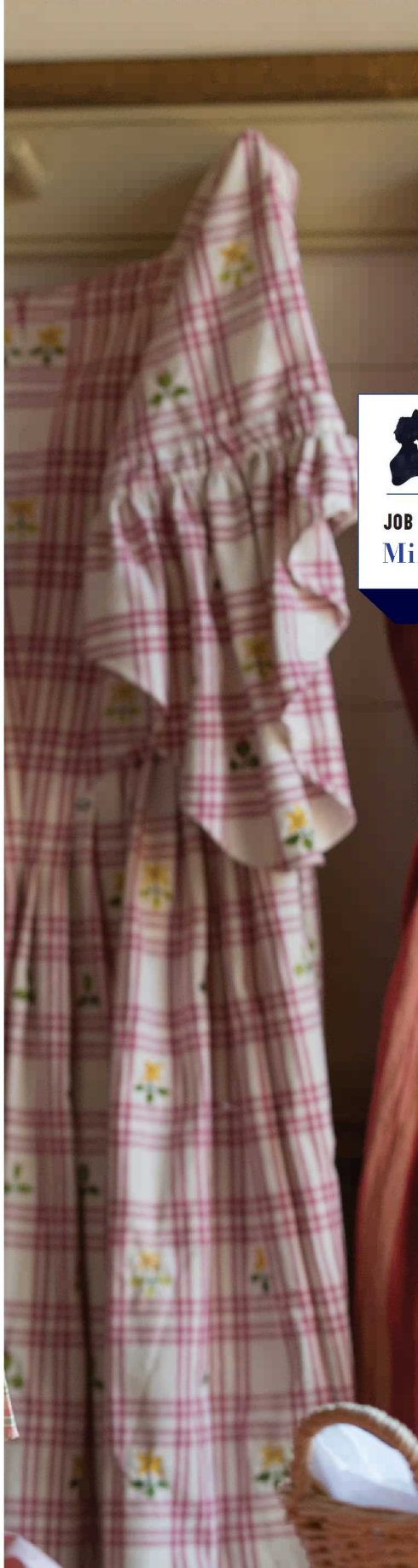
soldier in the Revolutionary War, David Miller returned to Williamsburg and his mother’s household.

The amenities Vobe offered her guests included meeting rooms and a repository for lost-and-found items. Guests could buy theater and lottery tickets. They could hire horses and riding chairs. At the printing office, she purchased engraved prints to hang in her tavern and dozens of packs of playing cards for her guests for gaming. She took an interest in her slaves. She arranged to have two slaves baptized by the rector of Bruton Parish Church, and she also sent some of them to the Bray School – a school in Williamsburg for slaves and free blacks. One of Vobe’s slaves, Gowan Pamphlet, managed to carry on his activities as a Baptist preacher either without Vobe’s knowledge or by negotiating with her for time away from the tavern.

The American Revolution brought unexpected prosperity to tavern keepers as Williamsburg became a primary recruitment center. Vobe regularly hosted Continental officers including — in the weeks before the final decisive battle at Yorktown in 1781 — Gov. Thomas Nelson, a commanding general of a Virginia militia, and the Baron von Steuben, a Prussian-born, French-speaking tactical taskmaster credited with emphasizing the Continental Army’s need for military discipline. Vobe kept a tavern in Williamsburg until 1785, long after the capital had moved to Richmond.

Catherine Rathell prided herself on having the "most fashionable goods in Williamsburg."





NAME

Catherine Rathell

JOB

Milliner

YEARS

Mid-1760s – 1775

➤ Catherine Rathell, a milliner by trade, arrived in Fredericksburg from London in late 1765 or early 1766, and was advertising her goods in Williamsburg by April 1766. She spent the next nine years managing millinery shops in various cities in Virginia and in Annapolis, Md. She was unmarried and there is no information about her birth, her parents or family, or her education. During the decade preceding the Revolution she was one of at least seven women milliners in Williamsburg.

Her correspondence with John Norton, a London merchant, acting as an agent for Virginia merchants, and the numerous detailed advertisements she placed in *The Virginia Gazette* offer insight into her business practices. A savvy businesswoman, she pursued trade by moving her shop to various cities: Fredericksburg, Williamsburg, Petersburg and Annapolis, making sure she was in Williamsburg when the General Courts and the courts of oyer and terminer were in session and Colonists would flock to the capital. Rathell stocked a diverse inventory of clothing and accessories. She sold other various items: lottery and play tickets, jewelry, riding and walking sticks, silver

soup ladles and medicine. She also provided lodging for gentlemen.

Her letters to Norton reveal her high standards, priding herself on having “the best & most fashionable goods in Williamsburg.” Rathell’s terms for her customers, “for ready money only,” were a deviation from the standard credit transactions and she used them to promote herself with English merchants with whom she preferred to do business. When a shipment of goods didn’t measure up, she returned the product and requested a refund. In 1771, she traveled to England to personally select her orders.

Rathell’s political persuasions remain a mystery. Following the adoption of the Continental Association, an action of the First Continental Congress that prohibited trade with England, she advertised in April 1775 that she was selling all her stock and returning to England. This trade boycott threatened all Williamsburg milliners, whose business was dependent on imported British goods. The next news of her is in *The Virginia Gazette* in February 1776 announcing her death when her ship sank within sight of Liverpool.



NAME

**Clementina Rind**

JOB

**Printer**

YEARS

**1773-1774**

▶ Clementina Rind became the proprietor of a business through personal tragedy. Her husband, William Rind, who ran a printing office, died at the age of 43, leaving an estate valued at £272, half of which was represented by equipment used in his shop. The Rind family had moved to Williamsburg from Annapolis in 1766 when William was solicited by some Virginia burgesses to publish a second newspaper, whose content was not controlled by the governor. As Thomas Jefferson wrote 40 years later: “We had but one press, and that having the whole business of the government, and no competitor for public favor, nothing disagreeable to the governor could be got into it.” Prior to his arrival in Williamsburg, these burgesses sent articles deemed too radical by the Williamsburg printer to Rind. He had printed them in *The Maryland Gazette*.

Within a few months, Virginia’s House of Burgesses elected Rind as Public Printer for the Colony, a post that he held until his death in August 1773. Left with five small children to support, Clementina took over the family business. A week later, in her first issue as editor of *The Virginia Gazette*, she retained the masthead that her husband had used, “Open to ALL PARTIES, but Influenced by NONE.” In that same issue she sought sympathy from her readers, emphasizing the current financial plight of her family: “May that All Ruling Power, whose chastening Hand has snatched from my dear Infants and myself our whole Dependence, make me equal to the Task.” She asked for prompt payment from those placing advertisements and requested continued favor from the House of Burgesses, hoping to inherit her husband’s position as public printer. This position, which had the responsibility of

printing the General Assembly's laws and proceedings, government proclamations and paper currency, carried with it a salary of £450.

Clementina Rind was not the only printer in Williamsburg at that time. Her shop was located in what is presently the Ludwell-Paradise House, one block from where her competitors, Alexander Purdie and John Dixon, ran a printing office and published a newspaper, also named *The Virginia Gazette*, as well as books, almanacs and printed forms.

While both newspapers carried much of the same content, Rind's editorial sensibilities were evident in her inclusion of recent developments in science, improvements in education and amusing vignettes of European high society. She frequently printed Virginia counties' resolves and similar measures passed by other Colonies to protest the Boston Port Act, which closed that port to trade.

Her coverage of the arrival of Lady Dunmore to join her husband, the royal governor, in March 1774 contrasts sharply with Purdie and Dixon's factual — but impersonal — reporting of that event. Rind's account is graphic, describing a misfiring of the cannon in the salute to Lady Dunmore and the serious injuries that resulted to the men and slaves attending it. "They received considerable damage; the arms, face, and eyes ... being bruised; ... one of them having lost three fingers ... the other is much burnt in the face." She includes her own verse of warm welcome to the governor's wife, describing her delight in having the family reunited, and at the same time, intimating how her own tragedy has influenced her life.

Long may they live — to virtue aspire,  
And catch the bright  
example of their sire.  
May watchful angels ever guard their fate,

And make you happy as you're  
good and great...

There was controversy during her tenure. An ATTENTIVE OBSERVER, writing anonymously in Purdie and Dixon's *Gazette*, criticized her for sacrificing her husband's principles by refusing to print a piece that leveled serious allegations against certain individuals. In the next issue of her newspaper, Rind wrote that having received a "severe reprimand" she felt obligated to defend herself and indicated that "When the author gives up his name, it shall, however repugnant to my inclination, have a place in this paper."

Her most memorable accomplishment came in August 1774, a month before her death. Virginia was preparing to send a delegation to the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia, which was convening to respond to the Intolerable Acts, punitive laws that Parliament had imposed on the Colonies. Thomas Jefferson wrote instructions to the delegates, but the House of Burgesses found them too extreme to endorse. Instead, Clementina Rind printed them as an anonymous publication, *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*, which was also issued in Philadelphia, New York and London. This was the first document to oppose British rule over the Colonies, and Jefferson's role in writing the pamphlet was widely known. Two years later, he was chosen to write the Declaration of Independence. In this pamphlet, Rind fulfilled the purpose for which her husband had been brought to Virginia. Her death following a "tedious and painful illness" was announced in an issue of *The Virginia Gazette*, printed by John Pinckney, bearing the masthead "for the benefit of Clementina Rind's estate."

Clementine Rind's choice of content, including science, education and society news, set her publication apart.

	<b>NAME</b> <b>Christiana Campbell</b>
<b>JOB</b> <b>Tavern Keeper</b>	<b>YEARS</b> <b>Early 1750s – Late 1780s</b>

▶ Christiana Campbell was born in 1733, the daughter of John Burdett, a Williamsburg tavern keeper. She married Ebenezer Campbell, an apothecary from Petersburg, who died in 1752 leaving her with two daughters. Within 10 years, Campbell returned to Williamsburg and established herself as a tavern keeper. In 1771 she moved into the tavern that Vobe had just vacated

behind the Capitol. Campbell owned several slaves, some of whom she baptized and sent to the Bray School. And like Vobe, Campbell found favor with members of the gentry. Washington was a frequent guest of hers, recording several stays from 1762 to 1774.

Campbell continued in business until sometime after 1776. She died in 1792 in Fredericksburg, Va., where she had gone to live with her daughter Ebe Day and her family. ♡

Christiana Campbell is remembered on her grave marker as “Sincere in her professions, An enemy to oppression, A friend to the distressed, The means whose relief she generously exercised and promoted.”

