

# TREND & Tradition

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Women worked through the societal constraints of business, government and education

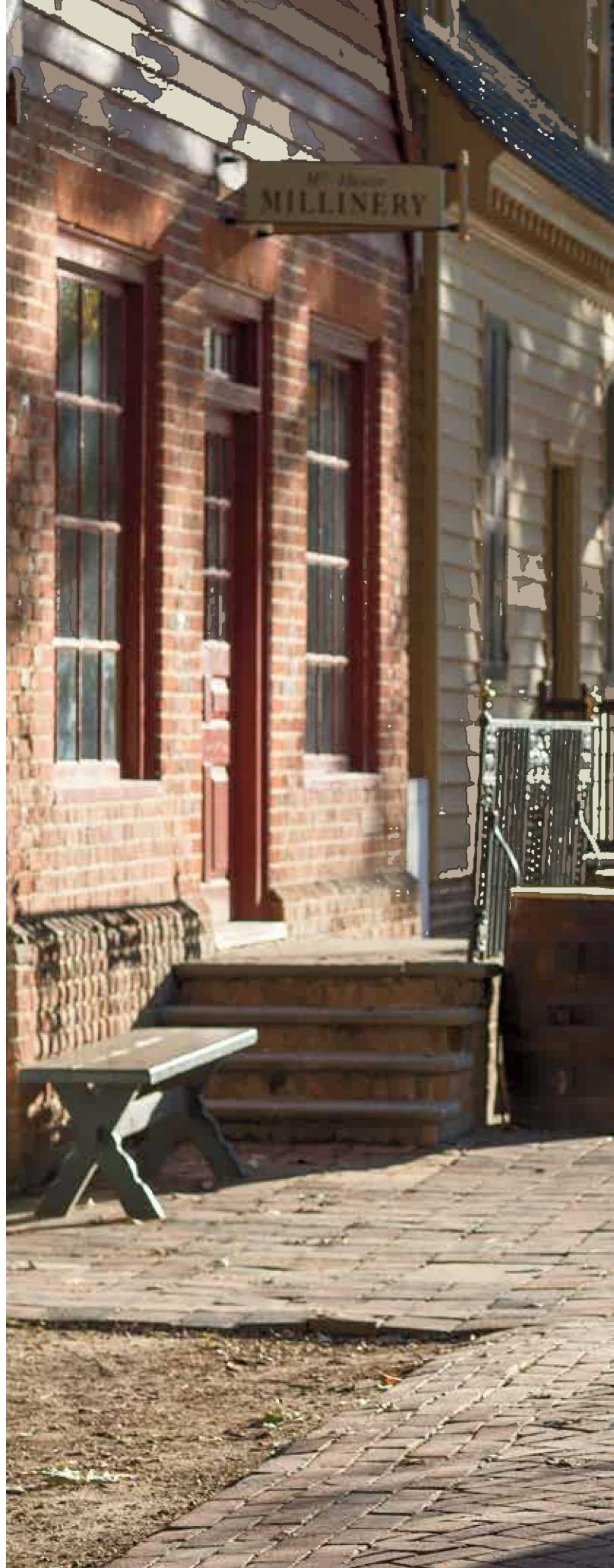
**Photography by Tom Green**

# Her Story

**T**he fullness of women's lives in early America is, to some extent, lost to history. Women certainly had to navigate the social conventions and legal limitations of the colonial era, but the way they did it was often subtle — so subtle that their place in history tends to be evaluated in relation to the men around them.

Though they were not always seen, women and their contributions could be found in all arenas of 18th-century life. They could be business owners or wage laborers. In rarer instances, they could even effect political changes. They could be educated — self-taught or tutored. They could be helped or hurt by the legal system.

Women's stories were complicated by the circumstances into which they were born and other aspects of their lives. These images offer glimpses into some of the subtleties that help make each story uniquely hers.



Women & Business

## *Common Interests*

In addition to the responsibilities of running a household, women in the 18th century often ran their own businesses. Elizabeth De Rozario, one of the few free black women from Virginia, and Margaret Brodie Mathews, an English immigrant, had common business to discuss. De Rozario made a living as a laundress and seamstress out of her own home. Mathews apprenticed as a mantua-maker in London and ran a millinery shop. Both were business owners who advertised their services, crafted the clothing and maintained the account books.

**PICTURED:** Hope Wright and Liz Thomas



Women & Power

## *'Petticoat Government'*

For many of the indigenous nations along the East Coast, women and men had equal voice in deciding on issues that ranged from trade to politics. However, the Virginia politicians did not welcome women's involvement, often barring their inclusion from negotiations and criticizing the "petticoat government" power structure. The Cherokees, along with other indigenous tribes, referred to their most influential female leaders as "Beloved Women," who were regarded with great respect and acted as key decision-makers.

**PICTURED:** Felicity Meza-Luna, Warren Taylor and Kody Grant



Women & Work

## *Invisible Workforce*

Though many women made money performing tasks that were extensions of the conventionally feminine household responsibilities, they were not necessarily limited in the types of work they could take on. Not beholden to the same rigid guild system found in England, middling women could work as wage laborers to make ends meet. Often, women worked alongside their fathers or husbands to meet the demands of the family business, acting as a kind of shadow apprentice whose contributions, monetary and otherwise, were largely invisible.

PICTURED: Amanda Doggett and Peter Hudson



Women & Literacy

## *'Uncommon Arithmetician'*

Education for ladies of Virginia could encompass the management of households in cities and plantations, along with studies in music, languages, mathematics and other subjects also taught to gentlemen. Susanna Nelson Page, the daughter of Lucy Grymes Nelson and Gov. Thomas Nelson, spoke highly of Lucy's intelligence: "She had quite a liberal education for the times. She was a most uncommon Arithmetician, very fond of reading and learned to play on the Harpsichord."

PICTURED: Sharon Hollands

Women & the Law

## *'Pleasant Countenance'*

While free blacks were able to own property, marry other free people of color and file lawsuits, laws often failed to differentiate between free and enslaved. As the 1782 Act of Manumission allowed owners to grant their slaves freedom, it imposed a burden on free blacks to register their own status. Their appearance and demeanor was often described in the record, such as the listing for 30-year-old Mary De Rozario who was described as "short" and having "a Pleasant Countenance when Spoken to."

**PICTURED:** Mark Couvillon, Kemper McDowell and Deirdre Jones



