

What kinds of jobs were open to women?

In colonial America, most girls got married and became housewives. If you lived in Williamsburg in the 1700s, you probably would have gotten married at around age twenty.

A great many household tasks had to be done by hand, and a girl learned how to do them at a young age. Usually her mother taught her, but if she came from a poor family or if her mother had died, she might be “bound out” to another family for instruction.

By the time she was eight or nine, a girl knew enough about sewing to make a cap and a shirt. A middling-sort or gentry girl often took lessons to learn how to make a *sampler*, which was a stitched cloth piece designed to show her needlework skills. Later she also learned how to cook, spin, make candles and soap, and do many other things.



*My maid Mary, she minds the dairy,
While I go a-hoeing and mowing each morn;
Gaily run the reel and the little spinning wheel,
While I am singing and mowing my corn.*

In colonial times — like today — married women often had two jobs. Besides taking care of the house, a woman might have a small butter-and-eggs business, or she might spin cloth for customers, or sell surplus vegetables from the kitchen garden. Sometimes women helped their husbands run a store or tavern.

There were female farmers who plowed and sowed and harvested the crops side by side with their husbands.

There were also some female storekeepers and barbers in Williamsburg and one printer, Clementina Rind. Often these tradeswomen learned their husbands' businesses after they married.

Women also were teachers. And some women worked as midwives. Midwives helped women have their babies and care for their children when they were sick. In the colonies, women had their babies at home. A midwife instead of a doctor usually helped with the delivery.



*There was a little woman,
As I have heard tell,
She went to market
Her eggs for to sell. . . .*