



FOUNDING FEMALES Female Qualifying Ancestor Index

Female Ancestor Number: 229

Name: Zenger, Anna Catharina (Maul)

Dates: (c. 1704 - 1751)

Colonial Society: NY

Date added to ROA: June 21, 2025

Service: Printer/Publisher (The New York Weekly Journal)

Authority: Hamill, Frances. "Some Unconventional Women Before 1800: Printers, Booksellers, and Collectors." *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, Fourth Quarter, 1955, Vol. 49, No. 4, p. 313. Wroth, Lawrence C. *A History of Printing in Colonial Maryland: 1686-1776*. Volume 43. Baltimore: Typothetae of Baltimore, 1922. Pp. 52-53

<https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000435/html/am435--53.html>

Biography:

Anna was an American publisher and the first woman to publish a newspaper in America. Descended from a family of religious refugees who fled the Pfalz region of Germany, she was born in either the Netherlands or England and settled in New York City in 1710. Twelve years later, she married a printer and fellow refugee, John Peter Zenger, on August 24th in Manhattan's Dutch Reformed Church.

Known as Peter, Anna's husband established his own printing business in New York, specializing in Dutch religious and academic texts. However, another client was the political party opposing the Royal Governor of New York. That client hired him to publish tracts and pamphlets, as well as a newspaper, the "New-York Weekly Journal," which resulted in an accusation by the Governor in 1732 of seditious libel that established America's landmark principles of libel law.

Lacking funds for bail and losing his attorneys during the bail hearing, Peter was incarcerated for eight months. With the help of a teenage assistant, Anna Catharina took over his publishing duties, regularly visiting him in jail and taking instructions for managing the business. Reduced to passing notes through a hole in the cell door, she had editorial control and wrote articles, even covering his trial until his exoneration and release in 1735.

When Peter died 11 years later, Anna Catharina again took responsibility for the business. She continued to publish the newspaper every week, as well as advertisements and an annual almanac, selling books and stationery on the side. In 1748, she turned the printing business over to her stepson and moved to a rural area, where she opened a bookstore.