Women Economic Writers in the History of Economic Thought (1700–1914)

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Women Economic Writers in the History of Economic Thought (1700–1914)

Edith Kuiper
State University of New York at New Paltz

Abstract
Women have been invisible both as authors and as subjects of study in the field of political economy (later economics). The fact that women were barred from education (including, later on, higher and university education) and in the early twentieth century from academic jobs in economics played an important role here. As early as the beginning of the eighteenth century women, however, did write about economic subjects, and they did so in much larger numbers than might be expected. They used a variety of genres: essays, pamphlets, letters, diaries, account books, poems, novels and treatises. This essay provides an overview or rather a peek into this (re)emerging literature, which teaches us about women’s – and men’s – economic lives and women’s views on economic institutions, markets, legislation and policies, as well as their role in the economy of everyday life. The focus in this essay is on England and Scotland, with additional discussions on France and the US.

Political economy, which in late nineteenth century became redefined as ‘economic science’ or ‘economics’, has been developed by men. By regulation, practice and definition of the field, women have been excluded from official economic theorizing – first, through lack of access to education, later because academic jobs in economics were closed to women, and up to the present day there has been a very significant underrepresentation of women in higher academic positions in the discipline (see e.g. Nelson 1995; Madden 2002; Dimand 2003). However, over the last few centuries, women have been reading and writing about economic, social and political issues and had their work published. In doing so they have made use of the most up-to-date technologies and a wide variety of genres, and been involved in academic and public debates, political movements and government research, as well as more private correspondence, diary writing and accounting. However, most of their work has either been lost or just plainly forgotten – or at best, buried in archives. What we see now is that these archives are being revisited and these materials are in the process of being brought back into the light.

This essay aims to open up this growing field of study for those unfamiliar with early women’s economic writing. It provides a rough overview, or perhaps better, a peek into the increasing amount of recently recovered women’s writings on their own economic experiences, interests and views, writings that are now becoming more widely available. These ‘new’ primary resources shed a remarkable light on women’s role in the economy in England, Scotland and other West European countries and, later, in the US. Although there is
not enough space here to address any of the works in detail, this essay makes the point that these writings may substantially contribute to our understanding of the way Western economies have been run, and this time from a woman’s if not a feminist perspective. Their work prompts a number of questions – questions regarding, for instance, how the exclusion of women and the denial of the role of gender, race, class, age and religion has impacted political economy and economics and on our economic thinking today.

Secondary sources and some issues and concerns

For a long time Joan Robinson (1903–1983) was the token woman in the history of economic thought. Joan Robinson, a brilliant economist, worked closely with John Maynard Keynes in Cambridge in the 1930s. She became known as ‘the woman who should have received the Nobel Prize in economics but never did’. Rosa Luxemburg (1887–1919), the socialist economic thinker and author of The Accumulation of Capital (1913), also used to be mentioned to show that there have been women economists in the field. Both women – conveniently – did not mention women explicitly as a central category in their main works.

Mark Blaug (1927–2011) mentioned only three women out of 100 economists in his Great Economists (1986), ignoring Dorothy Lampen Thomson’s Adam Smith’s Daughters (1973). In addition to Rosa Luxemburg and Joan Robinson, Thomson discussed Jane Haldimand Marcet, Harriet Martineau and Beatrice Potter Webb. Blaug also overlooked Barbara Libby’s more quantitative article, which mentioned 80 women economists (Libby 1984). Libby’s other publications (1987, 1990) and an overview of women who obtained their PhD in economics and published in economic journals around the turn of the twentieth century by Peter Groenewegen and Susan King (1994) prompted more research and publications. Peter Groenewegen’s Feminism and Political Economy in Victorian England (1994) and May Ann Dimand, Robert W. Dimand and Evelyn Forget’s Women of Value: Feminist Essays on the History of Women in Economics (1995) looked at the work of these women economic writers in more depth. Robert W. Dimand (1995) provided an overview of women economists in the documented collective memory of economics, making the point that women economists contributed to the field but were pushed to the margin and did not get the recognition they deserved. In the following years, a range of publications brought a huge number of female economists’ publications to light; about 10,000 publications from about 1,700 women economists (Madden, Seiz and Pujol 2004; see also Dimand, Dimand and Forget 2000, 2004; Barker and Kuiper 2010; Kuiper 2014). The focus of this essay will be on women’s economic writings between 1700 and 1914.

Why focus on women’s economic writing, instead of on women economists or on the role and status of gender (see e.g. Dimand and Nyland 2003)? The texts that were recovered first were those by women who were part of the economic academic communities in the US and England. Dimand, Dimand and Forget (2004), for instance, define their group of focus as ‘individuals who were intentionally working in what would, at the time they wrote, have been considered economics’ (xvii). Two aspects are important here. The first is that definitions of ‘economic science’ and ‘the economy’ have changed over the centuries. The second is that these definitions have not been neutral with respect to gender – or with respect to class or race, for that matter. This essay therefore considers a broader set of texts than is included in the contemporary category ‘economics’ and focuses on the work of women who wrote about economic topics and issues.

The interest in women economic writers is based on the centrality of gender in the period 1700–1914: gender symbols, language, roles and normative gender notions were fundamental and particularly profound in eighteenth and nineteenth-century academia (see e.g. Scott 1986,
The meanings assigned to sex (i.e. gender) have always been strongly context related, and in eighteenth-century England and Scotland, gender was a structuring principle: fundamental, hierarchical (the male was perceived as more important, the norm and the ideal) and a decisive factor in people’s lives (see e.g. Davis and Farge 1993; Hufton 1995; Pinchbeck 1930). One's gender determined access to education, inheritance, professions and pay, among other things. The role of gender was especially pervasive in the field of political economy (later economics). In this academic field, women were excluded both as subjects of reasoning and as objects of study; they were absent and invisible. It makes sense, therefore, to focus on the work of women economic writers; not for essentialist reasons, but because their work and their experience were excluded from political economy and economics on account of their sex. Bringing back the silenced voices of the women who wrote on economic topics – women from lower and upper classes, from various ethnic backgrounds, of different ages and different religions – is bound to bring to light aspects of economic life that have been marginalized and neglected because women wrote about it, because their texts dealt with women’s economic concerns and interests.

The field of political economy emerged around the 1750s (see e.g. Groenewegen 2002). According to the standard reading of the history of economics, early political economic thinkers like Mandeville, Turgot and Smith aimed to describe and explain the industrialization process, which in their view consisted of production, accumulation, distribution of surplus, and consumption. Economics, which ‘took over’ at the end of the nineteenth century, takes the industrial, capitalist economy as a given and focuses on the functioning of markets, the maximizing behaviour of individuals and firms, and the efficient use of scarce resources (see e.g. Marshall 1890; Robbins 1938). Feminist historians of economics have been analyzing and critiquing political economy and economics and its relation to gender from the 1990s onwards, looking at the use of genre, the topics addressed, the methods used, as well as the content of dominant concepts and theories (see e.g. Nelson 1993; Folbre 1993; Hewitson 1999; Barker and Kuiper 2005; Folbre 2009). Concepts such as ‘rational economic man’, self-interest, the public–private divide, the production–consumption dichotomy and the notion of culture versus nature have been shown to be explicitly but also implicitly gendered in content and meaning (see e.g. Ferber and Nelson 1993; Nelson 1995; Kuiper and Sap et al. (1995), Barker and Kuiper 2005; Grappard and Hewitson 2005; Ozler and Gabrinetti 2017; Shah 2006).

Reading the women’s economic writings presented here in relation to contemporary political economy and economics makes it clear that the fact that these authors were women gave their work only limited cohesion in terms of content. Their texts seem rather scattered, isolated and normative, sometimes strongly moral in content. However, what these early writings especially have in common is that they speak from a position of experience, of endurance of economic challenges, of struggle for respect and for academic acknowledgement of the facts and arguments they present. What has to be kept in mind in this respect, however, is that, with some exceptions (see e.g. Scott 1999; Kuiper 2001; Folbre 2009; Clery 2015), most of these texts have not yet been fully analyzed – not in relation to contemporary economic thought and not in relation to each other (see also Weiss 2009).

The interest in women’s economic writing is still increasing and crosses the boundaries of the field of history of economic science. In philosophy of economic science, perceiving economics as a form of rhetoric (McCloskey 1983, 1985) and literature as economics and/or economics as literature brought about a range of analyses that used women’s writing as a source of economic knowledge (see e.g. Henderson, Dudley-Evans and Backhouse 1993, Henderson, 1995). In women’s and gender history and in women’s literature too, a range of publication have been coming to the table (see e.g. Knott and Taylor 2005; Clery 2004, 2015, 2017; Eger 2013; O’Brien 2009): historical and textual analyses of poems, novels, diaries and
correspondence that provide a wealth of materials and insights into the history of women’s economic writing. Should these analyses be considered part of the history of economic thought? That depends on whether one considers it productive to include women’s voices that tell us about their economic experience, ideas and theories when attempting to understand the history of our current economic thinking.

Feminist waves or fissures?

Quite a few of the early women economic writers mentioned in this essay were actually quite prominent in their day. Mary Astell (1666–1731), for instance, was known all over England, Jane Halmimand Marcet (1769–1858) was practically a household word, as was the name of Harriet Martineau (1802–76), who wrote, among many other things, short stories about political economy for newspapers. In aristocratic circles in Scotland and England, Grisell Baillie of Jarviswood (1665–1746), Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762) and Elizabeth Montagu (1718–1800) (no direct family connection) were central figures in the public eye. And besides the attention they attracted due to their rank and actions, they were known for their writings: their correspondence, poems and essays – and in the case of Grisell Baillie, poems and account books (1692–1733). Never fully recognized by male economists, these figures faded from memory after their death and, due to a lack of historical accounts, had to be brought back into the collective consciousness by the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

In their time, these women were well known as individuals, as part of a particular circle or society or, in the nineteenth century, when their numbers and the level of organization increased, as part of a movement. Although the Seneca Falls Conference in 1848 in New York State is generally seen as the start of the first wave of feminism, many women and gender historians recognize the work of earlier writers, researchers and activists (see e.g. Lerner 1993; Schiebinger 1989; Kelly 1984). Akkerman and Stuurman (1993), for instance, indicate seven ‘waves’; from the first wave, ‘late-medieval and Renaissance feminism’ (1400–1600), the start of which is generally considered the publication of Christine de Pisan’s *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1406), to the seventh contemporary wave. Instead of feminist waves, Karen Offen (2000) prefers to speak of a wide range of ‘fissures’ and ‘eruptions’, of larger and smaller streams of consciousness and activism that come and go. As we will see, women’s economic writing does not really fit into a schema of waves and answers better to Offen’s metaphor of a working volcano (2000: 25–6).

Women’s economic writings during the period 1700–1914

Regarding our particular period of focus, Mary Astell and the group of writers and poets around her such as Judith Drake, Elizabeth Elstob, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Lady Mary Chudleigh can be considered the first fissure or even eruption. With political economy not yet on the horizon, Astell wrote about the importance of women’s education in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694, 1697). In her second pamphlet she addresses morals and marriage in an age where divorce was impossible or impossibly expensive (1700). Her participation in philosophical and public debates with John Locke, John Norris and the bishops Berkeley and Shaftesbury on the role of education and the nature of man contributed substantially to her fame (Perry 1986, 2005).

At the same time in France, Madame de Tencin and Anne-Thérèse de Marguenat de Courcelles, also called Marquise de Lambert (1647–1733) organized the first salons. These dinners that were attended by both aristocrats and members of the ‘bourgeoisie’; artists,
writers and philosophers set in motion a century-long tradition of women organizing dinners and discourse at the French court. At these salons the ‘woman question’ (le querelle des femmes) was widely discussed. Marquise de Lambert was also a prolific economic author, writing on education, social inequality and wealth (1748, 1749). In one of her philosophical texts, *New Reflections on the Fair Sex* (1729), she highlighted women’s gift for scientific inquiry (Kuiper 2014).

Like those in England and Scotland, women in France did not have access to the centers of academic life: L’Académie des Sciences and L’Académie Française were closed to them. However, this did not keep the brilliant mathematician, philosopher and early political economist Émilie du Châtelet (1706–49) from inviting those whose conversation she valued to the Château de Cirey and working and getting involved with Voltaire. She is of particular interest here because of her translation of and commentary on Bernard Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees* (1724). In this long poem Mandeville separates economic morals from religious morality and in this way made an important contribution to the emergence of political economy. It was du Châtelet who introduced Mandeville’s thinking to France. Her *Discourse on Happiness*, in which she claims the right to happiness, sketches a path to reaching it avoiding distractions. She did not live long, though; just after completing her translation of Newton’s *Principia*, du Châtelet died in childbirth in 1849 (Zinsser 2006; du Châtelet 2009).

Over the course of the century, many other women economic writers were involved in the salon culture. Louise d’Épinay (1726–83), for instance, was a salonière who corresponded with the philosopher Denis Diderot. George Sand, best known for her relationship with Frédéric Chopin, was an author of socially and politically critical novels such as *Indiana* (1832) and *Mauprat* (1837). Germaine du Staël (1766–1817) – to mention one of the most celebrated of the rest of the group – was an independent thinker who fled from the terror of the French Revolution to Switzerland, England and then travelled the European continent. She wrote novels, philosophical and political works and later in life the more explicitly political economic text, *De l’influence des passions sur le bonheur des individuals et des nations* (1796) (Escarpit 2016; see also Faccarello and Steiner 2008).

*Le querelles de femmes* – the discussions about gender equality – also crossed the Channel. Around 1750 a group of women and men in London formed a circle, the Bluestockings Society, which was led by Elizabeth Montagu. The group included Elizabeth Vesey (1715–91), Elizabeth Carter (1717–1806), Sarah Scott (1721–95), the historian Catharine Macaulay (1731–91), Hester Chapone (1727–1801) and Hannah More (1745–1833). The circle met informally over dinner, was comparable to Samuel Johnson’s Literary Society and overlapped in membership. The Bluestockings mainly focused on literary writing – letters, poems and essays –, not necessarily feminist in content (see e.g. Scott 1947; Eger 1999; Pohl and Schellenberg 2003). Elizabeth Montagu stands out as she managed the set of coal mines she inherited from her husband, together with her estates and lands. This was exceptional at the time and in her circle, and she was also very good at it; she died the richest woman in England, her mines listed at the top of the stock market (Eger 1999; Child 2003). She was an ardent letter writer; some 7,000 of her letters are held in the Huntington Library in San Marino. They contain her reflections, attitudes and ideas regarding running a business and set of estates. Over the past century various selections of these letters have been published (see e.g. Montagu 1809, 1813; Climenson 1906; Blunt 1923).

For the upper-class and aristocratic Bluestockings, being involved in charity and concerning oneself with the poor and social inequality was the principled thing to do. One way to do this was to take working-class writers under your patronage. Hannah More ‘discovered’ Ann Yearsley (1753–1806), a working-class poet, and Elizabeth Montague supported – but later came into conflict with – James Woodhouse (1735–1820). He was a shoemaker whose *Poems*
on Several Occasions appeared under Lord Lyttleton’s name in 1766 (Christmas 2001). There were other working-class poets whose work got published, such as the washerwoman Mary Collier (1739, 1762). Others, such as Mary Masters, provide us with insights into their daily lives and economic experiences and concerns (Ferguson 1985, 1995; Goodridge 1995).

The education of girls and women remained a problem as lack of access effectively kept women from contributing more broadly to knowledge and society and also meant that better-paying professions remained closed to them. For this reason, many women, including Mary Wollstonecraft, Hannah More, Elizabeth Montagu and Sarah Trimmer (1741–1810), started schools themselves, and some took up teaching as well. These were often schools for girls only. Sarah Trimmer turned setting up schools into a science and, besides raising ten children, launching a journal on children’s books and publishing a set of teaching methods, she wrote a large volume on the economics of establishing a school (see Trimmer 1787).

Although the education of girls began to improve, women still lacked access to higher education and academia. At the end of the eighteenth century and in the early nineteenth century, authors such as Mary Hays, Helen Maria Williams, Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Mary Robinson formed a group round Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97). These women worked with publishers such as Joseph Longman who favoured their cause and also saw a market for their work. These authors and other contemporaries such as Priscilla Wakefield (1751–1832) and Maria Edgeworth (1768–1849) expressed their ideas on abolitionism, the importance of women’s education, and women’s lack of access to professions in pamphlets and essays (see e.g. Hays 1798; Wollstonecraft 1787; Wakefield 1798; Edgeworth and Edgeworth 1798) and novels (see e.g. Radcliff 1789; More 1777; Smith 1788; Burney 1777; Wollstonecraft 1798). The novel would become an important vehicle for describing experiences and expressing ideas, fantasies and anxieties related to women’s economic dependence and the consequences of losing economic and legal security.

Just before and during the early years of the French Revolution (1789–91), several of these authors, among them Mary Wollstonecraft, travelled to Paris to witness and take part in the overthrow of the Ancien Régime. The revolution opened up many exciting roads for progressive change also where women’s social and economic position was concerned. Soon, however, the endeavour turned sour. Olympe de Gouges (1748–93), author of the Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne (1791), who argued for equal rights as citizens for women and men, the right to divorce, and equal pay for women and men, which led to her imprisonment. She died under the guillotine (Schröder 1989). Feminist writers could also be found at the courts that were under pressure from the revolution. One of them, Sophie de Grouchy de Condorcet, lost her husband, the philosopher and mathematician Marquis de Condorcet, to the guillotine. Against all odds she continued to organize salons until the very end. Her contribution to political economy consisted of a translation of the Adam Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759), which became the standard translation for decades to come (Forget 2003; Brown 2008). She also added eight letters to the 1798 edition in which she comments on and sharply criticizes some of Smith’s main arguments in the treatise. It was not until 2008 that these letters were translated and published under an English title (de Grouchy 1798, 2008).

In England, the terror of the French Revolution provoked a great deal of anxiety about French influence and a right-wing backlash (Wright 2013). When William Godwin, albeit with good intentions, published The Memoirs of the Author of the Vindication of the Right of Women (1798), Wollstonecraft’s life was turned into a scandal. This had such impact that even women moved away from feminism and articulated their thoughts instead predominantly in religious terms. It was only after some decades that William Thompson and Anna Wheeler (1780–1848) published an explicitly feminist pamphlet, titled Appeal of One Half of the
Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Retain them in Political, and Hence in Civil and Domestic, Slavery (1825), in which they discussed the state of political economy and the negative treatment of women in the field.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, novel writing was further developed by women authors as a place where they could argue, speak frankly and express their fantasies, as well as promulgate their moral, political and economic ideas – and make money by doing so. Some of the best-known novelists of the time are Jane Austen (1775–1817), Charlotte Smith (1749–1806), who had to write for a living, and Ann Radcliff (1764–1823), who wrote and became rich from what became referred to as ‘gothic novels’. Radcliff’s The Romance of the Forest (1791) explores and develops the moral practices around self-interest and selfishness (Wright 2003). In Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice (1813), Mansfield Park (1814) and Emma (1815), money, income, self-interest and marriage take centre stage. Another example is Maria Edgeworth (1768–1849), a prolific writer, whose Castle Rackrent (1800) describes the downfall of a feudal lord and his estate and the emergence of a capitalist approach to farming. More generally, the novels in this period address a variety of economic and financial issues: the drama and dread of married women without the option of divorce or rights over their own children, the lack of rights over property, and economic and/or moral devastation. We also see this in women’s novels written in response to the economic crises of 1837 and 1857 in the USA. ‘Panic fiction’ by, for instance, Catherine Maria Sedgewick and Maria Cummins describes and attempts to grapple with the impact of and anxieties arising from an unstable economy (see Templin 2014).

The nineteenth century brought with it the solidification and growth of industrial society in England, other European countries such as France and Germany, and the US. Unlike in England, where legislation was based on common law, on the Continent the Napoleonic Code influenced constitutions, excluding married women from citizenship and full property rights and relegating them to the domestic sphere (Pott-Buter 1992). The nineteenth century also saw the dark side of capitalism in the form of starvation wages, dangerous working conditions and child labour. Robert Owen, Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier and other ‘Utopian Socialists’, as Karl Marx would later call them, start articulating a coherent criticism of the established political economic theories of Smith, Malthus and Ricardo and developing alternative ideas and practices. Women economic writers such as Francis Wright (1795–1852), who started her own community, ‘Nashoba’, in Tennessee, and speeches and the book Union Oevrière (The Workers’ Union) (1843) by Flora Tristan (1803–44) are clear voices in this movement.

Besides those critiquing political economic thinking, there were also women economic writers who taught and propagated these established political economic theories. Building on the work of early educators such as Hannah More, Sarah Trimmer and Maria Edgeworth, Jane Marcet (1769–1858), who had lived in Switzerland and whose husband was a banker, organized supper parties at her home in England that were similar to the French salons. Many economic topics were discussed at these events (Thomson 1973). Against advice, Jane Marcet started to write and publish short educational pieces on political economy in the form of conversations between a teacher and her pupil (Marcet 1803). Conversations was very successful and made her not only rich and famous but also the first in a long line of women economic authors who wrote to educate a young female audience in the science of political economy. Decades later, Harriet Martineau adopted the same concept, which again proved successful. Originally published in newspapers, her Illustrations of Political Economy (1832) contained nine volumes filled with short stories. These stories discussed familiar social and economic issues while at the same time explaining and applying the basic concepts of established political economists such as Smith and Malthus. This line of work would later be continued by Millicent Garrett Fawcett (1870).
Auguste Comte (1798–1857), founder of the positivist philosophy of science and sociology, published his book *Discourse sur l’Esprit Positif* in 1844 and influenced John Stuart Mill, the most important political economist of the nineteenth century. Comte’s positivism would become one of the pillars of economic science, setting off academics and governments on a road of systematic data collection and statistical bureaux. Women economists, keeping up to date and working with the latest technology available, started to apply statistical methods in their research and writings. Around 1860, a group of women in London around Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (1827–91) and Bessie Rayner Parkes (1829–1925) constituted themselves as the Langham Place group, after the place where they met (Lacey 1987). Bodichon and Parkes started *The English Woman's Journal* and used it to publish their research and findings on women’s work, employment, wages, poverty and access to professions. This research (see e.g. Bodichon 1857; Butler 1868) supported the demands for more and higher education for women, access to more and better-paid professions, and changes to marriage and property legislation. In England these demands were more or less met by the end of the century. By then women could inherit, divorce, access university education and work in a much wider range of professions (Holcombe 1983; Pott-Buter 1992). At the same time, however, women’s work in the household – its economic contribution and value – became more and more excluded from the statistics and thus invisible to economists, and women’s economic dependence on men remained intact (Folbre 1991).

In France, Clémence-Auguste Royer (1830–1902), who later in her life became a highly regarded scientist and scholar, was inspired by the work of Charles Darwin and translated his most important work – *The Origin of the Species* (1859) – into French. Besides applying his perspective to the analyses of civilizations, philosophy and political economy, she also developed her own theories on, for instance, the force of gravitation and systems of taxation, as in her *Théorie de l’impôt, ou la dime sociale* (1862). She considered the economy as a natural system that only changes incrementally. Her ideas about natural hierarchies in society as well as between cultures means that she can be considered an early social Darwinist (see Hawkins 1997). In the USA it is the prolific Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935) who, besides writing novels such as *The Yellow Wall Paper* (1892) and *Herland* (1915), applied the same evolutionary Darwinian theoretical framework to the ‘woman question’ as economists such as Alfred Marshall and Joseph Schumpeter used it to analyze the economy. Like so many of her contemporaries, Gilman perceived the gendered public–private divide as naturalized. However, in her *Women and Economics* (1898) Gilman criticized and theorized the current hierarchical gender arrangement, pointing out that under the current gender regime, humans were the only species whose females could not take care of themselves and were dependent on the males for their daily sustenance.

Around the 1870s and during what would later become known as ‘the marginalist revolution’, economists increasingly took the capitalist system as a given and perceived political economy as too politicized to be ‘a real science’. The focus in the field thus shifted towards incremental – that is, marginal – changes, quantitative relations between prices and quantities, and the most efficient way of using scarce resources. Together with the capitalist system, gender, race and class relations, a preoccupation with the public realm and white middle-class men’s interests also became naturalized in the new science of ‘economics’. Although women had by then gained access to higher education, the professionalization of economics was accompanied by increasing mathematization of the field (Coats 1984). And both the full PhD examination and jobs in economics departments at Cambridge (UK), Oxford (UK) and Harvard (USA) remained closed to women. Mary Paley, who was one of the first to successfully take a tripos examination at Cambridge, published the *Economics of Industry* (1879) with her husband, Alfred Marshall (Groenewegen 1998; see also Keynes 1944). In the
decades that followed, an increasing number of women took their PhDs and published in economic journals (Groenewegen and King 1994; Dimand 1995). The economist Beatrice Webb (1858–1943), together with her husband Sidney Webb, founded the London School of Economics, which was more open to women and would become the breeding ground for an important group of women economic historians in the 1920s and 1930s.

In the years after the marginalist revolution, most women economists and economic writers both in England (e.g. Clara Collet, Millicent Fawcett, Ada Heather-Bigg, Beatrice Webb) and the US (e.g. Caroline Wells Healey Dall, Edith Abbott) were involved in labour and policy research initiated by the unions and/or the government. This involved empirical research on women’s work and wages, local social and economic labour circumstances, and the value of household production. The rich history of writing on the art of running a household, which often included aspects of various fields—chemistry, medicine, accounting, personnel issues and regulations, cooking, and the making and mending of clothes—was turned into the field of home economics. This subfield of economics would be the first field in economic science to be opened up to women.

Some afterthoughts

This essay set out the contours of the vast array of documents, essays, papers and books by women economic writers and women economists that is awaiting further analysis and research. Although understanding the reasons and mechanisms that kept and still keep women underrepresented in economic science remains important, the research discussed here, which makes the work of women economic writers working inside and outside the academic field of economics visible, has significant value on its own. It enables us to learn more about women’s economic experiences and insights over the past few centuries, which is long overdue. This knowledge will change our understanding of the functioning of the economy at large, of the process of economic theorizing as well as its content. It may even contribute to more women economists being active in the field and a greater recognition of their work.

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