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2/11/43

# An 18th-century dynamo

■ **Courage:** *Mary Katherine Goddard, Baltimore's first postmaster, was also a publisher and patriot.*

6-26-99

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SUN STAFF

Mary Katherine Goddard, printer, newspaper publisher, patriot and Baltimore's first postmaster, has been described by historians as the "most energetic and dynamic American woman of the Eighteenth Century."

Goddard, who was editor of the *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser*, Baltimore's first newspaper, for more than a decade, was born on June 16, 1738 in New London, Conn. She moved to Providence, R.I., in 1762 after the death of her father, a physician, with her mother, Sarah Goddard, to work in the print shop that had been established by her younger brother, William Goddard, who also founded the *Providence Gazette* newspaper.

After he moved to Philadelphia in 1768 and opened a printing office and began publishing the *Pennsylvania Chronicle*, mother and daughter continued to operate the Providence print shop under the name of Sarah Goddard and Company.

In 1768, Sarah Goddard sold the business and, with her daughter, settled in Philadelphia and once again went to work for William Goddard.

During 1773, while her brother was in Baltimore founding the *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser*, Mary Katherine continued to publish the *Pennsylvania Chronicle* and managed the print shop, which was one of the largest in Colonial America.

After the Goddards closed the Philadelphia newspaper and moved to Baltimore in 1774, Mary Katherine took over operation of the newspaper and printing plant while her brother busied himself establishing an intercolonial postal system in defiance of the official British post office.

On May 10, 1775, the colophone of the newspaper was changed to reflect what had been going on for well over a year, it read: "Published by M.K. Goddard" and remained that way for the duration of the Revolutionary War. Despite the hardship of wartime paper shortages, Goddard continued publishing and kept Marylanders informed as to the progress of the war.

Known as a feisty and tough defender of press freedom, Goddard refused to name an author of an article after the local Whig Club visited the newspaper's office in 1777 and demanded to know the identity of "Tom-Tell Truth."

"Although William Goddard was given 24 hours to leave town, Mary Katherine Goddard stead-



**Patriot, publisher:** *This portrait of Mary Katherine Goddard was reprinted in her 1783 almanac.*

fastly refused to say who the author was and remained in Baltimore to continue publication of the paper," observed *The Sun* in a 1976 article.

In January, 1777, Mary Katherine made publishing history when she ran off on her press the first certified copy of the Declaration of Independence that contained the names of the signers.

The bottom of the document reads: "Baltimore, in Maryland: Printed by Mary Katherine Goddard." A copy that was certified by signers John Hancock and Charles Thomson is in the Maryland Hall of Records in Annapolis.

In 1775, she was appointed Baltimore's first postmaster and moved the post office to her printing office on the southeast corner of Baltimore and South streets, where years later Arunah S. Abell, founder of *The Sun*, erected the Sun Iron Building, later destroyed by the Great Fire of 1904.

Goddard, who was known for keeping "scrupulous postal records," recorded postal receipts of 195 pounds for the year ended Oct. 5, 1776, the first full year she was postmaster. When compared with 130 pounds in Philadelphia and 82 pounds in New York City over the same period, that made the Baltimore post office the busiest in the nation at the time.

She also instituted a delivery service that abolished the established custom of postal patrons having to call for letters at the post office. In her paper, she advertised for "A Penny-Post wanted. A man of good character, well qualified to perform the business, or Letter-Carrier in this Town, will meet with good encouragement by applying to M.K. Goddard, at the Post Office."

After a change in the Postmaster General's office and appeals to George Washington and the U.S. Senate, Goddard was relieved of her job in 1789. In addition to her work as a newspaper publisher, printer, bookbinder and bookseller, she also operated a dry goods

and stationery business from the early 1870s until 1807.

After she had a falling out with her brother, who bought her out in 1784, she ceased to have any connection to the newspaper and confined her activities to her separate business interests.

"Not much is known of Mary Katherine's personal life," said *The Evening Sun*. "A portrait of her reprinted in her 1783 almanac shows a determined-looking woman with thin, pursed lips."

A contemporary account described Goddard, who never married, as a "woman of extraordinary judgment, energy, nerve and strong, good sense."

She retired in 1809 or 1810, and continued to live alone in Baltimore with Belinda Starling, her faithful black slave.

At her death in 1816, Goddard gave Starling her freedom and "all the property of which I may die possessed, all of which I do to recompense the faithful performance of duties to me."

Goddard, who was buried in the graveyard of St. Paul's Parish in Baltimore, left no other legatees in her will.