

*Moving into the Public Eye:
Women and Legal Scrivening in Later Nineteenth-Century Finland*

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Who did the legal writing for courts and administration in nineteenth-century Finland? You may automatically take for granted, as I did, that this was done by male judges and their trainees, court clerks and officials. However, in my presentation I will argue that such a male-only view of legal writing is to some extent a result of unconscious gender bias as far as nineteenth-century Finland is concerned. My research has unearthed several cases in which women as well as girls did legal writing and copying in the privacy of their own homes either occasionally or as an important source of income in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Economic pluriactivity and office-holding customs as well as genteel poverty explain why women were thus employed. This invisible legal writing became more visible in the 1880s and 1890s when women were increasingly employed by courts as copyists and advocate's assistants even if their own possibilities to advocate was barred by new legislation. In the early 1890s, women also started to study law at the University of Helsinki. In the 1890s, we also find a couple of women – close relatives of the sitting judge – acting as scribes in rural district courts. Thus, women's legal work and writing became step by step more public and visible. I would argue that in several European countries (e.g. Sweden, Finland, England) the under-researched undergrowth of women's (para)legal work copying and writing pre-dates and probably also precludes the appearance of first female lawyers in the public gaze.