

Susan Flagg Poole. *Lost Legacy: Inspiring Women of Nineteenth-Century America.* West Chester, Penn: Chrysalis Books, 1999. 114 pp. \$14.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-87785-386-2.



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It can be difficult in our secular age to keep the spiritual lives of women in the forefront of our minds when teaching women's history. Susan Flagg Poole's *Lost Legacy* provides a needed corrective to secular women's history, and offers tantalizing biographical tidbits that motivate the reader to learn more about the ten fascinating nineteenth-century women whose lives are briefly summarized in this slender volume. Although this book unabashedly promotes the Swedenborg philosophy, the women's biographies remind us that the lives of women in the nineteenth century were, after all, unabashedly spiritual in dimension.

The women in this anthology are united not only in their Swedenborg belief, but also in their social or educational background. They were writers, musicians, artists or activists who also taught school, raised children, and participated in local and national reform movements. Their idealistic views and strong beliefs that led them to make "an angelic heaven of the human race" also led them, while being sustained by their faith, to become leaders in their respective causes during an

age when being a leader and woman was a Herculean task (p.xvii). Each brief biography is titled and is accompanied by a quote from Emanuel Swedenborg.

The book is divided into two parts: Part One highlights public figures who became members of the Swedenborgian Church or were dedicated readers of Swedenborg: Lydia Maria Child, Harriot Hunt, Anna Cora Ogden Mowatt, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Jessie Willcox Smith.

The second part illuminates Swedenborgian concepts through the words of women who are largely unknown today; yet they were known within their communities and organizations in nineteenth-century America (p. xx). Their words were recorded in church journals (an underutilized source for historians) or regional publications, and they all participated in the World's Parliament of Religion, which was held in conjunction with the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. The purpose of the Parliament was to hear the religious views of others from different denominations across the country, as well as representatives from Eastern religions. All were invited to present

their unique perspectives in a pluralistic atmosphere.

In part One, "On Her Own Path," the author comprehensively mentions most of the voluminous work that Lydia Maria Child (1802-1880) produced in the first biography of the anthology. At the same time, the sustenance of Swedenborg faith is contextualized as an important element that sustained Child through her sometimes unpopular championing of causes.

The second biography, "Uniting Body, Mind and Spirit," describes the life of Harriot Kezia Hunt (1805-1875), who understood that sickness was not limited to a physical condition (pp. 15, 16). As medical practitioner who eventually was awarded a Doctor of Medicine degree from the Female Medical College of Philadelphia, she was a champion of women's suffrage and the anti-slavery movement. She earned a wide reputation for refusing to pay her taxes without representation. She dedicated her life to the health profession, and at the same time continued to promote freedom for all people, regardless of their sex, color, or class. She valued the life of the spirit and mind and was guided by strong spiritual principles.

Anna Cora Mowatt Richie (1819-1870), an actress famous in nineteenth-century America, is virtually unknown today, although her comic play, "Fashion," was revived in New York in 1924 and 1959 and is still performed in college and local theaters. Richie was a dramatic performer famous for her poetry readings and spiritual beliefs. Although she suffered from tuberculosis, she lived a dramatic public life until she died at 50 in England.

Sarah Orne Jewett (1849-1909), well-known to historians and literary scholars, was influenced by the Swedenborg pastor Theophilus Parsons, a Harvard law professor. Poole describes the Swedenborg influence and the important mentor role that Parson assumed in Jewett's life, and highlights some of Jewett's literary characters that exemplify tenets of the Swedenborg beliefs.

Part Two, "In Her Own Words," describes the lives of women who have largely remained unknown to women's history scholars, yet their public lives were unusual for their times. Lydia Fuller Dickenson (1828-1904), educator and essayist, was active in the women's movement and the Fourierist social movement, and she advanced the cause for personal, social and political freedom in many of essays and articles.

Ednah Silver (1838-1928) was an educator, writer, and the daughter of the Rev. Abiel Silver, a Swedenborgian minister. She addressed the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893, and presented a paper to the congress (women were invited to speak at this event). Mary Artemesia Lathbury (1841-1913) was a lyricist and poet laureate of Chatauqua, New York. When she was twelve she was told in a vision to write from her heart. This vision was to guide her throughout her life as she developed into a serious artist and writer who received training at the School of Design in Worcester, Massachusetts and later taught at the New York Chatauqua Institution. There she developed her talents as a musician and lyricist and wrote many hymns which are still sung today.

Selma Ware Paine (1847-1917) was a published writer and musician from Bangor, Maine who addressed the World's Parliament of Religion with an essay entitled "The Womanly Nature," which emphasized the importance of a woman's following her own path, regardless of the strictures of society. This idea was nurtured by her faith in Swedenborg principles, which stressed the concept of usefulness and the theory of the masculine and feminine nature; that a man or woman must follow one's own path in life or risk the consequences of going against one's own nature.

Ellen Spencer Mussey (1850-1936) was an attorney and social reformer from Geneva, Ohio who was well known in Washington, DC political circles as well a delegate to represent the Swedenborgian Church. Her speech illustrated the Swe-

denborg's concept of uses, emphasizing the importance of women's active participation in social causes.

An appendix following Part Two of the book lists 22 women who were Swedenborgian or were influenced by Swedenborg and includes a brief statement of their accomplishments. This list reads as a veritable Who's Who of nineteenth-century women, thereby highlighting the importance of faith in the lives of these women. The bibliography lists includes titles of biographies of all the women mentioned in the book, and provides resources for the interested reader.

Because of its blatant Swedenborgian promotion, this book may not appeal to all readers; however, including it in a syllabus for introductory women's studies courses would answer the need for an anthology of brief biographical sketches of nineteenth-century women. At the same time, it would serve to remind historians and their students of the importance of spiritual life for nineteenth-century American women. The women described here were in fact of strong Swedenborg faith, and this teaching and its importance in the history of women should not go unnoticed. *Lost Legacy* serves as a needed corrective to the highly secular nineteenth-century women's history that is widely circulated today, and it may even remind us to nurture our own frail spiritual capacities, even as we expand our intellects and physical strength.

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