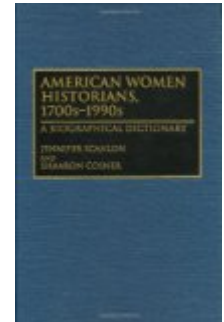


Jennifer Scanlon, Shaaron Cosner. *American Women Historians, 1700s-1990s: A Biographical Dictionary*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996. xviii + 269 pp. \$75.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-313-29664-2.



Reviewed by John E. Findling

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Jennifer Scanlon, Women's Studies Director at SUNY Plattsburgh, and Shaaron Cosner, a writer and high school teacher from Arizona, have written biographical sketches of 200 women who have (or are) pursued (pursuing) the study of history. As the authors state in their preface, many of the subjects have been overlooked in the standard biographical reference works on women, and *American Women Historians* thus introduces the reader to many women whose lives are quite obscure. Each entry details the education and career of the subject and includes a bibliography in which most of the citations are other reference works.

The increasing numbers of women in academia is clearly reflected in the selection of subjects for this book. Over 55 percent have been active since 1950; another 30 percent achieved prominence between 1900 and 1950. Only 26 subjects were active prior to 1900, and many of them (by necessity) were historians by only the most generous of definitions. Thus the authors have included nineteenth century (and some twentieth century) women who were active in archival work, "popular" history (writing historical novels

or children's history books), biography, Native American studies, and historical geography.

Most of the contemporary subjects included in the book completed a questionnaire for the authors, and their entries tend to be longer (irrespective of their importance), to include more personal information, and frequently, quotes evidently drawn from the questionnaires. This creates a sometimes bothersome lack of consistency with other entries, which are often perfunctory and lacking in any kind of analysis of the subject's significance. Another bothersome inconsistency is that subjects who completed a questionnaire have a full bibliography of their published works included, while other subjects have only the titles of their works sprinkled throughout their entries, usually without any bibliographical information.

In considering books such as these, one can always quibble over the selection of subjects to be included, and this one is no exception. A glaring omission is Nettie Lee Benson, the legendary Latin American historian who taught for many years at the University of Texas, where the Latin American library now bears her name. A number

of important contemporary historians are also conspicuous by their absence—for example, Lois W. Banner, Joan Hoff-Wilson, Susan Strasser, and Eleanor Flexner—all of whom have written on aspects of U.S. women's history. Did they fail to return their questionnaires?

Nevertheless, this is a valuable contribution, because it brings readers information about significant women who would otherwise remain sadly obscure. Perhaps Scanlon and Cosner's work will lead to master's theses or even dissertations on a number of the subjects who deserve to be better known.

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