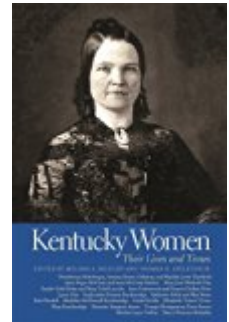


Melissa A. McEuen, Thomas H. Appleton Jr., eds.. *Kentucky Women: Their Lives and Times*. Southern Women: Their Lives and Times Series. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015. 448 pp. \$89.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8203-4452-2.



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Commissioned by Randolph Hollingsworth (University of Kentucky)

Kentucky women's history, or more accurately the lack of an interest in women's experiences in Kentucky history, is a subject that has resonated increasingly since Mary Ripley Wolfe's 1992 article on the issue. In her article, published to coincide with the bicentennial of Kentucky statehood, Wolfe asserted that the lives of women constituted the "fallen leaves and missing pages."^[1] Thankfully, interest in the presence and role of women in state histories has increased somewhat over the last twenty years, highlighted by the book under review, which is part of the Southern Women: Their Lives and Times series published by the University of Georgia Press. There is still plenty of room for growth in this area of women's history. As works from the likes of Stephen A. Aron, Ellen Eslinger, and Harry Laver attest, histories of Kentucky, in particular histories of early Kentucky, still encounter problems with fully discussing women's agency due, in part, to such issues as availability of source material.^[2] It is therefore appropriate that Melissa A. McEuen and Thomas H. Appleton Jr. choose to quote Wolfe's

article as a starting point for *Kentucky Women: Their Lives and Times*. Not only do Wolfe's words provide a clear context for the scope of this book, but they also demonstrate an awareness of where the editors envision its place in Kentucky historiography. This approach allows the editors to clearly define the scope and intentions of the collected essays, with the hope that "this volume will hasten the day when a comprehensive history of women in the commonwealth will be written" (p. 1).

Beginning with an introduction from the editors, which clearly defines the aims and refreshingly acknowledges the weaknesses of their chosen approach, *Kentucky Women* follows a roughly chronological timeline from the 1770s through the present, based on the birth dates of the subjects. Divided into seventeen chapters, *Kentucky Women* provides case studies of specific women based on era, rather than a comprehensive gender history of the period. Not limited by race nor ethnicity, Craig Thompson Friend's chapter begins the journey by comparing the frontier lives of Nonhelema

Hokolesqua, Jemima Boone Callaway, and Matilda Lewis Threlkeld, thereby introducing distinct experiences of Native American, Anglo-European, and African American women in Kentucky. Catherine Fosl and William Kuby offer chapters centered on the period prior to the Civil War, before Angela Esco Elder and Andrea S. Watkins offer case studies on how women maintained family ties despite political divisions. From this point, the volume shifts to look at the role of women in education from the late 1870s through the early part of the twentieth century. In particular, the campaign for women's suffrage, the distinctly "southern approach" to the campaign, is an aspect that permeates each chapter. Following Martha Billips's examination of Harriette Simpson Arnow's contributions to literature, the remaining essays of the collection focus on an increasing public role for women, from the civil rights movement and state politics (Carolyn R. Dupont and John Paul Hill) to McEuen's case study of Nancy Newsom Mahaffey as a business leader.

The scope of the collection is broad, but the chosen approach of the editors and contributors works well in achieving the goals defined in the introduction. By focusing on specific individuals, or comparing the experiences of two or three women, each author is able to contextualize each era of study by showing how attitudes regarding women, and the woman's role, affected the lives of the individuals concerned. The success of this approach is particularly evident in Fosl's comparison of Anne Pogue McGinty and Anne McCarty Braden, and Mary Jane Smith's character study of Laura Clay. While the bulk of the chapters deal with the Progressive Era, the lack of coverage of other time periods is not necessarily an issue, since the shared experiences, and in many cases family links, provide a clear narrative progression between the distinct contributor styles. These chapters in combination also reveal a distinct "southern" approach to white woman's suffrage, whereby the woman's rights movement was tied closely with an ideology of states' rights. This dis-

inction is clearly articulated by Lindsey Apple's study of Madeline McDowell Breckinridge, one of the strongest pieces in the collection.

Despite the many strengths of this collection, and the fine quality of writing throughout, there are issues with the approach taken. While the editors are clear in the introduction that the collection is unable to provide a comprehensive history of women in Kentucky, the limitations of the work go beyond such problems as lack of source material. For example, the women represented here tend to be drawn from historically elite families within Kentucky society, with the names of Clay, Breckinridge, and Todd returning throughout the chapters. This may have been an unavoidable decision based on the availability of source material, yet it does serve to highlight the lack of minorities discussed in a collection dealing with a "minority experience." Throughout the seventeen chapters, there are only two essays dedicated solely to African American women, while Friend's opening chapter splits the focus between one African American, one Native American, and one Anglo-European woman. Overall though, issues concerning the focus and chapter structure within *Kentucky Women* are tempered by the editors' clear acknowledgment from the outset of the collection's limitations. Intending to begin a debate and respond to a lack of publications dedicated to the experience of women in the historiography of Kentucky, McEuen and Appleton have succeeded in their aims, and it is now up to others to expand on each of the themes explored here.

Notes

[1]. Mary Ripley Wolfe, "Fallen Leaves and Missing Pages: Women in Kentucky History," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 90 (1992): 64-89.

[2]. Stephen A. Aron, "Putting Kentucky in Its Place," in *Bluegrass Renaissance: The History and Culture of Central Kentucky, 1792-1852*, ed. James Klotter and Daniel Rowland (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012), 36-52; Ellen Eslinger,

ed., *Running Mad for Kentucky: Frontier Travel Accounts* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004); and Harry Laver, "Refuge of Manhood: Masculinity and the Militia Experience," in *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South*, ed. Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-kentucky>

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