

## American Women in the Early Historical Profession

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**Abstract:** in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century, Historical Research Was Becoming Professional in the United States, and the Historical Profession Was Gradually Dominated by Men. Women Were At a Disadvantage in the Historical Profession, Which Has Been Associated with Gender Discrimination. Women Historians Made Some Compromise, At the Same Time, They Also Fought for Equal Right. Although Being Marginalized, They Made a Unique Contribution to the Historical Knowledge, Which is Likely to Be Far More Than We Used to Know. the Study of American Women Historians Helps to Enrich Our Understanding of American Historiography, It is Still a Topic Worth Further Discussion.

### 1. Introduction

Since the Mid-19th Century, with the Expansion of Higher Education in the United States, the Appropriateness of women's Access to Higher Education Has Gradually Been Recognized. during This Period, American Universities Learned from the Experience of Europe, Especially Germany, to Establish the Doctor of Philosophy. Women, Like Men, Are "Pioneers" in Receiving Ph.d. in the United States, and History Has Been One of the Leading Subjects Which Women Have Selected as a Graduate Major. However, Women in the Historical Profession Are a Long-Neglected Group, Who Experience Different Degrees of Gender Discrimination in Education, Employment, Academic Research, Participation in the American Historical Society and Other Aspects. Since 1970, with the Development of Feminist Movement and the Rise of women's History, Women in the Historical Profession Have Received More and More Attention, and Their Situation Has Gradually Improved. But the Number of Women Historians Before 1970 Was Relatively Small and Their Overall Influence Limited, There Was Relatively Little Research on Them. the Author Believes That the Inferior Position of Women in the American Historical Profession is Largely Caused by Gender Discrimination.

### 2. The Plight of Women with Ph.d. in History

In 1943, William B. Hesseltine and Louis Kaplan published a statistical study of women who received Ph.D. in history over the past 50 years. The two scholars noted that most Ph.D. candidates in history have been actuated by two ambitions: to qualify themselves for college teaching positions and to make contributions to knowledge about the past. The report compared men and women in terms of the number of Ph.D. holders, employment, and the number of academic publications. From 1891 to 1935, a total of 334 women received Ph.D. in history (206 of them awarded after 1925), compared with 1,721 men over the same period. In terms of employment, male have more advantages than female. By 1939, only 49 percent of female Ph.D. had won academic positions in the historical profession, compared with 74 percent of male. Outside academia, women with Ph.D. are still underemployed and have higher unemployment rates than men. Moreover, a considerable proportion of the women in employment taught in secondary schools, even those could find position in college or university were mainly in women's colleges and normal colleges. The injustice caused by gender discrimination is obvious, women could not find positions in men's colleges while men could find positions in women's colleges. Overall, women have consistently published less academic work than men, though women since 1931 have been significantly more active than their predecessors. According to Hesseltine and Kaplan, in terms of objective conditions of research and

publication, women did not suffer from obvious discrimination, and the difference in the quantity of academic achievements could only be explained by the fact that women did not engage in academic research.

According to the above report, women with Ph.D. work in poorer universities, often taking on more teaching duties and earning lower salaries than men. These disadvantages will inevitably affect academic research, and many women historians have complained that they have taken on too much work that has nothing to do with academic research which occupied their time. Jacqueline Goggin basically affirmed the research of Hesseltine and Kaplan, and pointed out that its disadvantage was that it did not attribute women's academic backwardness to gender discrimination. According to Deborah Cray white, the report omits two black women who have obtained Ph.D. in history at that time. In the list of categories listed, there are no black women in the category of women, and there are no women in the category of black. It was clear that black women suffer from double injustices: racial discrimination and gender discrimination.

There are many forms of sexism in historical profession, some of which are easier to identify, but some are implicit and subtle. As we all know, recommendation letters from doctoral supervisor are very important when a Ph.D. candidate want to apply for a scholarship or job. Jacqueline Goggin found that some male historians, in their letters of recommendation to female applicants, usually focused on their "age, appearance, dress, personality and quality", but paid less attention to their teaching and research abilities. In the letter of recommendation for male applicants, these descriptions that are not related to research ability will not appear generally, otherwise it will be considered inappropriate. According to statistics, in 1895-1940, only about 3% of all papers included in the *American Historical Review* (hereinafter referred to as AHR) were written by women, which was related to the fact that the early academic journals were not anonymous. In 1897, Nellie Neilson's paper was accepted by AHR, which was the first successful paper published by women historians in this authoritative journal. In this regard, Julie Des Jardins infers that it is related to her gender-neutral name. During this period, due to the lack of opportunities to publish papers in authoritative academic journals, women historians' academic achievements were more included in monographs, textbooks, summaries for biographies or historical dictionaries.

### **3. Women Historians in American Historical Association**

In 1884, Henry Baxter Adams, together with several other outstanding historians, founded the American Historical Association (hereinafter referred to as AHA), with the main purpose of legitimizing the emerging history discipline and unifying the academic methods and standards. For professional historians, it is very important to be recognized by AHA and its official journal (AHR) for their career success. Adams insisted that the membership of AHA should be open, so in the 1884 Council resolution, women were included in the membership. The constitution of AHA did not prevent women from joining the association. But that doesn't mean that women are more likely to have a place in academia. From the foundation of AHA to 1940, there were more than 100 women who usually attended the meeting. In addition to women historians, there were wives of men historians, teachers in secondary schools, and women members of some patriotic associations who were interested in history. During this period, women historians accounted for about 15% to 20% of the AHA membership, but they never actually received the same proportion of representation in the AHA governing bodies and committees. They were included in committees and even councils, but for a long time there was only one woman, Lucy Selmon. When Selmon asked for another woman to join the committee, Adams objected: "I think one woman is enough!" In the view of Smith (Bonnie G. Smith), Adams, while advocating the admission of women by the association, also restricts their development. This complex and ambivalent attitude towards working women may be common to his generation.

In addition to formal meetings, there will be luncheons, dinners, and "smoker" parties during the AHA annual meeting. Because women often complain about men's smoking and swearing, and men feel comfortable when women are not present at parties, so women are arranged to participate in the "Committee on Social Entertainment of the Ladies", which men think is for women's sake. Women

historians at that time had different views on this kind of social gathering which separate men and women. For women who teach in women's colleges and most of their colleagues are women at ordinary times, they urge to attend male parties, and believe that social or knowledge exchange opportunities should be equally suitable for men and women, the exclusion of women will hinder their career development. Women who are outside academia or teach at coeducational universities tend to maintain women's separate gatherings, with few female colleagues. They want to take this opportunity to have more communication with other women. Until the annual meeting of AHA in 1917, women were allowed to attend "smoker" parties for the first time.

Women historians have fought for their rights in AHA for a long time, but their opinions are usually ignored. They gradually realized that it was necessary to win the support of male historians, but although they expressed sympathy for them in the early stage, they seldom took practical actions to support these women in order to change the unfair situation. Male historians whose wives or daughters are women historians are usually more likely to sympathize with and support women in the historical profession. In addition, in the long-term struggle, women gradually realized the importance of collective action. In response to the rejection of women by regional organizations set up by male historians, women historians set up their own organizations. In 1930, the Lakeville Conference was held, and in 1936, it was renamed The Berkshire Conference of Women Historians, which has continued to this day.

At the AHA conference, women historians did not have many opportunities to submit papers, and papers on women's history were rarely valued. Until 1940, for the first time since the founding of AHA, a conference on women's history was held during the annual conference. At the same meeting, a conference on black history was held, and black historians submitted papers. This year, Neilson was elected the first woman president in the history of AHA. However, the victory women won was fragile. Nelson's election did not bring about the expected recognition or equal status for women historians. On the contrary, from the 1940s to the 1960s, the situation of women historians was not as good as before.

Some scholars believe that the association initially only accepted women in name. Joan Wallach Scott analyzed some of the reasons why AHA accepted female members at the beginning of its establishment. She pointed out that the purpose of bringing women into the camp of scientific history is to prove that they have overcome the "residual aristocratic and romantic" tendency in disciplines organized in a new way. In addition, if the new professional history is to be successful, it is necessary to implement standard history courses in universities, colleges and secondary schools. At that time, women played an increasingly important role in historical education in secondary schools and women's colleges.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Obviously, the inferior position of women in the early American historical profession is closely related to the sexism they encountered. But there are still many problems to be solved. For example, if the male historians dominated the history profession at that time and women suffered from various exclusions and restrictions, it is worth considering how to properly describe their contributions so as not to exaggerate. It is easy for many later feminist historians to make use of their hindsight and strive for more "contributions" for their predecessors. In addition, the study of women historians in this period as a whole or divided into several types also has the disadvantages of simplification. How to study this group and highlight their fresh activity as individuals is also a problem worth exploring. In a word, there are still many problems to be discussed about American women historians who lived before 1970.

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