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Arnita Jones

Women Historians and Women's History: An Organizational Guide

Since the late 1960s an interlocking network of new national, regional and local organizations has furthered the interests of women historians. From the beginning, however, the developing field of women's history has also been a primary concern. The enthusiasm of women historians for women's history has its parallel within other academic disciplines, but the current redefinition of historical inquiry to include such new areas as psycho-history, family history and the history of childhood has provided an unusual opportunity. Perhaps for this reason, perhaps out of frustration about the issue of employment, the history of women has become the major focus of attention for most of the women's organizations in the historical profession.

The Committee on Women Historians (CWH) of the American Historical Association (AHA) began in 1969, in response to a petition calling for the AHA to set up an ad hoc committee to investigate the status of women in the historical profession. The findings of this committee, known generally as the Rose Report, were dismal: not only was the status of women in history departments and the AHA low, but it had also suffered a further decline during several recent decades. The Rose Committee recommended that the AHA express its formal disapproval of discrimination against women and that it work actively to enlarge their numbers and status, both within the organization and the profession. The Rose Committee specifically advocated a standing Committee on Women Historians (CWH), with paid staff, to monitor and aid this activity. Since 1971 the CWH and its staff assistant have performed a variety of functions, with employment a major concern. The CWH has compiled a roster of women historians for prospective employers which has also served to provide a pool for book reviewers and for nominations to professional organizations and foundations. In 1975 this roster was published as a Directory of Women Historians, containing information on the experience and publications of 1200 women, with plans to be periodically updated. CWH continues to monitor employment of women historians, to provide information on federal affirmative action guidelines, to consult on individual grievances and to collect models of alternative employment possibilities. Additionally it has published a Survival Manual for Women (and Other) Historians and plans both a directory of foreign women historians and foreign historians concerned with women's history as well as a pamphlet on women's history in the AHA series. In 1976 CWH sponsored a Summer Institute in Women's History at Sarah Lawrence College. This program for high school teachers was designed to help them integrate women's history into the high school curriculum.

The Coordinating Committee on Women in the Historical Profession (CCWHP) was organized in 1969 at the annual meeting of the AHA and now includes some 700 members. While it is an official affiliate of the AHA and functions as an informal pressure group there, much of its activity has been aimed at developing ties with existing regional organizations and aiding in the development of new ones. Specifically, its purposes include the encouragement and recruitment of women into the historical profession, the monitoring of discrimination against women at all levels of the profession and the development of the concept of women's history as a branch of historical study. The CCWHP publishes a quarterly Newsletter which includes information on the status of women, reports of regional activities and women's caucuses in various history departments, job advertisements and statements of candidates for office in the AHA. A coordinator for graduate students publishes another newsletter; also a directory of history departments offering a degree in women's history or faculty willing to direct work in the field. The CCWHP also publishes a Research Bulletin, which began as a forum for reporting research in progress and descriptions of courses in women's history. Its editor provides a clearinghouse for course syllabi and exchange of information among historians seeking to cooperate on projects in women's history. Over the years the Bulletin has expanded to include reports of conferences, research aids, openings of archival material and an annual bibliography of articles and books published in women's history.

The Conference Group in Women's History was formed in 1974 at the annual AHA convention to increase the visibility of women's history in that organization by sponsoring panel sessions, publishing a newsletter and eventually applying for official affiliate status. It was expected that a dues arrangement would facilitate dual membership in the Conference Group and the CCWHP. During 1975 considerable discussion about the wisdom of developing two separate organizations led ultimately to the Conference Group remaining within the CCWHP for 1976 and 1977. It has assumed and enlarged the functions of the Research Bulletin. The Conference Group also publishes its own newsletter and has sponsored a series of two-hour workshops at the AHA annual meeting. Workshop
topics have included methodology and the teaching of local and regional women's history.

The Committee on the Status of Women in the Historical Profession of the Organization of American Historians (OAH) was formed in April of 1970 to combat discrimination against women historians and to further research in women's history. A standing OAH committee, its seven members sponsor programs on professional issues, social events and workshops at the annual OAH meetings. In 1972 it published a list of research in progress in women's history in the U.S. and currently has available a Roster of Historians of Women (available from OAH, 112 North Bryan Street, Bloomington, Indiana 47401). Additionally, the committee has worked to increase the attention given to women's history in the official OAH periodical, the Journal of American History.

The Berkshire Conference was formed, as legend has it, more than 50 years ago by a group of women historians in the northeast who felt unwelcome at the AHA Annual Meetings. It has met annually to discuss professional issues and research since that time, and during the last four years has planned and hosted a series of three nationally acclaimed conferences on women's history. The first, "Historical Perspectives on Women," was held at Douglass College in March of 1973 and drew an audience of five to six hundred. Thus encouraged, the Berkshire Conference planned another meeting for October of 1974 at Radcliffe College, expecting perhaps one thousand to attend. Twice that number appeared for two-and-one-half days of panels and workshops. (For a full report see Women's Studies Newsletter, Vol III, No. 2.) The third conference in this series, with an even further expanded program was held in June 1976 at Bryn Mawr (see Women's Studies Newsletter, Vol. IV, No. 3).

Formed in 1969, the West Coast Association of Women Historians (WCAWH) is the second oldest of the groups. It is affiliated with the Pacific Coast Branch (PCB) of the AHA, participates in PCB meetings and holds its own annual conference. Composed of about 500 persons, the WCAWH has the dual purpose of improving the status of women in the historical profession and promoting the research and teaching of women's history. It publishes a tri-annual Newsletter, sponsors candidates for office in the PCB, maintains an employment placement file and has surveyed the status of women historians in the western states.

The Southern Association of Women Historians is informally associated with the Southern Historical Association (SHA). Founded in Louisville in 1971 for the purpose of providing communication among women historians, it publishes a newsletter three times a year, sponsors panels at the annual SHA meeting and has surveyed employment of women in the south. A comprehensive survey of graduate history education in the south was done in 1975 by D'Ann Campbell. Currently the organization is exploring a new structure which would encourage the development of local affiliate groups.

The Metropolitan New York Chapter of the CCWHP has been one of the most active of the regional groups. It has about 140 members, holds monthly meetings to discuss a variety of issues related to research and professional concerns, maintains a job file, has surveyed the status of women historians in metropolitan New York and has reported periodically the effects of cutbacks in that area on women. In September of 1974 it adopted a new structure based on five committees:

liaison with AHA; grievance and sex discrimination; membership, employment, graduate students; programs, papers and panels; liaison with other women's groups. A related recent development is the new Institute of Historical Studies founded in New York to provide affiliation to unemployed historians.

Women Historians of the Midwest (WHOM) was founded in 1973, has nearly 300 members, meets monthly to present research and holds an annual business meeting. Its stated purposes are to promote and extend sisterly relations among women historians and to advance research in women's history. WHOM publishes a bimonthly newsletter and is currently producing, in cooperation with KTCA-TV of Minneapolis, a three-part television series on the history of women in Minnesota. In 1975 it held a two-day conference on women's history which drew 600 people. WHOM is planning a second conference in October 1977 with the Chicago Women's History Group which meets monthly at the Newberry Library.

Women Historians of Greater Cleveland/Ohio was organized in 1971, has about 20 to 30 members, meets monthly to hear guest speakers and short papers, publishes a newsletter and holds an annual all-day conference. This group has surveyed the state of women historians in Ohio for the Ohio Academy of Historians and has presented special panels at their meetings.

The Missouri Valley History Conference has an informally organized women's caucus which meets annually in March, sponsors panels and sessions and helps with the special effort to include graduate students on the program.

The Upstate New York Women's History Conference was organized in 1975, has held a one-day workshop and publishes a newsletter.
The Berkshire Conference: Sandi E. Cooper, College of Staten Island/CUNY, Staten Island, New York 10301.

Canadian Committee on Women's History: Ann Leger Anderson, Department of History, University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada.

Chesapeake Bay Area Group of Women's Historians: Hilda Smith, Department of History, University of Maryland, College Park 20742.

Chicago Women's History Group: Marlene Stein Wortman, 1331 East 50 Street, Chicago 60615.

Committee on the Status of Women in the Historical Profession (OAH): 112 North Bryan Street, Bloomington, Indiana 47401.

Committee on Women Historians (AHA): Emiliana Noether, Department of History, University of Connecticut, Storrs 06268.

Conference Group in Women's History: Hilda Smith, Department of History, University of Maryland, College Park 20742.

Coordinating Committee on Women in the Historical Profession: Karen Offen, 450 Raymundo Drive, Woodside, California 94062.

Institute of Historical Research: Zec Giraldo, 371 Seventh Avenue, New York, New York 10001.

Metropolitan New York Chapter of the CCWHP: Abby Kleinbaum, 227 West 78 Street, New York, New York 10024.

Missouri Valley History Conference Women's Caucus: Jacqueline St. John, Department of History, University of Nebraska, Omaha 68101.

New England Association of Women Historians: Lilian Shiman, 93 Carven Road, Newton Highlands, Massachusetts 02161.

Southern Association of Women Historians: Rosemary Carroll, Department of History, Coe College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52402.


West Coast Association of Women Historians: Gretchen Schwenn, P.O. Box 1111, Berkeley, California 94701.

Women Historians of Greater Cleveland: Lois Scharf, Department of History, John Carroll University, University Heights, Ohio 44118.

Women Historians of the Midwest: Winifred Bolin, Box 80021, Como Station, St. Paul, Minnesota 55108.

Judith K. Brodsky

The Women's Caucus for Art

The Women's Caucus for Art is a national professional organization of over 1,000 women art historians, artists and curators. Historically speaking, the Caucus is of its time. Women in a number of academic societies have been establishing or have established caucuses in order to bring to bear more concerted action of their societies, chiefly to work against discrimination in the field and on improvement in the curriculum. The history of the Caucus reveals some of the intricate problems facing women in the attempt to gain equal status.

The Caucus came into being at the College Art Association's (CAA) 1972 meeting in San Francisco. It has not, however, remained within the College Art Association. The CAA in 1974 informed the Women's Caucus of the College Art Association, as it was then called, that it could no longer use that name. Allegedly, use of the name made CAA legally responsible for activities and actions undertaken by the Caucus. Since the members of the Caucus were all CAA members—working professionals and graduate students—the CAA position posed curious problems and suggested certain assumptions. One may surmise that the CAA saw the Caucus as a threat to the established order and tried, therefore, to limit its potential power within the CAA.

The Caucus, not to be deterred, assumed its present name and proceeded to become an independently incorporated organization with tax-free status. Its relationship with the CAA is complex but continuing. While women outside the CAA have been attracted to the Caucus—artists, especially—there is a high degree of overlap in membership. A number of the women most visible in CAA activities are on the Caucus board or actively support the Caucus in other ways.

After the Caucus had been organized, the CAA established a Committee on the Status of Women. The women chosen to head that Committee—Linda Nohlin Pomer and Sheila McNally—are Caucus members and have seen the Committee and the Caucus as a team rather than as separate, parallel entities. The Committee on the Status of Women and the Caucus...