

Review of PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN'S ARCHIVES. Tanya Zanish-Belcher with Anke Voss (Eds.) *Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2013, 488 pp., \$69.95, \$49.95 (SAA Members), ISBN: 1-931666-47-4.* Review by Annie Tummino

Efforts to archive women's lives have proliferated over the last 40 years, accompanied by a myriad of papers, activities and projects. However, until now, those interested in women's archives were largely left to fend for themselves, cobbling together understandings from scattered sources.¹ Finally, Tanya Zanish-Belcher and Anke Voss's *Perspectives on Women's Archives* provides a comprehensive introduction useful for historians and archivists alike.

As stated by the editors, the volume "is only a beginning and is not intended to be definitive." However, they succeed in providing a firm grounding in the field's historical developments, theoretical debates, and practical challenges. Readers will gain an understanding of where and how to find women's collections, omissions and gaps that need to be filled, and strategies for continued growth.

The book is divided into four sections and includes previously published as well as newly solicited articles. I would have preferred that publication dates appear at the beginning of each article, rather than the end, to immediately clarify the context of each piece.

Section 1, "Reclaiming our Past," starts with "Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges," Gerda Lerner's seminal 1974 essay. Many of the questions

¹ Notable exceptions include a few volumes that address specific areas/themes, including *Make Your Own History: Documenting Feminist & Queer Activism in the 21st Century*, Lyz Bly and Kelly Wooten (eds), 2012; *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources*, Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry J. Katz, and Mary Elizabeth Perry (eds), 2010; and *Women, Information, and the Future: Collecting and Sharing Resources Worldwide*, Eva Steiner Moseley (ed.), 1995.

she poses are still relevant today, and provide a framework with which to move through the remaining essays. For example, how might historians move beyond a necessary but insufficient “compensatory” history highlighting “great women” to a history that documents ordinary women’s lives? How does the practice of women’s history challenge or contradict previously constructed male-centered narratives?

Section 1 also covers historic and courageous efforts by archivists and/or activists to provide access to women’s materials, including Mary Ritter Beard’s quest to establish a world-wide women’s archive starting in the 1930s, the enormous *Women’s History Sources* survey of the 1970s, and the Black Women in the Middle West Project of the 1980s.

The articles in Sections 2 and 3, “Locating Women in the Archives” and “Documenting Women’s Experiences,” begin to answer the questions posed by Lerner, while also highlighting new challenges. The difference between “locating” and “documenting” is subtle could have been more clearly explicated; nonetheless, together the essays demonstrate a variety of approaches to both endeavors. The articles explore institutions that specialize in women (like the Iowa Women’s Archives); those that hold rich collections on women within the context of a broader framework (such as the Library of Congress and the Archives of Historically Black College and Universities); and thematic research on specific aspects of the female experience (including religion, human reproduction, feminism, and lesbianism).

Strategies for locating existing but hidden materials on women (for example, within family papers named after men), and new acquisition and documentation strategies (such as community outreach, forming coalitions, and oral histories) are also discussed.

Overall, the articles suggest that archiving women is often not straightforward. Breaking from traditional practices may be necessary, and ensuring that a diversity of women are represented requires additional thought and intentionality.

Section 4 consists of two concluding essays. First, Gerda Lerner revisits the questions posed in her 1974 piece and projects her vision for the future of women's history. Second, Elizabeth A. Myers reflects on the articles in the reader from an archival perspective. These pieces help weave together ideas and themes while raising questions about the trajectory of the field in the 21st century.

Based on the evidence in the reader, there appears to be an almost symbiotic relationship between feminist activism, women's archives, and academic scholarship. The interplay of these forces resulted in great leaps forward in terms of documenting women, and renewed collaborations and commitments between these actors offer rich possibilities for the future. Like Zanish-Belcher and Voss, I hope that this reader will serve as a foundation upon which others will build.