

*Women and Nature: Saving the "Wild" West*, by Glenda Riley. Women in the West Series. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999. xviii, 279 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$60.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

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With broad brush, Glenda Riley portrays the myriad ways women "conquered" the West by feminizing it and, in the process, making "unique gender-related contributions to the environmental ethic in the United States" (191). Riley chronicles the achievements of women who wrote about the West, photographed it, explored its vastness, climbed its mountains, and studied its flora and fauna. Overall, she finds that our foremothers looked at the West not as a place to be exploited but as a tapestry of scenic landscapes, historic sites, and native cultures worthy of preservation. *Women and Nature* is thus a compendium of heroines and role models, some well known in their time, but most little recognized or studied seriously by environmental historians.

Riley insists, gently and with good humor, that scholars should pay more attention to the roles that women of diverse race and class have played in the course of American environmentalism, especially between 1870 and 1940, when the conservation and preservation movements intertwined and took many forms. She argues especially for the inclusion of women of color—African American, Hispanic American, and Native American—as well as a critical mass of club women across the western United States who campaigned to clean up waterways, establish parks, and save forests, songbirds, historic sites, and indigenous cultures, all under an ideological banner linking the wise use and preservation of America's resources with "motherhood, family, community, religion, and patriotism" (107).

Riley's West begins at the Mississippi River; she does not lop off that column of states east of the plains, as so many western historians do. She credits Iowa and Minnesota women for their early involvement in the natural sciences, citing, for instance, the 59 women listed among the Davenport Academy of Science's 206 members in the 1870s. Ornithologist Althea Sherman, the author of an "undisputed classic" on Iowa birds, *Birds of an Iowa Dooryard*, and the network of women naturalists to which she belonged are mentioned in passing (58). (So many women are recognized in this book that passing references constitute much of the narrative development.) Likewise, Lou Henry Hoover, trained in geology, is mentioned briefly for her work with Girl Scouts as well as the rural Virginia retreat she designed for President Hoover and herself, Camp Rapidan, which the Hoovers later donated to the National Park Service (130).

Riley devotes an entire chapter to the contributions of "Club Women and Other Activists," where once again she notes the early involvement of Iowa women in the campaign for clean water. In the early 1910s, the Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs (IFWC) took the lead in urging "wise water usage, purity of streams and rivers, and prohibition of industrial pollution," a cause the national federation then adopted as a priority (104). However, it is here, in the discussion of clubwomen, that gaps in her broad-brush approach begin to show. Riley, citing several women who served as state or federal legislators or as appointees to high-level posts with responsibility either to make or to implement resource conservation policies, notes that "American women seized political opportunities whenever possible" in the early twentieth century (110). She does not, however, provide much evidence to suggest how effective any of these women were at shaping local, state, or federal resource policies, or how a gendered perspective actually influenced policy decisions.

In this respect, the contributions of Iowa clubwomen are instructive. From the early 1920s through the 1940s, critical years when the Iowa Board of Conservation formulated its initial policies concerning park acquisition and development, forestry, and water quality, a succession of IFWC leaders held at least one seat, and sometimes two, on the board. These women did indeed bring a gendered perspective to the power structure that created state resource policy, a perspective that placed a slightly higher value on park aesthetics, historic preservation, and the restorative quality of nature.

Riley's study suggests that Iowa clubwomen may have been unusual, yet it is difficult to believe that they were exceptional given the extraordinary involvement of clubwomen nationwide. If we can identify gendered perspectives on nature and the physical environment, we should be able to characterize and assess the ways women made a difference in the realm of policy. Thus, this book implicitly raises an important question: whether women's myriad activities on behalf of nature from 1870 to 1940 mainly influenced an environmental ethic or whether women's political activism also influenced the shaping of resource policies in definable ways. In *Women and Nature*, Glenda Riley provides a useful map to territory that is ripe for further exploration. There is much that we have yet to learn about the nature of women's contributions to American environmentalism and about how women and men negotiated differing perspectives to achieve shared environmental objectives.

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