

One reason Hoover is perceived as a do-nothing president is that he was not a risk taker and did almost everything behind the scenes. That hurt him politically, as Jeansonne points out, in his relations with Congress. As Secretary of Commerce for nine years, Hoover was a seasoned administrator who knew how to convene committees, conferences, and commissions, all with solid agendas. Jeansonne labels him “a technocrat with a heart” (76). But that heart had very little instinct for politics. Hoover was not prone to backroom deal-cutting when it came to moving federal legislation. Unfortunately, being too hands-off meant that critical legislation was either killed or bottled up in committee for months. Indeed, Congress passed more legislation during the first hundred days of FDR’s administration in 1933 than in all four years of Hoover’s term. Jeansonne’s description of the Hoover presidency as a “partial success” may be generous.

Herbert Hoover was a good man, but not a great president. He was honest and hard-working, but lacked political skills and even a sense of humor, although Jeansonne tries hard to “humanize” him. His successor, Franklin D. Roosevelt, in contrast, was a great president but not a good man. Roosevelt was cunning and duplicitous but a master of politics. Hoover’s image was crushed by the Great Depression while Roosevelt’s was enhanced, at least until 1936. The onset of World War II and the subsequent Allied victory alleviated the effects of the Great Depression and elevated FDR’s status to the upper tier of U.S. presidents.

*From Society Page to Front Page: Nebraska Women in Journalism*, by Eileen M. Wirth. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013. xvi, 186 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography. \$17.95 paperback.

Reviewer Kimberly Wilmot Voss is associate professor of journalism at the University of Central Florida. She has written extensively about women in journalism.

For too long people have generalized about women’s roles at newspapers. Yes, these women were marginalized. In some cases, they were literally put in separate rooms from the male reporters. Yet their roles on the margins did not mean that they did not have an impact—especially on their readers. The soft news that most women covered was often about humanity. After all, the content in the women’s or society pages included family, fashion, and food—topics that affect the daily lives of readers.

Eileen M. Wirth’s book, *From Society Page to Front Page*, is helpful in challenging those generalizations. In her research, Wirth examined

issues of newspapers from Nebraska from the 1870s to the 1970s. She discovered that women covered an interesting mix of hard and soft news topics, far more varied than many previous journalism histories have suggested. One highlight of the book is her discovery of the food-related stories women were writing. For example, she highlights Harriet Dakin MacMurphy, who was the domestic sciences (the precursor to home economics) editor at the *Omaha World-Herald*. Her editorials about food safety helped persuade Congress to pass the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906.

Wirth conducted extensive historical research and interviewed numerous women. For historians, the concluding notes are fascinating to read. The book would be an excellent addition to a journalism history class—a great demonstration to graduate students of the rigor of good historical scholarship.

For generations women mostly wrote for newspapers' women's pages. With a few exceptions, most journalism histories ignore the content of those pages or dismiss them as "fluff." Recent journalism history projects have shown, however, that forward-thinking women's page editors were making improvements both shocking and subtle as they transformed their sections in ways that transformed their readership. They also helped to transform the newspaper industry. Wirth's book adds to that conversation.

Wirth, a journalism professor at Creighton University, was one of the first female reporters at the *Omaha World-Herald* outside of the women's pages. Her experiences provide an interesting perspective on women and newspaper journalism. The book's conclusion is correct: Too many significant women in journalism and other fields have been overlooked in history. Regional scholarship is the best way to document these previously unrecognized women. As Wirth writes, "We cannot understand the history of women in the United States unless we consider local and regional dimensions because family obligations have limited the geographic and career mobility of the vast majority of American women" (164).

Wirth also includes stories about women who covered hard news beats. During World War II, for example, women such as Marjorie Paxson, who worked for the United Press in Nebraska, were able to work on the news side. Some women covered wars from the front lines or became White House reporters. There is an interesting chapter about minority journalists, several of whom crusaded for civil rights.

Wirth is right to conclude her narrative in the 1970s as the "firsts" began to invade the male turf of the newsrooms and newspaper management. Historians are often drawn to firsts, but more work needs to

be done on the women of the 1950s and 1960s who laid the groundwork for the “firsts” to accomplish their achievements.

As journalism critics look at when newspapers lost their connection to their communities, it may be when newspapers “transformed” their women’s pages in the early 1970s. The women’s page journalists were a true tie to their readers. Take, for example, Maude Coons, who started at the *Omaha World-Herald* as the household editor in 1936. She answered 60–75 questions from callers each day, she estimated. Sometimes the questions veered from fashion and food into other areas, as some callers “really were just lonely and wanted to talk.”

*On Behalf of the Family Farm: Iowa Farm Women’s Activism since 1945*, by Jenny Barker Devine. Iowa and the Midwest Experience Series. Iowa City: University of Iowa, 2013. xi, 188 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$19.95 paperback.

Reviewer Nancy K. Berlage is assistant professor of history at Texas State University. Her Ph.D. dissertation (Johns Hopkins University, 2000) was “The Farm and Home Bureau: Organization, Family, Community, and Professionals, 1914–1928.”

In *On Behalf of the Family Farm*, Jenny Barker Devine offers a fresh and intriguing interpretation of farm women’s organizational activities. She demonstrates that women performed vital functions in support of Iowa’s key farm organizations, including the Farm Bureau, the Iowa Farmers Union, and the National Farm Organization. Devine begins with the 1920s and then moves forward in time as she considers the varied approaches each organization took to farm problems. She convincingly demonstrates that women bolstered these organizations as they tackled the key problems of fluctuating markets and policy, population shifts, and technological change that increasingly threatened the viability of Iowa farms and communities after World War II. Clearly, gender expectations restricted leadership opportunities for women. Still, these activists were able to negotiate such strictures. They worked through female auxiliaries, alongside male leaders and members, and even in their daily and community activities to shape organizational programs in ways they thought best served agriculture and their own needs. Devine also illustrates how these activists developed strategies for enacting their multiple roles as wives, mothers, community organizers, and advocates for rural life. Over time, women renegotiated their own sense of identity in ways that allowed them to create new types of opportunities for themselves. By the 1970s and 1980s, activists increasingly assumed positions of leadership and