

educators, and woman suffrage. The final piece in the collection considers the roles of black women as elected officials in Oklahoma. The quality of the essays varies. The two on Indian women contain interesting information on cultural practices; Terry P. Wilson's essay on the Osage includes fascinating research on the impact of oil money on social practices within that group. Portions of some essays, however, are little more than lists of "firsts"—first county superintendent, first officers of suffrage groups and so on, without much analysis or interpretation. Again, the book fulfills its stated task. It provides some information about the contribution of women to Oklahoma history and to the history of the West. Obviously more needs to be done, but the collection is a nice beginning.

These four "women in . . ." books are all useful to some degree. As collections of information about interesting women who were vital to the creation of institutions, governments, societies, and the arts, they help spread the word: women have not been household drudges for all eternity, as some contemporary interpretations imply. The books do not try to reevaluate the lives of their subjects by any new standards, however, and they do not admit that women who led more ordinary lives also served a vital purpose in their more circumscribed worlds. Many newer books on women's history suggest interpretations that give value to anonymous lives. These volumes are not that ambitious. They do serve their purposes, however, by reminding us that adventure, ambition, talent, and creativity are not limited to the male gender, and that activist women have enriched all of our lives. The Oklahoma and Nebraska volumes are quite good and deserve a more than local audience. The Louisiana and Colorado books, especially the latter, might interest only those with a personal stake in those states.

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

PAULA NELSON

Women of Fairhope, by Paul M. Gaston. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984. xiv, 143 pp. Notes, index. \$13.50 cloth.

Along with its practical frontiersmen, Iowa also spawned utopian dreamers, and Ernest Gaston was one of them. A young 1890s graduate of Drake University in Des Moines, Gaston had found the writings of Edward Bellamy and Henry George so inspiring that he dreamed of founding a colony on the principles of communitarianism, equality, and equal opportunity in the ownership of land. A single tax on land, as Henry George had claimed, would eliminate

speculation and thus free labor and capital to assume their full share of private property. Ernest Gaston led a few Iowans, and like-minded idealists from all over the country, to a site along Mobile Bay in Alabama. There he founded the Fairhope Single Tax Colony, which lasted from 1894 to our own era, and which became a symbol of hope for a generation of radicals.

The grandson of that founder, Professor Paul M. Gaston of the University of Virginia (who, like his father, was born in the colony), has chosen the stories of three women to illuminate the Fairhope experience. The first, Nancy Lewis, was a neighboring farm woman who sold her land to the colony but was unwelcome as a member because she was black. Frightened for their future if they admitted blacks, the northern idealists proposed a separate experiment for Negroes alone, but the plan never materialized. Since this book originated as the Lamar Lectures at the University of Georgia, a series devoted to Southern history and culture, Gaston uses Nancy Lewis to raise questions of race as they impinged on the relations between southern society and this "New England enclave" along Mobile Bay.

Marie Howland, the second of the women, was, indeed, a New Englander, but her radical leanings and her novels, such as the popular *Papa's Own Girl*, had brought her a national reputation before she joined the colony. She came to Fairhope from Topolobampo, a similarly utopian adventure of Americans in Sinaloa, Mexico. Dominant themes of Howland's radicalism were the emancipation of women through the vote, greater legal equality in marriage, and changes in domestic architecture.

The final chapter of the book deals with Marietta Johnson, who sought to reform society by first improving education. As a traditional teacher, who had imposed discipline and rigid expectations, she read John Dewey and came to cry over the damage she had done to her pupils. At Fairhope she found a fertile field for experimental progressive education; she allowed each child to develop at his or her own speed and encouraged the balanced growth of children mentally, physically, and morally. Only in the school years will a child learn justice, she felt. Her school became a national model, visited on several occasions by Dewey himself. The great man even brought his own fourteen-year-old son to work there for a time.

Women of Fairhope has real charm. It reflects the care and love of a historian who applies the rigors of his profession to a subject which touches on his own roots and is close to his own heart. That he selects women as his focus is a tribute to his rapport with the present. That he chooses to examine southern culture through an experiment

born of an Iowa radical is a measure of his breadth. The lectures must have been a delight to hear, as they are to read.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE

ROBERT V. HINE

A Woman's Ministry: Mary Collson's Search for Reform as a Unitarian Minister, a Hull House Social Worker, and a Christian Science Practitioner, by Cynthia Grant Tucker. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984. xviii, 216 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$27.95 cloth.

Cynthia Grant Tucker's book about a woman's "search for reform as a Unitarian minister, a Hull House social worker, and a Christian Science practitioner," to quote the subtitle, is difficult to categorize and review. It is not a comprehensive biography of Mary Collson (1870-1953). It is not a study of her "life and times," that investigates the major social and intellectual developments in American during the course of her lifetime. It is not a work in "woman's history," that focuses on gender as its central issue or organizing principle. Nor is it a history of Unitarianism or Christian Science in nineteenth and twentieth century America. It is, instead, a work that touches on all of these. Furthermore, it is a study of a seemingly important yet virtually unknown woman which leaves the reader rather ambivalent about the subject and uncertain about her significance in American history. Did an unjust and sexist society stifle this brilliant and dedicated woman and hide what she accomplished, or was she a troubled individual who was unable to live up to her convictions and remained relatively obscure for good reason? Were there other Mary Collsons in the world, or was she an exceptional, perhaps even a unique, individual? Unfortunately, to be honest, one cannot tell from this work.

The book begins with Mary Collson's childhood in Iowa. She was born and grew up in the frontier town of Humboldt, in the northwestern part of the state. Humboldt's pioneers were Unitarians who, infused with the spirit of transcendentalism and liberal reform, colonized the town in the interests of freedom and equality for all, male and female, black and white. The Collson family's inability to achieve prosperity, however, which young Mary blamed on an incompetent father, who thus "did not inspire in . . . [her] a high opinion of men," had a profound effect on her life (4). So, too, did a prodigious group of female Unitarian ministers known as the Iowa Sisterhood, under whose tutelage she fell. After becoming the darling of the liberal community in this rather remarkable town, Collson went east to become a Unitarian minister and then returned to Iowa to assume a pulpit in the poor farming town of Ida Grove.

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