

Celebrating women in history

BY FAYE JONES

March is Women's History Month, and these fascinating books show the various facets of women throughout history.

Charlotte S. Waisman and Jill S. Tietjen's **Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America** (Collins, \$29.95, 272 pages, ISBN 9780061246517) is like a slideshow of American women's history. Pictures and photographs along with short captions document women who've excelled in areas of American culture, including science, politics, business, entertainment and sports. The ones we all know from history class (Pocahontas) and popular culture (Oprah Winfrey) are here. Many are lesser known but no less interesting; for example, Sister Rose Thering, who was instrumental in the Vatican's repeal of its policy of holding Jews responsible for the crucifixion. One fascinating set of photographs shows a Boston Marathon official trying to tear off K. Switzer's race number when he realizes the "K" stands for Kathrine (in 1967 Switzer became the first woman to officially enter and run in the event). With more than 900 women profiled, this book is a perfect addition to any library: public, school, college or personal.



Woman warriors

Rosalind Miles and Robin Cross quickly disabuse readers of the notion that women's participation in combat is a relatively new phenomenon in **Hell Hath No Fury: True Stories of Women at War from Antiquity to Iraq** (Three Rivers Press, \$14.95, 400 pages, ISBN 9780307346377). This encyclopedic collection of short, incisive essays is convincing in its portrayal of women as anything but "the gentle sex." Miles and Cross divide the book into sections, which show the various ways women have participated in war throughout the centuries. We have the rulers, such as Elizabeth I and Indira Gandhi. There are the women who have served as nurses and doctors, and there are the "recording angels," such as Christiane Amanpour and Tokyo Rose, the famous World War II-era propagandist for the Japanese. And there are those who fought in wars as men, only to be revealed as women after their deaths.



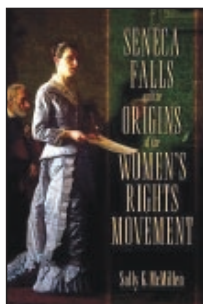
In fact, women have been as strategic, as wily and even as cruel as men when facing their opposition. One section deals with what Miles and Cross call the "ruthless opportunists, sadists, and psychopaths unleashed and empowered by war." One of the more horrible examples is Nazi concentration camp guard Hermine Braunsteiner, aka the "Stamping Mare," who literally stomped elderly prisoners to death with her steel-toed boots.

Still, this collection about the noble, the fierce and the downright evil makes it clear that though there's little record of women's military feats, it's because they have been written out of history, not because they never happened.

The long struggle

At the 30th anniversary of the Seneca Falls Convention, Elizabeth Cady Stanton summarized the efforts of women's rights activists in the 19th century: "It taxes and wearies the memory to think of the conventions we have held . . . the Legislatures we have besieged, the petitions and tracts we have circulated, the speeches, the calls, the resolutions we have penned, the never ending debates we have kept up in public and private, and yet to each and all, our theme is as fresh and absorbing as it was the day we started."

Using the convention as a starting point in **Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movement** (Oxford, \$28, 320 pages, ISBN 9780195182651), Sally McMillen details the struggles of the women's rights movement in the 1800s, focusing on the lives of four of its leaders: Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone and Susan B. Anthony.



McMillen provides an in-depth picture of the movement and the remarkable dedication of these women who faced rejection after rejection in attempting to earn women the vote, basic rights to their own money and children, and higher education. This rejection came from many quarters, from male political and religious leaders as well as most women's indifference or hostility to their cause. McMillen does not shy away from the missteps women made during the struggle. Some activists, disappointed when former slaves gained the vote before them, resorted to racist tactics in their speeches and writings. At times, personal and professional jealousies hindered the cause.

Still, what comes across most clearly is their untiring commitment to women's rights. It is both an inspiring and sad story. Inspiring because these women set the nation upon a course that finally recognized women as equals. Sad when you think of the contributions that women could have made in other fields instead of working so hard to achieve rights that should have been theirs all along. ♥

Faye Jones' doctoral dissertation was on working women of the Victorian era.

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