

WOMEN'S WORLDS AT THE AMERICAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY*

JANICE MONK

ABSTRACT. For much of the twentieth century, women in the United States found it difficult to obtain university positions in geography. Opportunities existed in other types of institutions, however, including the American Geographical Society (AGS). This article addresses ways in which the Society's mission intersected with its historical context from 1895 to 1970 to create niches for women in editorial and library work. It explores the women's origins, their perspectives and experiences with the AGS, and the significance of their contributions to the discipline. It suggests the potential of a gendered social approach for enriching understanding of the histories of geographical institutions. *Keywords:* American Geographical Society, employment, history of geography, staff, women.

*All of this is so close to my heart that I'm sure if anyone cut me open they'd find
a map inside, with rivers and roads for veins.*

—Ena L. Yonge, AGS map curator, 1917–1962

From the late nineteenth century until the early 1970s, women scientists found it difficult to obtain appointments in universities. Their opportunities were in high schools, the normal schools that subsequently became state teachers' colleges, women's colleges, governmental agencies, and alternative institutions such as museums and research organizations (Rossiter 1982, 1995). The American Geographical Society (AGS) was one such alternative institution. The long tenures of Gladys Wrigley and Wilma Fairchild as editors of the *Geographical Review* are well known—sequentially they held office for more than fifty years. Douglas McManis's (1996) essay on "leading ladies" at the AGS described thirteen women associated with the Society, nine of whom were employees. When we include other supporting actors, the numbers expand substantially. John K. Wright (1952) recorded seventy-four women employees between 1894 and 1951, of whom more than half did professional work, while the others occupied clerical positions, though those boundaries were often blurred. Women's presence continued over the next two decades, accounting for about two-thirds of the fifty-seven employees in 1966 (Miller 1967).

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✦ DR. MONK is the executive director of the Southwest Institute for Research on Women at the University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona 85721.