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THE CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN IN NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALOLOGY

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“... WHEREAS, the ASM took time to reflect on its history; and
... looking to the future, the Society elected women to three of its six offices ...”

(excerpt from host resolution of the 1994 75th anniversary meeting of
The American Society of Mammalogists)

The 75th anniversary meeting of The American Society of Mammalogists (ASM), held in Washington, D.C., in 1994, focused attention on the history of mammalogy. In addition to historical talks presented at the meeting, a book was published to document the development of the Society and to celebrate the 75th anniversary (Birney and Choate, 1994). Although the volume offered a generally excellent treatment of the history of the discipline, it made little mention of female mammalogists. This led us to wonder if a lack of recognition was because women have made few significant contributions to the science of mammalogy or if it was because the contributions of women have been more difficult to characterize and, thus, to document. This special feature endeavors to address this question.

Key words: women, mammalogists, American Society of Mammalogists, history, science

The role of women has changed dramatically in North American society over the past century. Until the mid 1900s, the widely accepted concept of “separate spheres” held that the primary role of women was marriage and the raising of children (Abir-Am and Outram, 1989; Ainley, 1989; Bailey, 1994; Ogilvie, 1986, 1989; Slack, 1989). Professional careers were virtually unheard of and educational opportunities were limited. The establishment of co-educational colleges began in 1833 when Oberlin College first admitted women (Bailey, 1994; Rossiter, 1982). The first institution to establish a graduate program for women was Bryn Mawr College in 1885, although female students were still segregated from their male colleagues (Bailey, 1994; Ogilvie, 1986; Rossiter, 1982). For the vast majority of women, however, advanced education was restricted. Before 1920, for example, only 439 women had received

baccalaureate degrees in science in the United States (Bailey, 1994).

Despite societal pressures, women did become scientists. Collaboration with a male (father, brother, or more often a spouse) sometimes provided a back door through which they could enter science with few negative consequences (Abir-Am and Outram, 1989; Bailey, 1994; Bonta, 1991; Ogilvie, 1989; Slack, 1989). Wealthy women had the ability to indulge their scientific inclinations as an avocation or, vicariously, by becoming benefactresses. For example, Mrs. E. H. Harriman, the widow of a railway magnate, sponsored the work of C. H. Merriam for 30 years (Sterling, 1989). Occasionally, women became scientists against the prevailing societal norms. These individuals generally paid a heavy price. They often sacrificed a normal family life and were viewed as “unwomanly” (Abir-Am and Outram, 1989; Bailey, 1994; Bonta, 1991; Ogilvie, 1986, 1989;



FIG. 1.—Viola S. Schantz examining skins of mammals at the United States National Museum of Natural History (courtesy of Smithsonian Institution Archives, record 7288, negative 95-20481).

Slack, 1989). Sometimes a widow was able to make the transition from collaborator to investigator. For example, Wanda Farr worked as an unpaid assistant for many years in her husband's lab, then continued their work alone when he died. Her efforts eventually lead to the discovery of cellulose (Bailey, 1994).

When women did become scientists, their roles were different from those of their male colleagues. They generally were confined to positions as instructors, technicians, or research assistants, and were expected to also perform menial tasks, which sometimes included sewing or cooking (Bailey, 1994; Ogilvie, 1986, 1989; Rossiter, 1982). Women often had difficulty obtaining the respect of their scientific peers. "I am not a housewife. I am a trained zoologist" Margaret Morse Nice is reported to have stated to a male colleague when he commented that her work was only that of an "untrained housewife" (Bonta, 1991; Slack, 1989). Some colleges avoided listing women in the faculty roster to prevent problems with the trustees, alumni, and fellow faculty members (Bailey, 1994). Women who did obtain faculty positions often were expected to resign them when they married; this continued into the 1950s (Ainley, 1989).

Attitudes about roles of females began to change during World War II. Women took over many traditional jobs of males as men were shipped off to fight in the war. To some extent, the effect carried over into educational institutions. Academic and research institutions, however, tend to reflect change more slowly than other areas of society and not until the affirmative-action movement of the 1960s and 1970s did real changes occur in the types of roles and in the degree of involvement women have in science (Kammer et al., 1978). This transition is described in the following special feature from several perspectives.

The first article, by Smith and Kaufman, contains a quantitative analysis of the activities of women within The American Society of Mammalogists from its founding in

1919 to the present. It documents both scientific productivity by women as reflected by publications in the *Journal of Mammalogy*, and participation by women in the affairs of the Society. The analysis shows that women have always contributed in both ways to some degree. The first article by a female author, for example, was published in volume four of the *Journal of Mammalogy* (Jones, 1923), and ca. 4% of the charter members of the Society were women. The analysis also shows, however, that until quite recently participation by women was relatively limited.

The second article, by Stein, recounts the histories of three early female naturalists. Martha Maxwell (1831–1881) was an example of a woman whose drive to pursue her interests in science lead to abandonment of a traditional female role at enormous personal sacrifice. Annie Alexander (1867–1950), was the patron of Joseph Grinnell and the founding benefactress of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at the University of California, Berkeley. Louise Kellogg (1879–1967), first pursued her interests in science as the companion and collaborator of Annie Alexander, but then continued after Alexander's death working primarily as a botanist. Although the roles of these females were distinctly different from those of their male contemporaries and from modern female mammalogists, each of them made substantial contributions to the science of mammalogy.

The third article, by Kaufman et al., is a history of a number of women active in The American Society of Mammalogists from ca. 1900 to 1949. These early scientists are relatively unknown to contemporary mammalogists although each made substantial impacts on the field. The article is organized into sections dealing with women who were primarily laboratory scientists (such as Helen Dean King), those who were active in field research (e.g., Margaret Altman and Lucille Stickel), those who were active in museums (e.g., Erna Mohr, Barbara Lawrence), and general naturalists

(e.g., Fannye Cook and Jane Claire Dirks-Edmunds). A final category includes women whose primary contribution was in service to the ASM (e.g., Viola Schantz, Fig. 1, and Caroline Heppenstall).

The final article is a compendium of the personal perspectives of four female mammalogists: B. Elizabeth Horner, J. Mary Taylor, Alicia V. Linzey, and Gail R. Michener. The careers of these women span 5 decades, from the end of World War II to the present. These are only a few of the many women whose work spans this interval and others could undoubtedly have produced equally interesting accounts. While their experiences should not be viewed as entirely representative of their female contemporaries, they graphically illustrate the ways in which women have responded to the changing, and often conflicting, demands of both science and society.

Our purpose in organizing this special feature is not to decry or highlight past sexual discrimination in the discipline of mammalogy or in The American Society of Mammalogists. Rather, our intent is to document the changing roles and increasing contributions of women, to call attention to some early women mammalogists whose influence on the discipline and the Society has been largely overlooked, and to provide a personal perspective of what it was like to be a female mammalogist at different times during the history of mammalogy in North America. That the discipline of mammalogy and science in general have changed significantly over the past three-quarters of a century was exemplified by the election of Alicia V. Linzey and Sarah B. George as First and Second vice-presidents of the ASM at the 75th anniversary meeting. It is with considerable optimism that we look forward to the 100th anniversary of the Society.

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