

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma: Stories from the WPA Narratives.
Edited by Terri M. Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7f62q7nh>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 33(1)

ISSN

0161-6463

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Publication Date

2009

DOI

10.17953

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of the desert seem the antithesis of wren-dom (typically small, furtive, dull-colored birds with elaborate melodious songs). Cactus Wrens do everything wrong” (219). The overall result is a work that is authoritative yet approachable with its combination of first-person narrative, lively descriptions, and exhaustive use of existing documentation. Rea’s knowledge in this area is profound, but he freely admits where information is lacking and avoids presenting speculation as fact. Some species accounts have a comparative linguistics note; many accounts discuss misidentifications where the result is that one “misses the metaphor” (218). All of the species are accompanied by attractive hand drawings of the bird under discussion, often drawn by the author.

For a book that is so thorough, it almost seems ungrateful to ask for more. However, there is an absence of a brief discussion of the language. The beginning of *Wings in the Desert* contains only the most cursory descriptions of the sound system, and a one-page “Orthography: The Sound of Akimel and Tohono O’odham” found on the book’s last page seems like it should be expanded and placed at the front. Adding just a few pages on the language would help the reader better appreciate the naming patterns. For example, it seems that many of the names contain an element of “it-has-X.” Because the book is essentially organized around a set of names, it would not be out of place to have a brief description of the way in which nouns are formed from other parts of speech. A short introduction to the language would allow the reader to appreciate the important distinction Rea makes among nonanalyzable, partially analyzable, and analyzable names of birds better. Because many of the birds described play an important role in Piman myths, it would also be more desirable to have more introductory material on this topic. A brief discussion of the cultural significance of colors would also be relevant, as this aspect occasionally arises in the species accounts. Some brief discussion of these topics—language, myth, and colors—might make this book more accessible to the nonspecialist.

Wings in the Desert is essentially a reference work; two-thirds of the book is a catalog and description of about seventy-five bird species. The main audience for the book will be the specialist in folk biology, ornithology, or Piman culture in general. For a younger generation of Pimans this book is a treasure trove of rapidly disappearing cultural information. The amount of Native knowledge contained in this book is vast and awe inspiring, and it is an indispensable read for anyone interested in the cultures of this region.

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Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma: Stories from the WPA Narratives. Edited by Terri M. Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw with a foreword by M. Susan Savage. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007. 226 pages. \$29.95 cloth.

In this volume, editors Terri M. Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw gather dozens of excerpts from the narratives of white, American Indian, and African American Oklahoma women as written and edited by Works Progress

Administration (WPA) workers in the 1930s. The scores of well-chosen and often gripping vignettes will provide teachers with an excellent resource for classroom use and will capture the imagination of what seems to be its intended audiences: general readers interested in Oklahoma history, women in the American West, and American Indian studies. The book, however, will likely frustrate scholars who have read and thought deeply in these fields.

The book's source is a group of documents known as the Indian Pioneer Papers, which were generated by WPA workers in the 1930s in a project akin to those that generated the "ex-slave narratives" that have proven such a valuable though problematic source in African American studies. Baker and Henshaw have combed through these narratives and selected excerpts. Most are a paragraph or two in length, though some are a page or more. Most of the excerpts describe the experiences of white women; about a fifth are narratives of American Indian women. The editors have arranged the vignettes into topical chapters, for example, coming to Oklahoma Territory or Indian Territory, making a home, and living with animals. *Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma* succeeds admirably in giving the reader a sense of the challenges, dangers, and dramas of life in nineteenth-century Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory.

It does not succeed, however, in providing an analysis of these experiences as represented in these texts. In the introduction, the editors argue that together these vignettes constitute a collective autobiography of the women who pioneered Oklahoma. Yet these are not autobiographies. The WPA workers who wrote them, following interviews with the women in question, generated narrative stories in the first person. Although the editors claim that this permits "the subjects' voices to emerge unhindered," there is no way for us to know whether the questions asked and the topics discussed were the ones these women would have chosen nor is there anyway to know whose voice we hear (xvi). The editors' argument that these vignettes constitute a collective story does not bear up under closer consideration. The idea that these women—Indian women who were forced to walk the Trail of Tears, black women who were held as slaves in Indian Territory, and white women who homesteaded or purchased lands that were until recently protected by treaty—can all be placed into the single category of "pioneers" leads us away from an understanding of the particularities of these women's lives. Despite these interpretive missteps, however, *Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma* will reward the reader and offer teachers a wonderful tool for classroom use.

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