

INTEGRATING WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES
INTO THE HISTORY OF ADVERTISING:
THE LEAGUE OF ADVERTISING WOMEN OF NEW YORK

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ABSTRACT

Woman's relation to advertising is identical with her relation to everything else of importance in the world--vital, energizing, inspiring.

Jane Martin, advertising woman, quoted in
Editor and Publisher, 1916

By all indications, women have been active contributors to the development of advertising practice, yet their involvement has been largely ignored in traditional histories. Accounts of women's early experiences in the field are at present so severely limited in number as to be considered nonexistent.

This inquiry, a cultural history, is part of a long-term project directed at the recovery of the experiences of women working in the field of advertising. Drawing upon Schultze's extensive work on the professionalization of the field (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1978), this research takes as its starting point the early-20th-Century efforts of advertising women to achieve professional recognition through the formation of clubs and involvement in national associations. It focuses particularly on the League of Advertising Women of New York. Founded in 1912, the League was the first of several efforts undertaken by advertising women in the United States to create a community in which they could share their experiences and advance their field. "The objects of this organization," the League's constitution stated, are "to enable women doing constructive work in advertising to cooperate for the purpose of mutual advancement; to further the study of advertising in its various branches; and to emphasize the work that women are doing and are especially qualified to do in the many-sided business of advertising."

What did it mean to be a woman in advertising in the early years of the 20th Century, and what role did advertising clubs play in that experience? Profiles of League members, and descriptions of the club's organizational structure, practices, and activities will provide the groundwork for later research which will attempt to reconstruct the motivations, values, beliefs, and aspirations of women who first undertook the conscious creation of a community of professional advertising women. Interpretation will be based largely upon archival materials (Schlesinger Library, State Historical Society of Wisconsin), including League minutes, documents, scrapbooks, etc.

Subsequent extensions of this work will integrate the experiences of women in clubs throughout the nation, as documented in women's pages of local newspapers, personal and public writings, and early vocational guides written by women for women.