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The New Woman As Librarian: The Career Of Adelaide Hasse



Synopsis

At the time of her death, it seemed that Adelaide Hasse would simply pass from memory and be forgotten. However, by the turn of the century, American Libraries would sanctify her as one of its hundred library leaders of the twentieth century, one of only thirty women given this honor. Thus, the unsinkable Adelaide Hasse has risen to the status of a giant of the profession and has been established as a sort of patron saint of documents librarians. The Government Printing Office even named a room in her honor in 1985. Though much of her career has remained obscure, Hasse did leave records that could provide a more balanced understanding of her life and work. Besides the extensive print record in periodicals and *The Compensations of Librarianship*, there were the long submerged archival records awaiting discovery in the New York Public Library Archives, the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and the files of the F.B.I., as well as in the papers of various contemporaries. Hasse spoke and wrote about issues that are as relevant today as they were a century ago. How should librarians be recruited and educated? What is the nature of their professional expertise? How do libraries function as organizations? What services do they provide? How do they provide access to government information? What are the dynamics of a feminized profession? Hasse tried to stir such discussion, but her ideas were often submerged in allegations that she was a difficult, disloyal woman. This biography brings to light Hasse's achievements, setting aside enigmas of personality, and examines the impact of her work, her values, and her experience in a gendered system.

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Customer Reviews

...highly satisfying....thoughtful analysis of a spirited and talented woman. Definitely worth a read. (Information & Culture, Vol. 42, No. 3, 2007)[Adelaide Hasse] is now vibrantly alive to me and anyone else who reads Clare Beck's outstanding biographical study....Beck artfully interweaves primary source material...with secondary interpretations...using her considerable talent for historical synthesis and good old-fashioned storytelling....I urge everyone to read this book. (Documents To The People)...a comprehensive and gripping biography....Beck is to be praised for this impressive and long overdue biography of Adelaide Hasse. (College & Research Libraries, Vol. 68, No. 2 (March 2007))Hasse toiled rather quietly, given that she was fairly obvious in what had been a male enterprise, a collector, controller and disseminator of information. She spent 21 years at New York Public Library, until her conscience made her controversial, with significant sojourns before at the Los Angeles Public Library, the Government Printing Office, the Astor Library, and after at war agencies and the Brookings Institution. In those years she learned to speak her mind, and sometimes what she said was directed at professionals and library users as well: what shall we read? What shall we keep openly and what shall we hide away? What role does documentation play in a democracy? Beck (government documents library emerita, Eastern Michigan U.) frames her biography in the larger issues Hasse handled in her long and distinguished career and focuses on how her work affects librarianship and library policies now. (Reference and Research Book News, November 2006)

Clare Beck is emeritus professor at Eastern Michigan University, where she served as government documents librarian.

Although not outwardly aligned with the burgeoning feminist movement, Adelaide Hasse was both a leader and a martyr for her time. Despite doing excellent work in bibliography, documents classification and research, and library promotion, Hasse was seen as a megalomaniac seeking outside approval for her work to the detriment of working well with other staff members. Because of her German origin and recently visiting the country before the onset of W.W.I., Hasse faced investigations into her personal and professional character her whole life. These came to culmination during her leadership in the Economics Division of N.Y.P.L. when the Board of Trustees fired her without allowing a hearing. The reason? A dozen of her coworkers brought a signed request to do, partially against her personality and partially against her suspected involvement with a rising female union force within the library. But she wasn't silenced. She published a pamphlet

explaining her treatment and dismissal to petition N.Y.P.L. to at least give her the charges against her. They never did but her career didn't end. Instead, she moved to Washington D.C. and worked for the W.P.A. as well as edited the Special Library Association journal. And she had her revenge on Elihu Root, the Chairman of the Executive Committee of N.Y.P.L., a few years later when voted to deny him an honorary A.L.A. membership. A tumultuous biography but an excellent read that sheds light on one of the strongest early women librarians. Not formally educated, Hasse worked with library school graduates for years, holding her own and breaking new ground. Unfortunately, her power and lack of manners (often sending impassioned angry responses to memos without due time to calm down emotionally) led to serious conflict with new management at N.Y.P.L. She was eventually ousted and vilified in the press as a shrew even though her work and her ideas were quoted again and again. But she didn't stay down for long. :) Highly recommended to lovers of early feminists and their incredible spirits. Without these women fighting at the helm, we never would've had a chance to push the glass ceiling even higher, much less shatter it.

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