

Women in Maritime History

by Peter McCracken

"Is there a place for women in maritime history?" This question was posed in the title of a 2005 article in the online journal *History in Focus* (<http://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/Sea/articles/hagmark.html>), which suggested that historians broaden their definition of maritime history to avoid excluding women's roles. Women participated at sea in many areas, from well-known pirates (Anne Bonney, Mary Read) of the 18th century to merchant captains' wives in the 19th century, some of whom served as navigators or played other critical roles aboard ship. Today, women like Linda Greenlaw, swordfishing boat captain and author of *The Hungry Ocean* (<http://www.lindagreenlawbooks.com/>), describe their experiences to better inform society, a society not necessarily clued in to the ways in which women have participated in and been affected by maritime pursuits. These aspects of our history need to be included and studied to get a fuller picture of our maritime heritage.

In the past, only a handful of historians have published works on women in maritime history, but today people can find numerous opportunities online for exploring women's roles in maritime settings. Back in 2001, The Mariners' Museum created an online exhibit titled, "Women & The Sea," which is still available at <http://www.mariner.org/women>. The San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park has a similar online exhibit worth checking out at <http://www.nps.gov/safr/historyculture/maritimewomenhistory.htm>. An archivist at the museum has also created a 45-page document outlining selected resources at <http://www.nps.gov/safr/historyculture/upload/WomeninMarHist.pdf>. Across the pond—but easy to access through cyberspace—The National Maritime Museum, in Greenwich, UK, posted a research guide titled "Women and the Sea: Sources for Research" at <http://www.nmm.ac.uk/researchers/library/research-guides/women-and-the-sea/>. Also in the UK, the Royal Naval Museum in Portsmouth has compiled oral histories from a number of individuals involved in and affected by the Royal Navy's 1990 decision to have all female recruits spend time at sea; these can be heard and read at <http://www.seayourhistory.org.uk/content/view/43/108/>.



Joan Druett, author of a number of books about women at sea, has worthwhile information on her web site at <http://members.authorsguild.net/druettjo/> and on her blog at <http://www.joan-druett.blogspot.com/>. The International Institute of Social History, based in Amsterdam, maintains "ViVa Women's History," a database of citations about women's history, available at <http://www.iisg.nl/womhist/vivahome.php>. A search of their database yields some useful citations, but full-text articles are not included. Because the citations are translated into multiple languages and entries do not have abstracts, one needs to search for words that

appear in an article's title, and it can take some time to figure out the most effective search terms.

"H-Net" is a broad collection of discussion lists focused on specific history topics. Two relevant lists for this subject are "H-Women" and "H-Maritime." Past messages posted to the lists are searchable and can be a great resource for finding all kinds of information. All H-Net

discussion lists can be searched at <http://www.h-net.org/logsearch/>; you can limit your search to a specific one or search several at a time. All H-Net lists can be found at <http://www.h-net.org/lists/>, and H-Women is at <http://www.h-net.org/~women/>.

Not surprisingly, many online resources focus on issues that affect women currently working in maritime industries, both at sea and on shore. One example is the Minerva Center, at <http://www.minervacenter.com>, a non-profit organization that supports the study of women in the military and women at war. Conferences addressing women currently working at sea include the Women's International Shipping and Trading Association at <http://www.wistaconference.org/> (September 2009, London, UK) and The US Maritime Administration's "Women on the Water" conference at <http://tinyurl.com/nm6vg7> (October 2009, Castine, Maine). The Women's Maritime Association (<http://www.womensmaritimeassoc.com/>) provides a central spot for those interested in issues affecting women at sea today.

Suggestions for other sites worth mentioning are welcome at shipindex@yahoo.com. See <http://www.shipindex.org> for a compilation of over 100,000 ship names from indexes to dozens of books and journals.

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