



Defining Women's Scientific Enterprise: Mount Holyoke Faculty and the Rise of American Science

Miriam R. Levin

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This fascinating reappraisal of the relationship of women and the scientific enterprise focuses on the efforts of Protestant women science faculty at Mount Holyoke College to advance themselves and their institution from its founding as an evangelical Protestant seminary for women in 1837 to the present. Contrary to most history-of-science interpretations of women's professional experience, Levin suggests that in several important ways New England Protestant culture - and the zeal of women faculty at a college established to train female missionaries - created a learning environment that enabled science faculty to establish and maintain a niche for themselves and to contribute to the development of scientific enterprise, particularly during Mount Holyoke's first hundred years. Levin examines science at Mount Holyoke College in four critical "externalist" dimensions: religion, gender, geography, and pedagogy. She shows how the unique blending of a religious and female calling took place in a particular geographical setting - a relatively isolated college town in New England. She also shows how new ideas about "doing science" became translated into new ways of teaching science and how pedagogy and scientific discoveries are mutually interactive. Ultimately, Levin presents an intriguing case study of an alternative way of doing science - college-based, women-based, religion-based, teaching-based - one wholly different from the "rise of the research university" model that has become the basis for the history of academic science in the United States. In Levin's book, Mount Holyoke itself becomes an experiment that raises a basic question: Is there another way to do science?

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