

Kathleen L. Endres, *Akron's Better Half: Women's Clubs and the Humanization of the City, 1825-1925*. Akron: University of Akron Press, 2006.

Most of Akron's claim to national and international historical significance centers on its former status as the rubber capital of the world characterized by Steve Love's and David Giffel's, *Wheels of Fortune: The Story of Rubber in Akron* and historian and communications professor at the University of Akron, Kathleen Endres, 2000 publication *Rosie the Rubber Worker*. However, Endres, in *Akron's Better Half: Women's Clubs and the Humanization of the City, 1825-1925* contends that understanding the history of women's organizations in Akron, Ohio contributes greatly to the local and national narrative of urbanization and underscores the important work of Akron women beyond the factory floors of Goodyear and Firestone. Endres examines the history of "club women" in Akron from the antebellum period through the First World War. She argues that women's clubs were vital to urban growth. They were responsible for the social services required to make this regional transportation and industrial hub livable for elites, professionals, and laborers alike. Making a case for the significance of micro-history and rather traditional women's history, Endres offers insight into the conflicts and collaboration within and between women's clubs, and she underscores the participation of non-white, non-Protestant, and working class women in club organizing in Akron.

According to Endres, Akron's women's clubs emerged alongside the growth of Protestant churches and reform movements in the city. Many of the first clubs were auxiliaries to men's organizations, specifically focused on social causes such as the temperance movement. She also contends that club work for both men and women was particularly an American tradition evidencing famous European's, such as de Tocqueville's observations concerning early American culture and society and the importance of social organization to the formation of American identity. Making a case for the positive effects of Americans' tendencies to form social clubs, throughout the work the Endres explains the significant impact women's clubs, in particular, had on transforming the city from an "almost unbroken wilderness" newly littered with crime and disease characteristic of the difficult lives of canal workers and exploitive entrepreneurs to a "vital Midwestern city," (12).

As previously mentioned, Endres writes a rather traditional “herstory” women’s history by focusing the bulk of her book on elite and middle class, “notable” women, whom she rightly argues were largely left out of previous histories of Akron. Moreover, women’s history students will be familiar with the importance of the culture of “republican motherhood,” “the cult of true womanhood,” and the Progressives’ mission of “municipal housekeeping” that which the author attributes the appeal of club work to Akron women. However, the author also offers a historical analysis that explains Akron’s path to urbanization and the methods in which the people of the city provided social services and fostered a “moral,” “progressive” civic identity through a gendered analysis. Yet this forward thinking effort will not exempt Endres from a feminist critique of the ways in which she neglects to problematize the distinctions between the private and public sphere, as well as the authors assertion that Akron women did not consider being confined to the domestic domain as a hardship, but rather they considered it an honor (8). However, her inclusion and analysis of the non-white, non-protestant, and working class women’s role in club organization deserves recognition, and remains a significant contribution to understanding Akron municipal history and American urban social and cultural history in general. Moreover, Akron’s “Better Half” will certainly become an indispensable text for Ohio History courses.

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