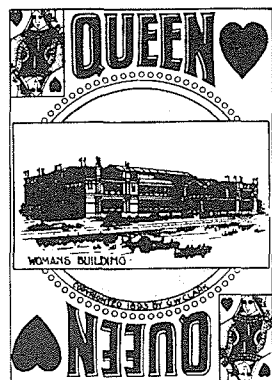


Those who can read their ancestors' language will be disappointed when they discover that editorial fiat limited the bibliographic references to publications in English; Harvard University Press's enthusiasm for ethnicity has its limits. And after their initial astonishment at having been included, "Yankees" and "Southerners" will be disappointed, too: The former are given rather skimpy coverage, and the latter are lumped carelessly into one category (what about black and white in the composite picture of the Southerner?). Despite such minor flaws and the puzzling omission of an index, this is the most serviceable book on American ethnicity published in the past decade.

—Willi Paul Adams ('81)

THE FAIR WOMEN

by Jeanne Madeline
Weimann
Academy Chicago, 1981
611 pp. \$29.95 cloth,
\$14.95 paper



Courtesy of Academy Chicago.

The World's Columbian Exposition commemorating the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus's discovery of America opened in Chicago on May 1, 1893. The neoclassical Woman's Building, with its broad balconies and airy loggias, was one of the fair's big draws. But a few blocks away from the fairgrounds stood another monument to women, the Isabella Club House. A plain, six-story brick and stone structure, it had originally been planned as a grand Moorish palace, to be built on the fairgrounds accompanied by a bronze statue of Queen Isabella — a counterbalance to that of Columbus.

These two contrasting buildings resulted from a struggle between two women's groups. It began in 1889, when Chicago was campaigning to be selected as the site of the fair. A collection of Chicago women, wives of wealthy entrepreneurs, petitioned the city's all-male fund-raising corporation for a Women's Auxiliary Corporation. They proposed to raise money, lobby Congress for the Chicago cause, and construct a pavilion to highlight the activities of women. Almost simultaneously, suffragists, meeting first in

Chicago and then establishing offices in New York, Washington, D.C., and St. Louis — many of them professionals, doctors, lawyers — formed the Queen Isabella society; they called for the appointment of women to the fair's governing organization and for the exhibiting and judging of men's and women's work together.

Congress settled on Chicago in April of 1890 and directed the Fair's National Commission to appoint a Board of Lady Managers. The commission chose 117 ladies — two from each state and territory, plus an additional nine (eight of them from the Auxiliary). Mrs. Potter Palmer, wife of a

successful Chicago financier, was elected president. Wealthy, beautiful, wise to the ways of power, often dictatorial, she set the board on the course charted by the Auxiliary.

Weimann, a journalist, constructs a fast-moving, absorbing narrative, evoking (with 450 illustrations) the *fin de siècle* atmosphere of the fair and Chicago. The Isabellas, led by such figures as Susan Anthony, sought in the fair what they sought in larger economic, social, and political spheres. Their goal of combined male-and-female exhibits reflected their one-dimensional approach, their dedication to suffrage, and their belief "that women should be equal in all things with men." Not surprisingly, most women on the board were suspicious of suffrage, sexual egalitarianism, and political activity. Wielding a majority, Palmer blocked the major points of the Isabella program. Often resorting to underhanded tactics, she fired the duly elected secretary of the board (the sole representative of the rival group) and kept the Isabella building off the fairgrounds.

Yet it would be wrong to think that the Isabellas had no influence. If most lady managers embraced the "woman's sphere" of home and family, they came to reject the Victorian notion of the "woman-on-the pedestal." The women's exhibits, Palmer insisted, *did* reflect new social and economic realities. If some women were leaving home to work, she argued, they were doing so to protect themselves and their families from "cruel circumstances." Such women deserved fair wages, educational opportunities, and technical training.

And then, of course, the Woman's Building itself — an all-female production (except for the actual construction) from architectural design to sculpture, decoration, and the 80,000 exhibits — represented more than a triumph of the Auxiliary position. It provided overwhelming proof of women's accomplishments in art, industry, and, not least, organization. Perhaps most significant was Anthony's praise of Palmer's abilities at the fair's assemblies in 1893. Palmer reciprocated by acknowledging Anthony's efforts to draw attention to the needs of women. The conflicts within the women's movement did not disappear — they are perhaps even stronger today. But *The Fair Women* shows that a reasonable and productive reconciliation is not without precedent.

—Victoria Schuck ('80)