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## Dorothy Lois Riker, 1904–1994: Reflections on Indiana History, Historical Editing, and Women in the Historical Profession

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Dorothy L. Riker enjoyed a remarkably productive fifty-year career as an historian and editor for the Indiana Historical Bureau and Indiana Historical Society. For reasons that bear some exploring, Riker, with her fellow editors Nellie Armstrong Robertson and Gayle Thornbrough, exercised considerable influence over what was published in Indiana history during that period (1929–1979).<sup>1</sup> Riker's life raises interesting questions about the opportunities and constraints encountered by the first generation of Indiana women to receive professional training in history,<sup>2</sup> a group who were also among the first generation of American women to come to adulthood after World War I and the enfranchisement of women. Their rapid disappearance from our midst prompts this preliminary effort to understand their historical significance in general and that of Dorothy Riker in particular.

Riker was born in Elwood, Indiana, in 1904, the second daughter and third child of carpenter Albert D. Riker and his wife, Catherine Ripple Riker.<sup>3</sup> Although she spent five years at Indiana

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<sup>1</sup> Lana Ruegamer, *A History of the Indiana Historical Society, 1830–1980* (Indianapolis, 1980), 230–31, 238; Lana Ruegamer, "Gayle Thornbrough and the Indiana Historical Society," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXX (September, 1984), 271–77.

<sup>2</sup> The first woman to take an advanced degree in history at Indiana University was Harriett Casper, who received an M.A. in 1893, only three years after the first males received their M.A.'s in 1890. There were, however, very few women (only twenty between 1893 and 1920) taking postgraduate degrees in history until the 1920s. Eva Drusilla Edgerton, comp., "A Bibliography of Theses Submitted to Indiana University for Advanced Degrees, 1883–1927" (B.S. thesis, School of Library Service, Columbia University, 1928). There were Indiana women who published books in history around the turn of the century (e.g., Julia Levering, Charity Dye, Mrs. Thomas A. Hendricks), but they did not have professional training in history.

<sup>3</sup> U.S., Fourteenth Census, 1920, Population Schedules for Madison County, Indiana; Indiana Works Progress Administration, comp., "Index to Birth Records, Madison County, 1882–1920 Inclusive"; Vol. II, "Letters L-Z" (Genealogy Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis). This volume is hereafter cited as Madison County Birth Records. I am grateful to Paula Corpuz for finding this information.

University in the 1920s—where her fellow students included Hoagy Carmichael, Herman B Wells, and Ernie Pyle and where the atmosphere was electric with the sense of challenging authority and renegotiating social conventions—followed by sixty-five years in Indianapolis, Riker retained many of the marks of her small-town girlhood all her life.<sup>4</sup> She was direct, friendly, unpretentious, Hoosier in voice and idiom, indifferent to the surface markers of class. Riker was in a sense transparent, as few middle-class urban persons now are. Raised a Presbyterian, she demonstrated a Puritan sense of the godliness of service and neighborly obligation, as well as a fierce devotion to righteousness. Her older sister, Susie, married and spent her life as a missionary in China. Dorothy Riker's mission was historical research in the daytime and helping her neighbors in the evenings and on weekends.<sup>5</sup>

She was private (a necessary armor for transparent persons) and spoke little of her family, so that it is impossible to know how they influenced her. She ceased to have access to them relatively early in her life. Her mother died when she was fourteen. Her sister married and left the country. Her father's remarriage, after his daughters went away to college, precipitated a permanent breach between Dorothy and him.<sup>6</sup> Riker was on her own from a relatively early age, and she created her own community through service.

It is not clear how the carpenter's third child came to have the resources to go to the state university in Bloomington in 1923, when she was nineteen; but she probably had help from someone for at least two of her three undergraduate years because she was taking enormous course loads (eight courses per semester in 1924–1925 followed by nine courses per semester in 1925–1926) during the regular school years, as well as summer courses in 1925 and 1926. She earned her degree in three years, in 1926.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For Indiana University in the mid-1920s see, for example, the Indiana University yearbook, the *Arbutus*, 1924, 1925, 1926; and Herman B Wells, *Being Lucky: Reminiscences and Reflections* (Bloomington, 1980), chaps. 2 and 3.

<sup>5</sup> Information on her Presbyterian upbringing from Indiana University Graduate School records. U.S., Fourteenth Census, 1920, Population Schedules for Madison County; Shirley S. McCord, Indiana Historical Society, conversations with author. Hubert H. Hawkins, emeritus executive secretary of the Indiana Historical Society and emeritus executive director of the Indiana Historical Bureau, commented recently about Riker that she “epitomized what we like to think of as earlier nineteenth-century Hoosier values. Although she was not vocal about her religious beliefs, she held them with profound tenacity. I cannot imagine a situation in which Dorothy would have sacrificed a moral principle or what she believed to be the truth for any other consideration.” Hubert H. Hawkins, conversation with author, June 22, 1995. Riker's denominational affiliation in Indianapolis was with the Church of the Nazarene.

<sup>6</sup> Little is known about Riker's brother. Shirley S. McCord and Paula Corpuz, conversations with author; Madison County Death Records. Thanks to Paula Corpuz for researching these records.

<sup>7</sup> Dorothy L. Riker, Indiana University transcript.

The popular culture of the 1920s pressured young women to reject their mothers' model of adulthood in exchange for sexual adventurousness, an intensified emphasis on professional attention to physical appearance (beauty salons for haircuts, permanent waves, makeup), and economic independence. Riker's homegrown, small-town, Puritan character rejected the flapper model; the red-haired senior in the 1926 *Arbutus* has a rather grim look about her and a slightly truculent jaw. But she was clearly headed for economic independence. Her rather heroic course of study centered around her history major, but she also equipped herself to teach mathematics and history at the high school level.<sup>8</sup>

Riker took her first history course in her second year, when she accelerated her pace of study. After an introductory semester studying southern history with William O. Lynch and the general United States history course with Albert L. Kohlmeier, she enrolled in four history courses the second semester; included were the second halves of the medieval and modern history surveys and the Greek and Roman history course. She took six more history courses the next year, four of them with F. Lee Benns in modern European history (including a two-semester "seminary"). She was clearly enthusiastic about history and did consistently excellent work in it. The question was how she could make a living doing it.<sup>9</sup>

Public education was a rapidly expanding part of the American economy in the 1920s, a trend that reflected both an enormous increase in the national population in preceding decades and the increasing use of public high schools to prepare an expanding middle class for business and professional careers. Riker's intention to become a high school history and mathematics teacher was both shrewd and fairly ambitious, but she rather quickly decided it was not ambitious enough. She taught history and government at Frankton High School, not far from Elwood, for one year; but she decided it did not suit her and went back to the university for graduate work in history instead.<sup>10</sup>

It is not obvious what Riker's professional goals were when she went to graduate school to study history. Perhaps she was "testing the waters," contemplating the possibility of a Ph.D. and an aca-

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*; Indiana University *Bulletin*, XXII (1924), XXIII (1925), XXIV (1926); Dorothy L. Riker to Professor Albert L. Kohlmeier, May 22, 1953, in "Albert Ludwig Kohlmeier: An Appreciation," 1953, Albert L. Kohlmeier Papers, William Lowe Bryan Collection (Indiana University Archives, Bloomington).

<sup>10</sup> Ruegamer, *History of the Indiana Historical Society*, 231. For an overview of public education in Indiana in the 1920s, see James H. Madison, *Indiana through Tradition and Change: A History of the Hoosier State and Its People, 1920-1945* (Indianapolis, 1982), 263-83, esp. 263-64 and 274-78. Riker considered graduate school at the University of Chicago, but she never attended. Dorothy L. Riker to Dean David A. Rothrock, Indiana University, April 23, 1927, Dorothy L. Riker folder, Bryan Collection; Registrar's Office, University of Chicago, telephone conversation with author, July, 1995.

demic position, although looking around her she would have seen very few women in faculty positions outside of home economics and “physical education for women” at Indiana University.<sup>11</sup> Possibly she hoped to get a teaching position in a larger, more prestigious high school than Frankton’s. In any event she was part of a remarkable surge in women’s pursuit of graduate studies in history in the 1920s. Nationally, women earned almost 22 percent of the doctorates awarded in history in the 1920s, a proportion that remained unequaled until recent decades. Although Indiana University granted no doctorate in history to a woman until 1934 (and relatively few to men before then), women earned 37 percent of the master’s degrees awarded in history at I.U. between 1928 and 1935, more women in that seven-year period than had done so in the preceding thirty-four years.<sup>12</sup> The New Era prosperity combined with the promise of new potentialities for enfranchised and liberated women made graduate work seem to be a more attractive alternative for women in the 1920s than it would be again for many decades to come.

Riker received encouragement from the history department in her decision to return to graduate school. She was well known to most of them through classwork and through her participation in the History and Political Science Club (which she had addressed on “Cavour” in her senior year). The department awarded her an assis-

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<sup>11</sup> The Indiana University *Bulletin* for 1926, for example, showed that the only women full professors were one each in home economics and physical education and the dean of women. There was one acting professor of Latin. There were three associate professors (mathematics, romance languages, and home economics). There were twelve assistant professors, of whom five were in home economics and physical education. There were sixteen instructors, of whom six were in home economics and physical education. There were no women faculty at any level in history. Indiana University *Bulletin*, XXIV (1926).

<sup>12</sup> Jacqueline Goggin, “Challenging Sexual Discrimination in the Historical Profession: Women Historians and the American Historical Association, 1890–1940,” *American Historical Review*, XCVII (June, 1992), 771; Edgerton, “A Bibliography of Theses”; Indiana University Library, Reference Department, comp., “A Bibliography of Theses Submitted to Indiana University for Advanced Degrees, 1927–1935.” Ruth Stephens was the first woman to earn a Ph.D. in history at Indiana University; her 1934 dissertation was “Diplomatic History of the Prussian-American Treaties of 1785, 1799, and 1828.” Only sixteen men had earned the Ph.D. at Indiana by 1935. Women earned 41 of the 104 master’s degrees awarded in history between 1921 and 1930 and 39 of the 108 master’s degrees awarded between 1931 and 1940. Because of the virtual disappearance of men from graduate school during World War II, women earned 22 of 43 master’s degrees in history awarded at I.U. between 1941 and 1945. Only after World War II did women’s participation in graduate work dwindle significantly in relation to men’s. In the 1950s women earned only 16 percent of the advanced degrees awarded in history at I.U., and this figure dwindled to 11 percent in the 1960s. I.U. Library, “Bibliography of Theses,” 1935–1940, 1941–1945, 1946–1950, 1951–1955, 1956–1960, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1970–1971. In the 1970s women returned to graduate work in history in larger numbers; by 1992 women earned 34 percent of all Ph.D.’s in history granted in the United States. *Ibid.*, 1971–1972, 1972–1973, 1973–1974, 1974–1975; Susan Kingsley Kent, “Report of the 1994 Committee on Women Historians,” *Perspectives: American Historical Association Newsletter*, XXXIII (March, 1995), 25.

tantship for 1927–1928 to help with H101, the general European history survey; it paid her fees plus two hundred dollars for the year.<sup>13</sup> Riker's graduate work for the master's degree was focused on America and modern Europe; she took only one course (a seminar in medieval history) outside the modern Atlantic area. She continued to study with Benns, who probably oversaw her thesis on "England's Relation to Europe, 1912–14" and took courses with Kohlmeier, Lynch, William T. Morgan, Logan Esarey, and John C. Andressohn. Her work was deemed consistently excellent by everyone with whom she studied (she was one of 37 out of 204 graduate students in the university to receive all A's the first semester), and she was awarded a master's degree June 11, 1928. She immediately enrolled in two more history courses in summer school.<sup>14</sup>

Did she contemplate a Ph.D.? She was still receiving support from the history department (an assistantship for H105, the United States history survey), a fact which suggests that the department expected her to go on; however, her course work for her second year in graduate school suggests some indecision. She seemed briefly to have considered an advanced degree in education (she took four courses in education the first semester and only one in history) but did not follow this up. Riker was obviously at a crossroads in 1928–1929, not sure what to do next. She was a successful and resourceful student, with a growing self-confidence and worldliness. (It is with a small shock that one who knew her as an older woman learns that in 1929 the young Dorothy was the featured final speaker at the History and Political Science Club annual banquet, where she spoke on "George Washington as Lover and Husband.") She had been earning her living with the assistantships and by tutoring football players. Did she aspire to teach in a college if one could have been found to hire her? I have no evidence with which to answer the question. What *was* found for Riker was a job she later described as "the best job in the world": historical editing for the small, state-supported Indiana Historical Bureau.<sup>15</sup>

In 1928–1929 Indiana's commitment to a state-supported historical agency was relatively recent, an outgrowth of the plans for celebrating the centennial of statehood in 1916. In 1925 the agency, originally the Indiana Historical Commission (IHC), became a bone

<sup>13</sup> Albert L. Kohlmeier to William Lowe Bryan, September 15, 1927, Kohlmeier Papers; Minutes, History and Political Science Club, February 11, 1926, p. 147 (Indiana University Archives, Bloomington).

<sup>14</sup> LP to Dorothy L. Riker, March 10, 1928, Dorothy Riker folder, Bryan Collection; Riker, Indiana University transcript; Indiana University *Bulletin*, XXVI (1928), XXVII (1929); I.U. Library, "A Bibliography of Theses, 1927–1935."

<sup>15</sup> Albert L. Kohlmeier to President William Lowe Bryan, September 22, 1928, Kohlmeier Papers; Riker, Indiana University transcript; Minutes, History and Political Science Club, February 14, 1929. Information about Riker's tutoring football players and quotation from Riker that she had "the best job in the world" from Shirley S. McCord, conversation with author, June 6, 1995.

of contention between the Indiana University History Department, which had a strong program in researching and collecting state history, and the venerable and elite (but small) Indiana Historical Society (IHS), based in Indianapolis. The university's principal researcher in Indiana history, Professor Logan Esarey, made a bid to have the IHC transferred to Bloomington under his part-time direction. Such a move would have been in line with other midwestern historical agencies, which generally had strong connections with state universities. But Esarey faced a formidable obstacle: the commission had just appointed a new director, the well-connected Christopher B. Coleman, long-time IHS member, professionally trained historian (Ph.D., Columbia), and experienced administrator. Coleman and Esarey were a study in contrasts: the former, with his Yale background and family heritage of professional status, was a midwestern aristocrat; the latter was a small-town Hoosier, I.U.'s first Ph.D. in history, as ruffled and rustic as Coleman was graceful and urbane.<sup>16</sup> Coleman had also been elected IHS executive secretary in 1924, and the influential Society was not prepared to see the commission removed to Bloomington, thus depriving Coleman of the leadership of the state's historical work. Esarey's proposal was rejected; instead of the IHC's moving to Bloomington, it was consolidated with the Indiana State Library and renamed the Indiana Historical Bureau (IHB), under Coleman, in March, 1925.<sup>17</sup>

Esarey lost more than his bid for the IHC in 1925. As a consequence of a dispute with Coleman and the new Bureau's editor, Nellie C. Armstrong, whom Coleman hired to oversee the Indiana Historical Collections series, Esarey ultimately lost his editorship of the *Indiana Magazine of History* and his venue for publishing Indiana documentary editions.

Armstrong (1896–1982) had worked under the prolific academic editors Clarence W. Alvord and Theodore C. Pease in the prestigious Illinois State Historical Collections series after she completed an M.A. at Illinois in 1919, and she was well-regarded by her mentors.<sup>18</sup> In 1925, at Coleman's behest, Armstrong proceeded to make editorial changes in Esarey's manuscript for the James Brown Ray

<sup>16</sup> Ruegamer, *History of the Indiana Historical Society*, chaps. 4 and 5. For Logan Esarey see R. Carlyle Buley, "Logan Esarey, Hoosier," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XXXVIII, (December, 1942), 337-81.

<sup>17</sup> Ruegamer, *History of the Indiana Historical Society*, 135, 140-41.

<sup>18</sup> The author wishes to thank Paula Corpuz for supplying Armstrong's death date. For views of Armstrong's work at Illinois see Arthur C. Cole, ed., *The Constitutional Debates of 1847* (*Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library*, Vol. XIV; Springfield, Ill., 1919), iv; Clarence W. Alvord, ed., *Governor Edward Coles* (*Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library*, Vol. XV; Springfield, Ill., 1920), viii; Clarence W. Alvord and Clarence E. Carter, eds., *Trade and Politics, 1767–1769* (*Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library*, Vol. XVI; Springfield, Ill., 1921), iii.

papers, which he had submitted as part of the governors' papers series he had been editing for the Indiana Historical Collections. Esarey, angered that his work was subjected to correction by his rival Coleman and by a woman whose scholarly credentials were inferior to his own, refused to accept editorial changes. Coleman stood behind his editor, and after harsh words and the intrusion of legal opinions about the ownership of the manuscript, Esarey's work was returned to him, unpublished, in 1927. The I.U. professor had won a pyrrhic victory in his refusal to accept the Bureau's editorial supervision of his work.<sup>19</sup>

When Esarey subsequently failed to persuade the university to discontinue the IMH's connection with the Coleman-run Society, which constituted the IMH's principal base of subscribers, his resignation as editor was accepted as of the end of 1927. His colleagues had decided that Esarey had become an obstacle to the goal of better relations between the university and the Bureau/Society. For Esarey it must have been a crushing blow. He lost control both of the magazine he had brought to the forefront of state history journals during his editorship (1913–1927) and of the governors' papers series he had inaugurated for the IHC.<sup>20</sup>

Coleman hired Riker as the IHB research assistant a year and a half after Esarey edited his last issue of the IMH. Coleman probably asked Lynch, the new editor of the magazine, to recommend someone—he probably specified a woman—to work as Armstrong's research assistant in the Bureau's Indiana Historical Collections series. Coleman's request was probably intended and perceived as a peace offering. Riker was undoubtedly the best candidate for the job. She was an outstanding graduate student who had worked successfully with virtually everyone in the Indiana University department. She had studied midwestern history with Esarey, who could recommend her both professionally and personally, since he also knew her as the good friend and roommate of his niece Essa Maria Esarey, of Oriole, Indiana (who was also doing graduate work and who remained Riker's lifelong friend).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Ruegamer, *History of the Indiana Historical Society*, 148–49. The details of this conflict from Coleman's point of view are available in copies of correspondence from 1926 to 1928 between Coleman and Esarey, Professor James A. Woodburn and Coleman, and various members of the Library and Historical Department Board, along with Coleman's report to the Board, June 30, 1928. "Library and Historical Board, 1928" folder, Box 5, Correspondence, Records of the Indiana Historical Bureau (Archives Division, Indiana Commission on Public Records, Indiana State Library and Historical Building, Indianapolis).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 149–50. Esarey had earlier published two volumes of the William Henry Harrison papers (1922) and one volume containing the papers of Jonathan Jennings, Ratliff Boon, and William Hendricks (1924) in the governors' papers series of the Indiana Historical Collections.

<sup>21</sup> Information about Essa Esarey from Shirley S. McCord, conversation with author, June 6, 1995. See also *The Red Book: The Official Student Handbook of Indiana University* (Bloomington, Ind., 1928), 87, 171.

... usually serendipitous match. Riker found a mysterious Bureau found a selfless, joyful worker who was also a well-trained and talented historian. And Indiana University had installed one of its own in the IHB. Dorothy Riker was the university's gift to the Bureau. When I suggested this interpretation of the meaning of Dorothy's coming to the Bureau, Hubert H. Hawkins, Bureau/Society leader from 1953 to 1976, offered a pleasing analogy with Homeric wars: Dorothy was a sort of princess from Bloomington sent to Indianapolis as a hostage and token of peaceful intentions. Certainly Riker retained a strong sense of identification with the I.U. department; in the aftermath of her estrangement from her father, the history department became a sort of family for her, as she acknowledged several decades later in a tribute to Kohlmeier:

Through the years the History Department at Indiana University and the ideas and ideals for which it has stood have been a source of refuge and strength, like the home to which the young person looks back for encouragement and help—a place where you know there are persons interested in you and expecting you to do your best. This has meant more to me than words can ever express.

In October, 1930, Coleman wrote to the Indiana State Library and Historical Bureau, "we ought by all means to retain Miss Riker as she is a real 'find.'" In November Lynch ended a reply to a letter from Riker, "I am glad that you are in love with your work."<sup>22</sup>

Riker found her life's work in 1929 just in time to be sheltered from the long storm of the Great Depression. Although she worked for little (\$1,800 per year for a decade, with occasional *reductions* in salary when the legislature voted to cut state budgets), she was economically independent and better off than most. Her graduate work in history had led her to an independent life of service and intellectual fulfillment.<sup>23</sup>

Scholarly editions of historical documents were among the highest priorities of professional historians from the earliest days of the profession. Before research grants, microforms, and photocopying (not to mention the wonders that lie before us on the internet),

<sup>22</sup> Hubert H. Hawkins, conversation with author, June 22, 1995; Riker to Kohlmeier, May 22, 1953, in "Albert Ludwig Kohlmeier: An Appreciation," Kohlmeier Papers; Christopher B. Coleman to William P. Dearing, October 15, 1930, "Library and Historical Department, 1928" folder, Box 5, Correspondence, Records of the Indiana Historical Bureau; William O. Lynch to Dorothy L. Riker, November 14, 1930, "Indiana Magazine of History" folder, Editor's correspondence, *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Financial Statement of the Historical Bureau, October 21, 1930, "Library and Historical Department, May, 1928" folder, Box 5, Correspondence, Records of the Indiana Historical Bureau; Salary Schedule of the Historical Bureau, September 27, 1932, "Library and Historical Department, May, 1931–September, 1932" folder, Box 5, Correspondence, *ibid.*; Department of Education, Historical Bureau, June 20, 1939, and Salary Schedule, 1935–1936, "Historical Bureau, 1931" folder, Box 4, Correspondence, *ibid.* The General Assembly's salary reduction act in 1933 reduced Riker's salary by 5.5 percent. In 1939 she was earning \$1,707, less than she had earned in 1929. *Ibid.*



published documents were essential to the historical enterprise, and publishing them was among the chief duties of historical agencies such as the Bureau. Riker was trained in historical editing by Armstrong.<sup>24</sup>

It is not clear how much Coleman involved himself in his editorial staff's work, but circumstantial evidence would suggest it was not much. He was an overworked man for most of his tenure with the Bureau, especially during the six-year period when he was running the State Library (1936–1942) in addition to running the Bureau and the Society.<sup>25</sup> He usually signed the introductions to the Collections volumes. He was often the official correspondent with authors. But Coleman's name never appeared as editor on any of the Collections publications, and it seems unlikely, with Armstrong and Riker on his staff, that he did more than act as official correspondent to save the dignity of authors reluctant to accept the authority of women.

Coleman, a seasoned executive, chose his editorial staff carefully and expressed strong confidence in them. The result was a tradition of strong editors with unusual autonomy. Coleman observed in the 1930s, in response to an advice-seeking letter from the North Carolina Department of Archives and History, that the State Library and Historical Board took relatively little interest in the Bureau beyond approving salaries;<sup>26</sup> with Coleman himself ready to delegate authority to his editors, this left them a somewhat free hand. The Bureau's editors also had strong support from the Indiana Historical Society's publications committee, which by the 1940s included Armstrong. While there were some high-powered, vivid personalities on the committee, both professionals and amateurs with strong interests in history—e.g., Herman B Wells, Lyman Ayres, Eli Lilly, John D. Barnhart, and John P. Goodwin, all served on the committee at various times—they were consistently responsive to the editors' recommendations about what to publish. Hawkins recalled recently that he believed the committee had never failed to approve a project recommended to them by the editors in the period of his leadership of the Bureau and Society, 1953–1976.<sup>27</sup> The Bureau's first editor, Armstrong, was a composed and elegant woman, at ease with the Society's elite leaders; she established a precedent of editorial leadership that was to devolve

<sup>24</sup> Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, England, 1988), 39, 174–75; John Higham, *History: Professional Scholarship in America* (Baltimore, 1983), 22; Ruegamer, "Gayle Thornbrough and the Indiana Historical Society," 275.

<sup>25</sup> Ruegamer, *History of the Indiana Historical Society*, 177.

<sup>26</sup> Christopher B. Coleman to Dr. A. R. Newsome, secretary, North Carolina Historical Commission, February 17, 1931, "Historical Bureau, 1931," Box 4, Correspondence, Records of the Indiana Historical Bureau.

<sup>27</sup> Hubert Hawkins, conversation with author, June 22, 1995.

upon Riker and Gayle Thornbrough, who joined the enterprise as a Society editor in 1937.<sup>28</sup>

The leadership of Indiana's state history publications program by women M.A.'s with no male academic historians' oversight was not, so far as I have been able to determine, typical. While women "assistants" with M.A.'s may well have been *de facto* editors of historical publishing programs such as those of Illinois and Wisconsin, the *de jure* editors had close ties with universities. (Louise P. Kellogg at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, an unusual woman editor, had both a Ph.D. and close ties to the University of Wisconsin Department of History.)<sup>29</sup>

The Indiana women editors' relative autonomy reflected several circumstances. First, the women were unusually capable persons. As Hawkins put it recently, "The editors were good historians who had weight appropriate to their merit." (He went on to describe them as the dominant factors in the publishing program.) Like Riker, Thornbrough was an outstanding student—in her case, at Butler and in graduate work at the University of Michigan. As for Riker, by the 1950s it was clear that no one knew Indiana history better than she; her command of the documentary sources and secondary literature of state history and her knowledge of the resources of the State Library were unique. Everyone who did research on an Indiana topic was advised to "check with Dorothy Riker" to make sure that no sources were overlooked. She was notably generous with her knowledge; she did not see herself as a competitor with the scholars who sought her out. Together, in her view, they were serving a larger end, a search for knowledge and understanding.<sup>30</sup>

Riker and Thornbrough's domination of Indiana state history publishing also reflected Bureau directors' confidence in the two women. Like his predecessor Howard H. Peckham, Hawkins respected their judgment. He noted recently that the editors were often influential even in determining which projects were undertaken in the first place since prospective authors would discuss ideas with one or both of them before undertaking research and would consult with them at various stages of manuscript prepara-

<sup>28</sup> Ruegamer, *History of the Indiana Historical Society*, 230.

<sup>29</sup> For Rueben Gold Thwaites's program to encourage relations between the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and the University of Wisconsin, see Clifford L. Lord and Carl Ubbelohde, *Clio's Servant: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1846-1954* (Madison, 1967), 99-100. For Thwaites's women assistants at Wisconsin, see *ibid.*, 100, 138-40. The question has to arise as to whether the principal difference between what Nellie Armstrong did at Illinois and what she did in Indiana was that for the Bureau the documents she edited bore her name as coeditor whereas at Illinois she received acknowledgment in the preface while the academic editors received the full credit for publications.

<sup>30</sup> Hawkins, conversation with author, June 22, 1995; Lana Ruegamer, "Indiana Historical Society Salutes Dorothy Riker: Fifty Years an Indiana Historian," *Indiana History Bulletin*, LVI (June, 1979), 85-87.

tion. In decisions about which documents to publish, again the editors chiefly determined the agenda, in consultation with the Bureau director. Hawkins recalled three-way discussions with the editors, brainstorming publications possibilities. He urged publishing materials with greater popular interest than the traditional governors' papers, but the major say in determining publication belonged to the women editors.<sup>31</sup>

The largest factor explaining the women's opportunity to shape publications in Indiana history was the resistance of the Bureau/Society to accepting the leadership of the academic historians in Bloomington. Esarey, as noted, lost his bid to move the Bureau to Bloomington in 1925. President Herman B Wells and I.U. History Department head and Society executive committee member Kohlmeier made another unsuccessful effort to acquire the Bureau in 1944, after Coleman's death. The insistence of the Indianapolis leaders of the Society that the Bureau remain in Indianapolis preserved the women editors' autonomy, as well as preserving the powerful influence of the Society's amateur historian board members. While the executive committee was prepared to give lip service to the notion that the Bureau/Society should consult with the history department about editing and publishing material in Indiana history, in fact the women editors—Armstrong and Riker, until Armstrong's retirement in 1947, and then Riker and Thornbrough—continued to play the major role in editing and publishing Indiana historical monographs and documents.<sup>32</sup>

At times, the relationship between the university and the Bureau was somewhat tense. It is likely, however, that Riker's presence in the Bureau from 1929 to 1971 was a peacemaking one. With her strong ties to the department that trained her and durable friendships with Kohlmeier, Lynch, Esarey, R. C. Buley, and later with Barnhart, Riker's power in the Bureau perhaps partly mollified the university's sense that their leadership had been evaded.

As has been suggested by the foregoing, there were several kinds of historical editing undertaken by Riker and her colleagues. The first, already mentioned, was consultation with authors about potential manuscripts. The editors used their judgment about what would be valuable (and possible, given available sources) to suggest the shape of proposed research. In the same vein the editors evaluated completed manuscripts, often seeking the opinions of specialists before making their decisions. Once manuscripts were accepted in principle, the editors often proposed revisions or additions of various extensiveness to improve the clarity and/or usefulness of the work. The editors performed normal copy-editing chores, correcting

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<sup>31</sup> Hawkins, conversation with author, June 22, 1995.

<sup>32</sup> Ruegamer, *History of the Indiana Historical Society*, 179-80.

errors and infelicities of style and preparing the manuscript for the printer. Historical editors, in addition, verified the research, so far as possible, by checking the footnotes for accuracy in quotation and for their validity as evidence. In these situations the editors nurtured an author and his or her document.

There were, of course, conflicts. Hawkins recalled that Riker's steely integrity about her sense of historical truth led on rare occasions to stand-offs with authors. It was his sense that, while he and Thornbrough shared Riker's standards, Riker exhibited a distinctively moral passion for historical truth that reflected her essentially religious view of the world.

Riker was most noted as a documentary editor. She edited or coedited some of the most admired and useful documents published by the Bureau and the Society, including *Laws of Indiana Territory, 1809–1816* (1934), *Executive Proceedings of the State of Indiana, 1816–1836* (1947), *The John Tipton Papers* (3 vols., 1942), *Journals of the General Assembly of Indiana Territory, 1805–1815* (1950), *Indiana Election Returns, 1816–1851* (1960), and three volumes of the messages and papers of Indiana governors (those of James Brown Ray, Noah Noble, and David Wallace). This partial list represents an enormous body of scholarship. It is not too much to say that Riker was responsible for publishing more scholarship on the documents of Indiana political history than anyone else. Indiana University's gift to the Bureau (or hostage/princess, if you will) was the most productive single researcher in the field of Indiana political history for fifty years. She was rivaled only by her colleague Gayle Thornbrough in any area of Indiana history. Unlike academic historians, of course, Riker and Thornbrough were paid to do historical research, full time and year round, and spent their working lives with ready access to most of the documents and secondary sources they needed.

This "best job in the world" entailed identifying important kinds of documents to publish; selecting and arranging documents, following scrupulous analysis of their meaning and completeness; annotating the documents to clarify obscure references and identify individuals; placing the documents in their context by way of introduction; copy-editing the manuscript; and—in some ways most importantly—creating an analytical and accurate index to make the documents easily usable by researchers.<sup>33</sup>

While Riker spent most of her career editing documents of state building, her last eight years she joined with Thornbrough in editing the diary of Calvin Fletcher, one of the most impressive person-

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<sup>33</sup> Among Riker's earliest assignments was the creation of an index, published in 1930, to the first twenty-five volumes of the IMH. An excellent preparation for her career in Indiana history, the assignment not only taught Riker herself what had been published, it permitted her to create an intelligent and accurate resource tool for subsequent scholars.

al documents in American letters. Fletcher, a Vermont-born lawyer and pillar of Indianapolis from its early days, kept a detailed diary from 1817 to 1866, making it not only the richest single source in Indiana history (with the possible exception of newspapers) for the period it covers, but also, because of its author's intelligence, energy, and habits of reflection, one of the great American diaries. Riker brought the wealth of forty-plus years of knowledge to her part of this last big project for the women editors, and both used the project to train Paula Corpuz, their younger colleague, who joined them as a full editor within a few years. It was a splendid last "hurrah" as each woman headed into retirement.

Riker's work on the Fletcher diary reflected her interest in the documents associated with social history and the lives of ordinary persons, a consistent part of her passion for historical truth. The same interest prompted her to support genealogy and the efforts of ordinary persons to be their own historians. Riker was an influential member of the genealogy committee of the Indiana Historical Society and of the Family History Section which succeeded it. She used her experience with historical documents to provide authoritative transcriptions of birth, death, and marriage records from a wide variety of sources in the conviction that the broader the popular interest in history the more likely it was that historical documents would be preserved and in friendly sympathy with genealogists as fellow seekers of the elusive past.<sup>34</sup>

Unlike her editorial colleagues, Riker also produced an important monograph, *Indiana to 1816*. Although she was listed as coauthor, with John D. Barnhart (1895–1967), of the first volume of the multivolume history of Indiana published jointly by the Bureau and the Society (1965– ), it was widely known that Barnhart's manuscript, prepared during the ordeal of the long illness before his death, was essentially unusable. While Riker researched and rewrote the book, she was influenced by Barnhart's earlier works and benefited from his research. Moreover, she had respected and liked the man; she felt it was appropriate to acknowledge him and insisted that he be credited with coauthorship.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps, too, this was a continuing part of the peacemaking role she played with the Indiana University History Department. By deferring to Barnhart, she signaled her continuing loyalty to the department that trained her.

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<sup>34</sup> There are frequent notices in the *Indiana History Bulletin* of Riker's membership or chairmanship of the genealogy committee; see, e.g., XX (March, 1943), 82. For Riker's support of the revived genealogical committee of the Society in the 1950s and 1960s, the author relied on conversations with Hubert Hawkins. Riker's genealogical publications are extensive.

<sup>35</sup> Information about Riker's responsibility for *Indiana to 1816* from Shirley S. McCord, conversation with author, June 6, 1995, and Hubert H. Hawkins, conversation with author, June 22, 1995. Information about Riker's wish to credit Barnhart from Hawkins, *ibid.*

Riker was the logical choice to prepare the volume on the territorial period by virtue of her documentary works on territorial laws and the legislative journals. She had also published an early paper on Francis Vigo, demonstrating her acquaintance with Revolutionary War materials. She knew French, and her personal interest in the period had prompted her to read widely in the secondary literature.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, it was a daunting assignment. She was required to provide an authoritative account of a geographic entity not yet meaningfully defined for most of the period covered: Indiana did not yet exist, in any form, for eight of the thirteen chapters. The assignment covered an enormous time period (prehistory to 1816) and three colonial regimes—the French, the British, and the American. Riker demonstrated command of a significantly more extensive body of material than that required of the other authors of the series' volumes. Fortunately, she had help: Shirley S. McCord, the next generation of Bureau editor, trained by Riker herself, was research assistant and chief copy editor for the volume.<sup>37</sup>

Riker produced a fine monograph, praised in scholarly journals as "straightforward and authoritative," "scholarly, impressively researched, and lucidly presented." It contained, said one reviewer, "interpretation and information . . . not found in other books." Some reviewers complained that her approach was "very traditional . . . with a strong emphasis on political, diplomatic and military history" and failed to place Indiana's experience in comparative context. All called attention to Riker's bibliography. Sidney Glazer of Wayne State University in the *Journal of American History* found it "almost impossible to find adequate words of praise for the exhaustive, well-organized, and helpful bibliography."<sup>38</sup> It was her last work for the Bureau, from which she retired in 1971 at age sixty-six, before moving to the Society for eight more years on the Fletcher diary.

Editors provide a service to the historical profession. As James Franklin Jameson put it, they are "making bricks without much idea of how the architects will use them, but believing that the best architect that ever was cannot get along without bricks, and therefore trying to make good ones."<sup>39</sup> Riker and her editorial colleagues

<sup>36</sup> Dorothy Riker, "Francis Vigo," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XXVI (March, 1930), 12-24; Riker, Indiana University transcript; Shirley S. McCord, conversation with author, June 6, 1995.

<sup>37</sup> Dorothy L. Riker, "Preface," in John D. Barnhart and Dorothy L. Riker, *Indiana to 1816: The Colonial Period* (Indianapolis, 1971), vii-viii.

<sup>38</sup> William E. Foley, review, *American Historical Review*, LXXIX (June, 1974), 843-44; Sidney Glazer, review, *Journal of American History*, LVIII (March, 1972), 1007-1008; Larry R. Gerlach, review, *Ohio History*, LXXXI (Winter, 1972), 64-65.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Higham, *History*, 25.

did not acquire great reputations in the profession; Riker never earned much. One of her deepest disappointments came in the 1950s when she decided she wanted to buy a house. She was turned down for a mortgage loan "because she was a woman."<sup>40</sup> She lived in a small and modest apartment until she moved to a retirement home in her eighties.

Most of the women who earned advanced degrees in history in the 1920s, even those who earned doctorates, wound up in service jobs, in high schools, libraries and archives, and teachers' colleges, with a tiny elite teaching in women's colleges. In her study of the period 1890–1940 Jacqueline Goggin has documented a regular pattern of discrimination against women in faculty recruitment and hiring at universities, coeducational colleges, and men's colleges similar to the discrimination noted by Peter Novick against males who were Jewish, black, or (except in Catholic institutions) Roman Catholic in the same time period.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, Goggin shows a decline in academic opportunities for women with doctorates between 1930 and 1970, a decline that reflected the depression of the 1930s, the national emergency of war in the 1940s, and the fervid domesticity of the postwar period.

So, despite the optimistic degree seeking of would-be women historians in the 1920s, for most of the twentieth century they were excluded from academe and were suffered to serve only along the margins of the profession, usually in settings that increasingly assumed the atmosphere of the trenches as the century wore on: embattled public high schools and defensive teachers' colleges and schools of education. In the context of the last third of the twentieth century, with an expanded national commitment to the democratization of American culture and the general agreement that all should aspire to the privileges earlier accorded only to white males, the denial of the privileges of the academy to all women and to male members of traditionally despised groups seems profoundly unjust. But this late-twentieth century categorization of the fate of women such as Dorothy Riker—as victims of an entrenched prejudice against women—seems unfaithful to Riker's own sense of the significance of her life.

To assess her life by a careerist standard—by how much power, prestige, money she achieved in comparison to (by definition "privileged") male historians—is to distort its meaning for her and her contemporaries. Riker took pride in what she did; she believed that her editorial work was as significant a contribution to the profession as university teaching, and she knew that she did it outstandingly well. Moreover, she subscribed to an ethic of service; the point

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<sup>40</sup> Shirley S. McCord, conversation with author.

<sup>41</sup> Goggin, "Challenging Sexual Discrimination in the Historical Profession," 769-802; Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 173-74, 231-32, 338-39, 365-66, 472-73.

for Riker was not to lay up treasures on earth. She was a relentless and cheerful do-gooder (in a homey, personal, neighborly way—she was always running errands for “the old people,” as she called them when she herself was eighty) as well as a creative and fertile researcher; both doing good and doing history were her passions.

Riker rejected much of what twentieth-century American culture told her was important in favor of a life of scholarship cloistered in the Indiana State Library, dividing her love between the documents of the past and the people she found around her. What looked like the margins of the historical profession from some perspectives looked like a splendid life’s mission to Riker. For her, history was a calling, and her joy was that *she* was chosen.

When chosen, she was not found wanting. Expanded opportunities for professional training in history for women in the early twentieth century opened doors for Riker and her fellow women editors at the Bureau; they came in and, taking advantage of a male contest for power, ruled. Their regime was a distinguished one.