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Book Review

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Woman Lawyer: The Trials of Clara Foltz. By Barbara Babcock. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011. xviii, 370 pp. \$45.00.)

Woman Lawyer tells the story of Clara Foltz, who in 1878 became the first female lawyer in California. Today her legacy is memorialized in the Clara Shortridge Foltz Criminal Justice Center in Los Angeles. The courthouse recognizes Foltz's efforts to establish the office of the public defender. Barbara Babcock is eager to tell Foltz's story, and the details come tumbling out.

Babcock is a leader among legal historians of women. Her Women's Legal History Biography Project at Stanford Law School produces publicly available biographies of early women lawyers. Babcock is at her best in *Woman Lawyer* when she integrates these biographical stories to contextualize Foltz's experience. Babcock briefly introduces many of these famous first women, giving just enough information to whet the appetite.

Babcock's focus is the personal story of Clara Foltz. The first four chapters of the book present the details of Foltz's life in rough chronological order. Foltz married early at the age of fifteen but was soon abandoned by her ne'er-do-well husband. As a single mother with five children to raise, she came to law as a way to support her family. The book recounts Foltz's challenges to the entrenched male legal establishment, including her denial of valuable apprenticeships, exclusion from moot court clubs, and the lawsuit she filed to gain admission to the new Hastings College of Law. Her experiences are intertwined with glimpses into the history of California, from its constitutional convention driven by anti-Chinese sentiment to the economic boom times and depressions caused by gold, real estate, and the great fire.

Foltz struggled to earn a living as a solo practitioner, taking whatever cases came in the door: domestic relations, indigent criminal defense, and a few high-profile jury trials. She dabbled in newspaper editorship, political oratory for both national parties, and clubwomen's activities (founding the Portia Law Club). Foltz craved publicity and appeared often in the news, if only as a novelty. She crafted her own reputation, exaggerating stories of herself as "the Portia of the

West,” her million-dollar award for a wife in a divorce settlement, and her heroic actions during a shipwreck in the English Channel.

In the last three chapters, Babcock identifies Foltz’s contributions as a public thinker, feminist, and promoter of the public defender. She detours into broad-brush political history having little to do with Foltz. Even so, the book highlights Foltz’s pragmatic and successful advocacy of gender equality in lobbying for women’s right to profession, suffrage, and admission to the bar. Foltz went on to advocate for the idea of a state-supported public defender to equalize the power of the prosecution. She sought an institutional replacement for the common practice of appointing pro bono counsel, highlighting prosecutorial misconduct and the mistreatment of women defendants. The *New York Times* dismissed the public defender concept as a “strange project of a female attorney,” but this “ridiculous” idea earned Foltz her greatest renown (p. 289).

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