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The Making of a Historian of Women in Science: Marilyn Bailey Ogilvie at 80!

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This was the title of our session¹ at the Annual HSS Meeting in Atlanta, GA., (November 3-6, 2016) a session meant to celebrate our colleague Marilyn Bailey Ogilvie's 80th birthday, as well as explore her career as a leading historian of women in science who began her professional life prior to the affirmative action legislation, (1972), or at a

¹ The session, which concluded with a response by Marilyn B. Ogilvie to each and all the speakers, featured Marilyn's key collaborator Joy Harvey (as in Ogilvie & Harvey 1999) & her son Stevie Harvey, a NYC-based Egyptologist, who read the bulk of her text and otherwise ensured Joy's presence at the HSS Meeting under heroic conditions of recovery from a stroke two years earlier; Kerry Magruder, Marilyn's successor as director of the History of Science Collection at the University of Oklahoma; Sally Gregory Kohlstedt of the University of Minnesota, a former HSS President and herself a contributor to the history of women in science, among other fields; Ruby Heap of the University of Ottawa, a leading historian of Canadian women in science; and Pnina G. Abir-Am, who organized the session, is the recipient of the first HSS's award for "outstanding research essay" in the history of women in science, and served twice as co-editor of Marilyn's own essays. (in *Uneasy Careers...*1987 and *Creative Couples in the Sciences*, 1996) Margaret Walsh Rossiter, a former Editor of HSS, author of a trilogy on *Women Scientists in America*, (1982, 1995, 2012) and recipient of HSS's dual award for best book in the history of science, as well as the best book in the history of women in science, chaired this session. (See attached photo of most of the speakers.)

time such lives were still highly improbable for women.

I'm happy to report that the session was well attended, despite parallel sessions. Moreover, our session turned out to be a major success by any other criteria, such as an impressive diversity of

colleagues: junior and senior, women and men, US & foreign based, and especially an amazingly rich discussion by both new and veteran colleagues. The session even achieved the ultimate accolade of being talked about in the "corridors of professional gossip." Still, the rationale for



Standing, left to right: Marilyn Ogilvie, Kerry Magruder, Pnina Abir-Am, Nancy Slack, Sally Gregory Kohlstedt. Seated: Joy Harvey, Margaret Rossiter. (Photo by Stevie Harvey)

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such a session was not that obvious to some and the session's fortunes remained uncertain for a long time, to some extent until its very unfolding. Therefore, the following reflections should be of some interest.

Beyond the obvious milestone of celebrating a colleague's 80th birthday, the session's rationale included the following: A) to reflect on the changing role of the biographical genre, of which Marilyn has been a major exponent—in the historiography of science, and especially in that of women in science. Whereas outright exclusion of women as topics, as well as authors, has become rare four decades after affirmative action, still the topic of the history of women in science remains marginalized.² Our session in 2016 reflected a surprising mainstreaming effect.

Yet another aim of this session was (B) to showcase the diversity of contributions to the history of women in science. When another HSS

² As recently as 2015, upon reviewing a collection on innovative “outsiders” to science, which included no case studies of women scientists (only 2 out of close to 20 authors were women, but their topics did not include women scientists) I was castigated for pointing out these unfortunate aspects of the volume's composition. A mid-career colleague was more upset that this exclusion by gender was exposed in a major journal such as *Isis* than that it was an outdated form of historiography; instead, this scholar tried to justify the exclusion of case studies on women by lashing at the reviewer's alleged “lack of understanding.”

session (2007 in Washington DC) marked the 25th anniversary of Margaret W. Rossiter's 1st groundbreaking volume of *Women Scientists in America* in 2007, we highlighted the institutional approach that Rossiter's pioneering book and its later two companion volumes had so successfully pursued. By contrast, Marilyn's scholarship reminds us that the biographical approach remains not only a big favorite with the general public but also has plenty of justification within the scholarly realm. Focusing the bulk of her effort from one biographical dictionary (1986) to another, (1999, in collaboration with Joy Harvey, see below) Marilyn had the good foresight to grasp that the cumulative impact of biographical dictionaries does not occur in the realm of knowledge only, but also in that of power. By its sheer existence, the genre of the biographical dictionary refutes the long persisting belief that there were always very few women in science (and hence it is fine not to know about them, let alone research them).

Yet another aim (C) was to learn from the specificities of Marilyn's own career, which again are not widely known, to what extent her career patterns shed light on wider factors enabling and constraining scholarship on the history of women in science. As is the case with most women scholars, indeed most scholars per se, contributions to a new field such as

the history of women in science,³ especially when done by new categories of contributors such as woman historians of science, tend to be easily overlooked. It was thus the burden of our session to convey to HSS at large that many gems can be found well beyond the societal obsession with celebrities and its related academic obsession with professional “stars,” whether those “stars” are self-propelled or engineered by patronage. Marilyn's unfolding career as scientist, science teacher, science educator, and eventually archivist, curator, historian of science, HSS activist, and mentor to younger colleagues, illuminates the winding road to scholarship for women, as well as the art of survival in academia, often on its fringes, but eventually at its center; the recent naming of a research room in Marilyn's name at the University of Oklahoma is a first of its kind for a woman historian of science, and possibly for men too. Becoming finally acquainted with the unexpected opportunities of a colleague's career is illuminating not only for those of us who have enjoyed her collegiality for decades but also for junior colleagues who may find both inspiration and practical wisdom in the diverse choices that Marilyn made throughout her increasingly well-recognized career.

³ On the historiography of women in science as a new field see my “The 25th anniversary of *Uneasy Careers...*”, *HSS Newsletter*, April 2013.

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The session began with Sally Gregory Kohlstedt's attempt to capture the professional context in the history of science in the 1970s, when the affirmative action legislation of 1972 encouraged women to pursue graduate education and academic careers beyond the previous confines of women's colleges. As Sally, a founder of the first HSS Committee on Women in Science and main instigator for a HSS Prize recognizing contributions to the history of women in science (starting in 1987, or three decades ago!) reminded us, Marilyn faced a profession which, as befits its hybrid origins in science and in history, was slower than general history in recognizing women historians of science and their contributions; still, the history of science is better than science, which, in some fields to this day, has not fixed the many instances in which women scientists were deprived of their credit as discoverers, [e.g. **a AAAS session on RNA splicing**], not to mention discrimination in less lofty career aspects such as lab space, wage gaps, prize nomination, etc.

Joy D. Harvey described her collaboration with Marilyn on their joint biographical dictionary, a treasure for all those who research or teach the history of women in science. Their project was not only a labor of love but also an immense public serve to historians of science everywhere, and required that Joy drive to Norman,

Oklahoma from Boston, Massachusetts. This long drive (1,700 miles/2,736 kilometers) is in itself a feat! Ruby Heap conveyed for us her passion for the lives of women scientists and engineers in Canada, especially those who were both scholars and science policy makers; Ruby also highlighted the impact of the early U.S. historians of women in science on stimulating new scholarship on Canadian women scientists.⁴ Kerry Magruder detailed Marilyn's diverse contributions at the University of Oklahoma, especially her key role in building the history of science collection by deciding which rare books to acquire. Kerry's superb slides acquainted us with both the professional and social dimensions of Marilyn's career. My paper/presentation focused on Marilyn's early scholarship on collaborative couples in science, included in *Uneasy Careers...* (1987). Thanks to Karen M. Reeds' foresight, a session on creative couples at HSS-1989-Gainesville, Florida eventually became the volume *Creative Couples in the Sciences* (1996).⁵ My goal was to emphasize Marilyn's

⁴ As Ruby mentioned, the late Marianne G. Ainley of Montreal, Quebec and Victoria, B.C. was a pioneering historian of Canadian women scientists who contributed essays to the above mentioned *Uneasy Careers...* and *Creative Couples in the Sciences*, note 2.

⁵ Reeds, an active HSS member, served at the time as Science Acquisition Editor at Rutgers University Press, and commissioned *Creative Couples in the Sciences* after she was impressed with a session on

superb collegiality as Marilyn was among the first to contribute a paper and encourage my efforts in bringing together a critical mass of women historians of science in *Uneasy Careers...* I concluded by reminding all of Marilyn's outstanding **presentation of her forthcoming biography of the ornithologist Marjorie Nice Morse** at the 2015 Prague Meeting of the International Commission on Women in the History of Science, Technology & Medicine.

In addition, I wanted to draw attention to what I perceive as the most outstanding feature of Marilyn's scholarship, namely the sheer diversity of genres with which she had experimented in attempting to capture the richness of women's lives in science. Ranging from collective biographical studies—the most read genre by the general public—which Marilyn pioneered at the level of dictionary, (Ogilvie 1986, Ogilvie & Harvey 1999) to studies of collaborative couples (Ogilvie 1987, 1996), to popularizations of woman icons of science such as Mme Curie (Ogilvie 2004), to disciplinary and institutional studies at the mainstream of the history of science as a field.⁶ Now in her 81st year, and close to completing her biography of Marjorie Nice Morse, Marilyn remains a key contributor

this topic organized at the HSS Annual Meeting in Gainesville, in 1989. Marilyn was of course the first speaker in that session.

⁶ **See Marilyn's list of publications.**

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to the consolidation of the history of women in science as a vibrant and increasingly mainstream field within the history of science. The session concluded with a standing ovation, which reflected how much Marilyn's career has meant to us. She was pleasantly surprised.

A Gathering to Remember Sam Schweber (11/11)

By Snait Gissis

The above title was the one-line announcement in the general program of the HSS in Toronto.

A nice and spacey room was allotted for the gathering, and a special table was set up where all of Sam's books, authored and edited, were exhibited (at the end of the session attendees were invited to take whichever books they wanted, and they did).

David Kaiser opened with a beautiful short speech about Sam's work. I added a few sentences about the role of "the survivor's question" in the way Sam shaped himself and his life morally, the significance he attributed to being Jewish, and how he viewed the recent history of Israel as the deepest tragedy of his life. Then it was open to people to come forth and talk, and they did—from all age groups, marking the different stages of Sam's life as a historian of

science. These included Diane Paul, Gar Allen, Bernie Lightman, David Kahan, Katie Park, Heidi Voskuhl, Al Martinez, Karl Hall, Olival Freire, Alexei Kojevnikov (who flew specially from a Chicago conference), Jessica Wang, and many more. They told stories, some of them serious, others humorous. The common threads running through all were Sam's generosity, care and concern for people, his continued attempt to forge cooperation among communities, his readiness to share his vast knowledge and his insights, his support for young people—enduring yet relentless in demanding that they stretch themselves as much as they could, his deep and genuine intellectual curiosity, and his modesty.

He touched people in myriad ways. The day after the session many of the participants told me how glad they were of this opportunity to get together and voice these memories collectively.

I feel that this unassuming, straightforward and simple gathering fitted with the way Sam lived.