

AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF WOMEN IN EARLY AMERICAN FILMS: 1895-1930
DENISE LOWE, The Haworth Press, Inc., Binghamton, NY, paperback, (623p)
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When an audience watches Kate Winslet or Sandra Bullock on the big screen, it rarely realizes that these two actresses are part of a long tradition of women who have played significant roles in American cinema. Denise Lowe's extremely well-researched "An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Women in Early American Films: 1895-1930" focuses on the lives of women who worked in the American film industry at the turn-of-the-century, the time when silent films were giving way to talkies.

Conveniently styled after a dictionary, this book alphabetically lists the women who worked in American films between 1895 and 1930. In addition to supplying details of the women's years and places of birth and death, the write-up on each woman gives the reader valuable information regarding the woman's life, her career, and rumors and gossip related to her. Packed full of information, the write-ups are interesting reading. Photographs of some of the women accompany some of the entries. Denise Lowe highlights the fact that many women who were working in the film industry during the turn of the century are forgotten or unknown. Though she has done her best to create a comprehensive dictionary of women in early American films, she was forced to omit many women because she could not get information on them. This book, written by a self-avowed feminist and popular culture historian, is a dictionary that not only lists, but also acknowledges and emphasizes these women's contributions to the American film industry.

The dictionary also includes entries on women who did not work as actresses; instead, they had roles in other capacities such as: editing, writing screenplays, and directing. It may come as a surprise to many readers that women played so many roles in the film industry. If several of the names seem unfamiliar, it bears witness to Lowe's assertion that these are forgotten women. Readers will also come across a few unexpected names. For example, there is an entry for Helen Keller who wrote screenplays for a few films. Each entry is followed by the person's credits including: film credits, writing credits, and directing credits. These details inform the reader how much each woman has contributed to the film industry.

The dictionary also includes the names of some important women-centric films such as "Broken Blossoms." In addition to the amount of information the dictionary holds, the appendices also give readers fascinating information about things such as: the longest acting careers of female silent actors, the members of WAMPAS (Western Associated Motion Picture Advertisers), the locations of some of the women stars on Hollywood Walk of Fame, and a list of behind-the-scenes women pioneers in American films.

Women actors on the big screen come from a long tradition of women in American cinema. This book gives the reader access to this tradition, which is full of less remembered women who played important roles shaping the American film industry.

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