

Authorized to Heal: Gender, Class, and the Transformation of Medicine in Appalachia, 1880-1930

Sandra Lee Barney



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In this book, Sandra Barney examines the transformation of medical care in Central Appalachia during the Progressive Era and analyzes the influence of women volunteers in promoting the acceptance of professional medicine in the region. By highlighting the critical role played by nurses, clubwomen, ladies' auxiliaries, and other female constituencies in bringing modern medicine to the mountains, she fills a significant gap in gender and regional history.

Barney explores both the differences that divided women in the reform effort and the common ground that connected them to one another and to the male physicians who profited from their voluntary activity. Held together at first by a shared goal of improving the public welfare, the coalition between women volunteers and medical professionals began to fracture when the reform agendas of women's groups challenged physicians' sovereignty over the form of health care delivery. By examining the professionalization of male medical practitioners, the gendered nature of the campaign to promote their authority, and their displacement of community healers, especially female midwives, Barney uncovers some of the tensions that evolved within Appalachian society as the region was fundamentally reshaped during the era of industrial development.

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