



Women of the American Circus, 1880-1940

Katherine H. Adams, Michael L. Keene

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During the years 1880 to 1940, the glory days of the American circus, a third to a half of the cast members were women--a large group of very visible American workers whose story needs telling. This book, using sources such as diaries, autobiographies, newspaper accounts, films, posters, and route books, first considers the popular media's presentation of these performers as unnatural and scandalous--as well as romantic and thrilling. Next are the stories told by circus women, which contradict and complicate other versions of their lives. Across America in those years an array of acts featured women, such as tableaux, freak shows, girlie shows, tiger acts, and aerial performances, all involving special skills and all detailed here. The book offers a unique and fascinating view of not just the circus but of what it meant to be an American woman at work.

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