

*Mrs. Magavero: A History Based on the Career of an Academic Librarian*, by Jane Brodsky Fitzpatrick. Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press, 2007.

Reviewed by Cody Hennesy

*In a way I think I did an injustice to the profession, not only to myself, but to the profession. Because I wasn't an activist. I really didn't know how to handle those guys.*

So states Filomena Magavero, 83 years old, recounting her experiences as the first female librarian at the New York Maritime College, where she worked for the latter half of the twentieth century. Much of Jane Brodsky Fitzpatrick's *Mrs. Magavero: A History Based on the Life of an Academic Librarian* serves to unpack this statement, nimbly weaving Magavero's specific experiences at Maritime College into a broader cultural history of academic librarianship. This is the rarely discussed history in which Melvil Dewey not only devised a foundational system of library classification, but also delivered a speech in 1886 entitled "Women in Libraries: How they are Handicapped." Devoted to explaining why "the fairest employers, in simplest justice, usually pay men more for what seems at first sight the same work," Dewey's remarks were not those of some anomalous sexist, of course, but are instead representative of a sexism endemic to early librarianship. Fitzpatrick examines the repercussions of these early biases, as well as the societal pressures contributing to the development of the unique roles of men and women in librarianship, and uses this backdrop to contextualize Magavero's career.

The centerpiece of *Mrs. Magavero* is Fitzpatrick's concise and informative chapter on "Women in Library History." Fitzpatrick accomplishes a rare feat here by managing to conduct a fairly comprehensive survey of the literature about women in libraries without bogging down her narrative. Taking up Anita Schiller's 1970 thesis that women are a "disadvantaged majority" in libraries, Fitzpatrick notes that, despite an historical abundance of women working in the field, "library history was written by men and about men." It wasn't until the second wave of feminism, which came about twenty years after Magavero assumed her post at the Maritime College in 1949, that the library profession began to seriously consider issues of equal rights and pay for women. While the *Library Journal* was refusing to take a stand on women's rights as late as 1965, declaring in an editorial that they wouldn't be "brave—or foolish—enough to take sides" on the issue, Schiller and others began to pave the way for organizations such as the Committee on the Status of Women in Librarianship (COSWL) and the Social Responsibilities Round Table Task Force on Women in the late sixties. The official position of the ALA followed suit soon thereafter in the passage of a 1970 resolution (proposed by Schiller) "that the American Library Association take steps to equalize salaries and opportunities for employment and promotions."

Fitzpatrick enriches the discussion by continually returning the focus to Magavero's individual experiences at the Maritime College. Far from doing an injustice to the profession, Magavero is revealed here as a quiet pioneer. Establishing a place for herself in an academic library twenty years before her profession (or society at large) was willing to acknowledge and address the problem of sexual discrimination, Magavero recounts that "I wasn't going to let these guys run me out of here, just because they want to treat me as a clerk." And Fitzpatrick reminds us that Magavero's story is representative of a larger segment of American women who came out of World War II ready and willing to work, but who were denied professional opportunities and shuffled into clerical lines. It's enlightening, then, to read not only of the major contributions of feminist library historians such as Schiller, Kathleen Heim, and Wanda Auerbach (among others), but to also consider the experiences of those women, like Magavero, who were on the front lines in the battle for equal rights in academic libraries.

Given a disparity between men and women's salaries in academic libraries that has still not closed according to the 2006-2007 ARL Salary Survey, histories like Fitzpatrick's are a crucial reminder that the movement for equality is an ongoing struggle. We should consider ourselves fortunate to be able to build upon and learn from the examples of progress and endurance that *Mrs. Magavero* provides.