

REVIEWS of Herbal Diplomats: The Contribution of Early American Nurses (1830-1860) to Nineteenth Century Health Care Reform and the Botanical Medical Movement, by Martha M. Libster, PhD, RN. 359 pages including glossary and extensive notes. Golden Apple Publications.

This remarkable book connects medical history and women's history in path breaking ways. All students of American women's health history will benefit from its comprehensive and careful analysis.

Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Author of Women and Power in American History*
Distinguished Professor of History, State University of New York, Binghamton

Martha Libster has written a wonderfully well-researched book that deftly examines the "domestic sphere" of women healers in a manner unique from the "public sphere" dominated by male physicians and most frequently depicted by historians. By examining a diverse set of women who worked under the rubric of Botanic, Thomsonian, Eclectic, Physio-medical, Shaker, and Sisters of Charity, the author has ably documented both the transmission and feminization of health and healing in nineteenth century society through women's contributions to the botanical medical movement. The book brings a new perspective to the neglected sphere of sickroom management in America. Libster's scholarship is excellent and her argument compelling.

John S. Haller Ph.D., *Author of The People's Doctors: Samuel Thomson and the American Botanical Movement. 1790-1860*
Professor of History, Southern Illinois University

This very readable book provides an innovative historical perspective on the complexity inherent in the internal and external expectations assigned or assumed by community women and their creative use of the borderland between their private and public lives. The work of Shaker, Latter-Day Saints nurses, and the American Sisters of Charity as influenced by their specific cultural environments as well as the general cultural impositions of 19th century American society is explored. Gender differences such as, societal restraints on female ambition and education clearly played a part in the ultimate contributions of each of these groups. Those contributions tempered by society's slowly changing views of woman's proper place resulted in the degree of cultural integration of their remedies. The notion of cultural integration and the diplomacy required to achieve it is relevant today as nurses face the mounting health care crisis with a depleted workforce. Historically nurses have encouraged enlightened self-care in their education of and advocacy for patients and their families. As described here the healing networks established by these mid nineteenth century nurses provided for the tradition of open exploration of multiple forms of healing. Today in the ongoing age of consumerism, nurses continue to broker the attainment of the best level of health and illness care for their patients and their families. The development and determination of those nurses who first approached the "borderland" is an interesting and inspiring story worth telling. The author offers a refreshing account of overlooked contributions to the historiography of health care and as such offers a refreshing perspective for students and scholars alike.

Olga Maranjian Church, PhD, RN,FAAN
Founding Member of the American Association for the History of Nursing

The contributions and influences of the American botanical medical movement have been subjected to considerable scrutiny by historians for more than fifty years. But, as Martha M. Libster points out in her provocative and insightful *Herbal Diplomats*, the contributions of women have largely been ignored. In this thoroughly researched and highly readable account, Libster addresses that deficit and offers a **long overdue history of the women who played an appreciable role in this colorful and controversial health care phenomenon of the 19th century**. *Herbal Diplomats* offers a useful overview of antebellum health care that provides the context for a thorough discussion of women's contributions through several significant religious communities. These combine to provide a collective account of women as nurses from a fresh and fascinating perspective. Looking at women as providers of this botanical care rather than as mere consumers, Libster gives the reader a detailed picture not only of 19th century medicine but also of the social milieu of the period. As such, **this book should be of interest to a wide readership, from medical, social and cultural historians to sociologists, students and specialists of women's and religious studies, and a general public interested in American health and history. Because it speaks to such a wide and varied audience, both academic and public librarians will want *Herbal Diplomats* on their shelves.**

Michael A. Flannery, *Co-Author of America's Botanico-Medical Movements: Vox Populi* (2001) with Alex Berman
Associate Professor and Associate Director for Historical Collections
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Though the emphasis of Martha Libster's well researched book is on nursing and nurses, *Herbal Diplomats* is far more than a historical documentation of nursing in America. The author has provided us with a brilliantly documented, thoughtful and thought provoking book on the modern medical system as its unfolding in the last three centuries and how it might better serve the needs of the American public by incorporating a "tiered system of health care that embraces and integrative approach to health care". Though her emphasis is on the role that nurses play in our health care system, *Herbal Diplomats* really addresses the entire health care system, its faults and strengths. Martha Libster is in the finest sense a "bridge walker", a person who, as she aptly describes in *Herbal Diplomats* acts as a bridge between the 'modern' western model of medical training" and the traditional practice of community healers and herbalists. ***Herbal Diplomats* is an absolutely incredible book, perhaps one of the most important books written by a medical professional in the last decade.**

Rosemary Gladstar
Herbalist and Teacher, *Author of Gladstar's Family Herbal*
Founder of Sage Mountain Retreat Center

Herbal Diplomats provides the reader with a fascinating and very readable historical overview of the contributions and role of women in the healing arts, foundational to modern nursing. Dr. Libster weaves a tapestry of competencies and care in a trilogy presentation of nurses from the Shakers, the Latter-day Saints, and the Sisters of Charity from Emmitsburg, Maryland. The outcome is a captivating treatment of the development of nursing, changes in the prevailing domestic system of healthcare, and emergence of a dominant medical culture involving physicians of various orientations. The result defined a turning point in medical freedom and self-care, resulting in not only the prevention of disease, but of the prolongation of life. The author engages the reader in a delightful discussion highlighting the significant

ways women moved nursing from the domestic culture into the professional arena of status and influence, using herbal diplomacy and healing networks. Adequate background discussion enables even the most scientifically challenged reader to become absorbed in the material. A strength of this text is its exceptional contextualization of the topic coupled with historical analysis and documentation, as well as the insights of an experienced practitioner of the art of nursing. The sensitive but objective treatment of the Shaker infirmary and community nurses, pioneer nurses and midwives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the Sisters of Charity nurses provides concrete evidence of the dynamic relationship between culture and nursing care. The handling of both feminine identity and social role theory for each of the groups studied demonstrates the authors respect for the sociocultural and religious contexts of the nurses. The author invites the reader to consider the future of herbal diplomacy and nursing as an opportunity to go forward with the best of the past in pursuit of integrative solutions that respect diverse beliefs and traditions." This clearly written book is enriching and informative for healthcare practitioners and students of women's studies. It offers good reading, a result of extensive research and sound scholarship.

Betty Ann McNeil, D.C., Archivist, Daughters of Charity

*Dr. Libster's work is an important contribution to an area of study in the history of nursing and health care in the United States. **This is a work that has patiently waited 150 years to have its story told.** Medical and nursing care of the nineteenth century commonly employed the use of herbal medicines. Dr. Libster offers a fine overview of that tradition. She skillfully integrates the history of the tradition of herbal medicine of the mid and late nineteenth century with the history of nursing identity and practice of the time. Then she offers the stories of three specific religious groups who each developed a unique tradition of nursing practice: the Shaker Infirmary and Community Nurses, the pioneer nurses and midwives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and the Sisters of Charity and early American Catholic hospitals. Though current members of any of the three groups may recognize Dr. Libster's orientation as an "observer," rather than member, she shows **considerable sensitivity and facility** in explaining the history of these three groups. She tells their stories in the context of the time regarding medical practice and nursing practice. Herbal Diplomats is engaging and well referenced. It pushes the borders of traditional history of nursing and medicine that have focused on professional viewpoints. It expands our view toward an emerging look at history that moves beyond the study of solitary heroes or history of professional practice. **It is a story of the reality of the work of nurses within the context of their culture and actual practice in the nineteenth century. It offers a glimpse of the connections among health care practice, religious and cultural context, and care for suffering. This work will become a significant addition to scholarship on the history of nursing, the history of women, and the history of health care among cultural and religious groups in America.***

Elaine Sorensen Marshall, R.N., Ph.D.
Dean and Professor | College of Nursing | Brigham Young University

Histories of medical practice written during the 19th century focus primarily on the activities of male physicians and overlook the critical roles played by women as healers and caregivers. In *Herbal Diplomats*, Martha Libster re-evaluates the contributions made by women to healthcare by looking at three distinct groups of nurses/care-givers. Using the journals and receipt books left by Shakers, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the Sisters of Charity, Libster is able to highlight the prominence of women's nursing activities in the health and healing of their families and communities over a dependence on academic medicine. Her insightful blending of women's traditional domestic roles with their understanding of botanicals helps to show how these women were able to provide a system of medical care they could use at home, how they shared their knowledge with other women in their communities, and how they informed the developing practices of the larger healthcare system.

Sharon Duane Koomler
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