Lola G. Baldwin and the Professionalization of Women's Police Work, 1905-1922

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Portland State University. Department of History.

**Date of Award**  
2-12-1993

**Document Type**  
Thesis

**Degree Name**  
Master of Arts (M.A.) in History

**Department**  
History

**Physical Description**  
1 online resource (4, vi, 132 p.)

**Subjects**  
Lola Greene Baldwin (1860-1957), Policewomen -- Oregon -- Portland -- Biography, Vice control -- Oregon -- Portland -- History

**Abstract**  
This thesis traces the emergence of the American policewomen's movement through the career of Portland, Oregon's Lola Greene Baldwin, the first such officer hired by a municipality. It recounts the conditions which marked Baldwin's transition from a volunteer moral purity worker to a professional urban vice detective. The thesis connects Baldwin and her new profession to the Progressive era's social hygiene impulse. It considers how government absorption of the social hygiene agenda influenced the enforcement attitudes and methods of the early policewoman. Further, this work looks at the way Baldwin functioned within the bureaucracies and political structures of her environment. Baldwin's biographical history was obtained from her answers on a federal civil service application. The detective's original police department logs were a key element in researching her activities. Correspondence from the Portland city archives between the policewoman and five mayors and numerous police chiefs enhanced the information from her daily entries, as did a thorough perusal of contemporary newspaper items. Progressive-era city ordinances, reports of the Portland Vice Commission, and various memoranda of city council and local social hygiene committees also proved valuable. Miscellaneous personal documents and newspaper stories covering Baldwin's federal policing service during World War I were bolstered by articles from Social Hygiene. Baldwin professionalized women's police work by convincing Portland to pay for vice prevention and investigation formerly sponsored by private charities. She developed professional standards and procedures such as detailed case files, periodic statistical reports, and a specialized parole system for female delinquents. The female vice officer freely offered her ideas to other cities and helped form a national association of policewomen in 1912. Baldwin adopted social hygiene ideas through authoring laws which segregated females from sources of immorality in amusement and employment environments. The policewoman also championed detention homes for sexually precocious young women and special facilities for venereal cases. She fully accepted, moreover, social hygiene doctrine that prostitution was a medical as well as moral threat mandating complete abolition. When city authorities lagged in pursuing prostitution abatement, Baldwin helped establish a vice commission which forced appropriate action. National recognition of the female detective's vice policing won her appointment as a World War I federal military training facility protective agent. This work involved the detention of thousands of West Coast women and girls on mere suspicion of immorality.
Baldwin returned to her police job in Portland after her federal task ended in late 1920. Used to the complete social control afforded by martial law, however, the policewoman became discouraged by postwar moral laxity in the Rose City, and retired in early 1922. The American urban policewomen's movement was engendered as a government effort to maintain traditional female purity in the modernizing environment of the Progressive era. Baldwin personified the transition from religious-based notions which relied on moral suasion to methods of modern professional social control which codified traditional standards and made them relevant to prevailing cultural and social conditions. The policewoman used the agenda and momentum of the social hygiene movement to empower herself and her new profession. Baldwin took advantage of growing acceptance of women as necessary partners in the management of a "parental" state. She embodied elements of "social feminism" because she believed that females were inherently different and needed state protection. Her insistence on professional equality with male cohorts, however, contradicted this pattern, as did her support of woman suffrage. Although Baldwin never reconciled to the vast cultural changes of her time, she left a proud legacy of professionalism to her daughters in modern law enforcement.

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Women continued in law enforcement in limited ways through the Great Depression, when competition stiffened for jobs in all fields. Women who did manage to hold onto police jobs were often pulled off the street and were relegated to dispatch and other desk-bound jobs. Lola Greene Baldwin and Alice Stebbins Wells often vie for the title of "first policewoman" but Marie Connelly Owns beat them by a decade. Marie Owens was originally hired by the city of Chicago in 1889 as a health inspector charged with enforcing laws that forbid employing children under 14. Until her retirement in 1922, her police work continued to focus on the protection of women. Baldwin also lobbied for laws to protect women and pushed for a home for troubled women.