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# Lovie: The Story of a Southern Midwife and an Unlikely Friendship by Lisa Yarger (review)

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Lovie: The Story of a Southern Midwife and an Unlikely Friendship by  
Lisa Yarger (review)

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The Uptown story arrived at a very different end than the Jacobs versus Moses legend. The resistance was able to reduce the size of the college campus from twenty-two acres to four acres, decreasing the number of displaced Appalachian families; however, after a long, heated battle, Harry S. Truman College, not Hank Williams Village, was built.

Like Jane Jacobs, most designers, planners, preservationists, and community activists today believe neighborhood residents should take part in determining the future of their built environment; however, Guy's work challenges the view that access and participation alone equate to influence in decision-making. The Uptown community's battle for control over their built environment deserves an important place in planning and architecture historiography. Unfortunately, the book's \$100 price tag may make it difficult to justify requiring students to purchase it as a course textbook.

University of Kentucky

KAREN HUDSON

*Lovie: The Story of a Southern Midwife and an Unlikely Friendship.* By Lisa Yarger. Documentary Arts and Culture. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016. Pp. [xiv], 306. \$34.95, ISBN 978-1-4696-3005-2.)

Lovie Beard Shelton practiced midwifery in Beaufort County and surrounding communities in eastern North Carolina for just over fifty years (1950–2001). Following her training as a nurse-midwife in Scotland at the behest of Mary Breckinridge of the Frontier Nursing Service, Shelton emerged as a pioneer rural southern midwife: she was the first nurse-midwife to practice in North Carolina and, for a long time, was the only practicing nurse-midwife in eastern North Carolina. Shelton's identity as a midwife was steadfast, as "midwifery was the prism through which she saw the world" (p. 10). Shelton's multiyear collaboration and friendship with Lisa Yarger emerges as an intricate story of the lives and intersections of these two remarkable women.

Lisa Yarger, a former folklorist and journalist, draws her readers into a two-decade journey as she discovers the story of Lovie Shelton, co-creator of "'our book,'" and their unlikely friendship (p. 295). Although the main story is about Shelton, by the book's end we are nearly as well acquainted with Yarger. Through the years, we follow Yarger and Shelton's casual and formal conversations over numerous overnight visits, shared meals, Christmas card and letter exchanges, and car rides to church. In these carefully detailed accountings, Yarger achieves her goal, framing Shelton as a dynamic, authentic, and compelling figure.

In addition to chronicling Shelton's midwifery story, Yarger offers a frank presentation of race and religion within this community. Shelton, an educated white woman, fulfilled a unique role as a midwife for "black, white, Mennonite, and hippie women" (p. 6). Despite the fact that the majority of the babies Shelton delivered were born to African American women, her disparaging remarks toward interracial marriage and biracial children and her confession that "I was also trying to be white, you know, and keep things separated" indicate the social boundaries within which she worked (p. 141). Yarger also recounts many contentious arguments with Shelton regarding religion,

expressing annoyance and agitation at Shelton's persistent evangelical proselytizing. Together, these contestations divulge Shelton's rather static and hierarchical worldview and offer broader understandings of community social norms.

The beauty of the book lies in Yarger's careful intertwining of long transcript passages, birth stories, conversations with Shelton's family and church members, and details of mundane daily activities. However, it is through Yarger's personal interactions and sometimes cringeworthy banter with Shelton that both Shelton and Yarger emerge as real people wonderfully filled with compassion and contradictions. In so doing, Yarger weaves together events and interactions that belie standard linear time sequencing. The result is an engaging documentary-style biography that offers historical insight into changes in medical professionalization in the United States revolving around childbirth practices, the politics of medical care, and the cultural context of gender and race relations in rural southern health care.

This story of a unique southern midwife opens up broader and deeper understandings of rural southern communities and the centrality of religion and race in shaping social relations. Given Yarger's training as a folklorist, additional linkages to critical and feminist medical history resources through footnotes or an expanded notes section would have helped her make broader connections to studies and theories of medicalized childbirth and midwifery that have proliferated over the last two decades. Feeling familiar to oral historians and ethnographers, Yarger's study offers a rare glimpse into the difficulties of researching living people. Importantly, by chronicling Shelton's life through her own voice and actions, Yarger gives evidence to Shelton's self-proclaimed "'I'm a legend down here!'" status (p. 7).

East Tennessee State University

REBECCA ADKINS FLETCHER

*Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the Twentieth Century.* By Karissa Haugeberg. *Women, Gender, and Sexuality in American History.* (Urbana and other cities: University of Illinois Press, 2017. Pp. x, 220. Paper, \$24.95, ISBN 978-0-252-08246-7; cloth, \$95.00, ISBN 978-0-252-04096-2.)

Karissa Haugeberg's slim but impactful book, *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the Twentieth Century*, joins historical scholarship of the pro-life movement that began with Kristin Luker's remarkable *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley, 1984). Haugeberg makes a unique contribution to this growing body of literature by focusing on the role women played in antiabortion activism, something often overshadowed by the historiography's overemphasis on men's efforts to oppose abortion rights. Haugeberg uncovers her subjects through a masterful use of archival sources, antiabortion publications, legal documents, oral histories, and interviews. She argues that these "women who operated at the grass roots to change Americans' perceptions about life, death, and health paved the way for the erosion of women's right to abortion in the post-*Roe* era" (p. 35).