



History and the Texture of Modern Life: Selected Essays

Lucy Maynard Salmon

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Almost a century ago Vassar professor Lucy Maynard Salmon (1853-1927) started down an intellectual path that made her one of the most innovative historians of all time. Her historical method relied on extensive use of the documents of everyday life. In class, for example, she surprised her students with laundry lists, grocery receipts, and newspapers, and asked them to interpret these "ephemera" as historical documents. What did the laundry receipts tell about those who used such services? About those who ran such establishments? About systems of domestic service? Business organization? In short, Salmon recentered history from narrative to methodology, from story to apparatus. By examining subjects that we associate with material culture she anticipated current practices by decades. Salmon was modern in her concerns and her methods, and a feminist in both her interests and her approach.

The book contains a cross-section of her essays, including selections from her ground-breaking study "Domestic Service" and her well-known essays "History in a Back Yard" and "Main Street" in which she reads the everyday environment of garden and city in historical terms. Also included are her remarkable essay on the architectural organization of her kitchen and a hitherto unpublished essay on her former professor, Woodrow Wilson, that describes him in vivid terms as an "autophotographer." Salmon's modernism will startle those who have not read her before.

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