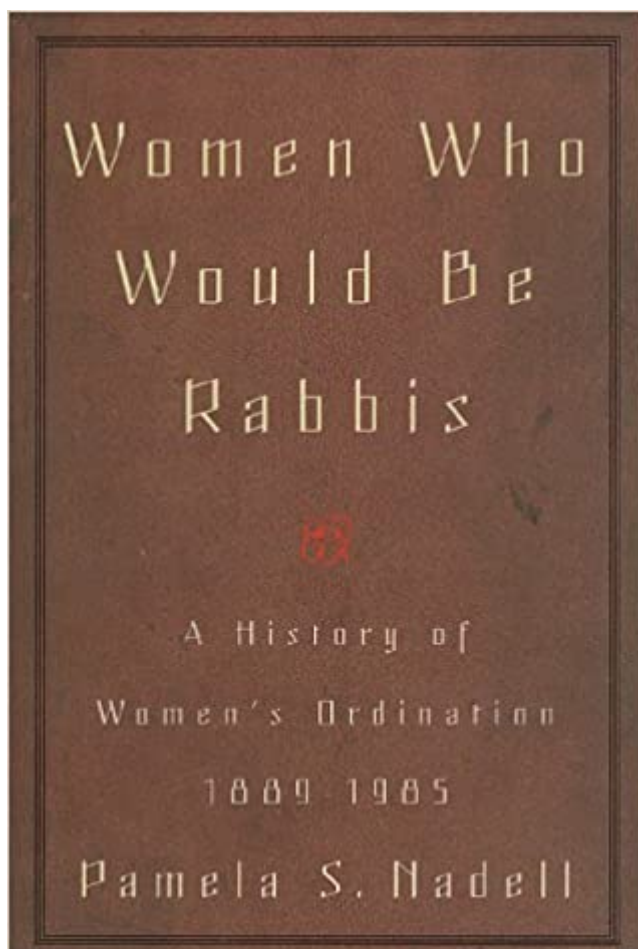


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# WOMEN WHO WOULD BE RABBIS



## Synopsis

1998 National Jewish Book Award finalist Pamela S. Nadell mines a wealth of untapped sources to bring us the first complete story of the courageous and committed Jewish women who passionately defended their right to equal religious participation through rabbinical ordination. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Jewish women have been struggling with the "women's issue" for centuries. They have had unequal rights in marriage and divorce, have not been allowed to worship alongside men in their synagogues or participate in certain rituals, and, of course, could not become rabbis. Slowly, things began to change, and in 1972 Sally Priesand was ordained as the first woman rabbi. In this scholarly work, Nadell (director of the Jewish Studies program, American Univ.) chronicles the history of women's struggles to become rabbis. She starts in 1889, when the journalist and Jewish communal activist Mary M. Cohen proposed in a short story for the Jewish Exponent, "Could not our women be ministers?" and ends with a discussion of the ordination of Orthodox women. The struggle has been a long, rocky, often painful one, and Nadell presents it with insight, careful scholarship, and vivid detail. Highly recommended for Judaic collections. Marcia G. Welsh, Guilford Free Lib., CT Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

In a lucid, accessible book on the long struggle for women's ordination to the rabbinate, Nadell brings to life figures, such as Rabiner Regina Jonas and Ray Frank, who have been obscured by

accounts that began with the 1972 ordination of Sally Priesand. Nadell makes clear that that event neither began the history of women's ordination in Judaism nor ended controversy about it. She reaches back from 1972 to 1899 and a question posed in a short story: "Could not our women be ministers?" She records responses to that question by carefully examining the struggles for partial, then full, admission of women to major Jewish theological institutions and rabbinical schools. She attends to each strand of U.S. Judaism--Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, and Orthodox--and sets her subject in the context of the concurrent U.S. women's rights struggle. Nadell's work makes a significant story more familiar and contributes to the broader history of women's efforts to fully participate in religious leadership--struggles that continue in many religious traditions Steven Schroeder

this book was recommended to me because of my interest in my family history. It was quite scholarly and well researched. what made it very personal was the inclusion of one of my cousins who was featured prominently in the book and gave me great insight to her character and accomplishments.

Pamela Nadell, director of the Jewish Studies Program at American University in Washington, D.C., put together the book, 'Women Who Would Be Rabbis: A History of Women's Ordination: 1889-1985', to trace the path of debate on the topic of women's roles in Judaism with particular emphasis on the issue of ordination. She quotes a reporter in the mid-1970s who declared, with the ordination of Rabbi Sally Priesand in 1972, that Judaism answered the question of women's ordination before it had been asked. Not so, according to Nadell, as she traces the 100+ year-old history of the debate. In 1889, Mary M. Cohen, a Jewish journalist and activist, raised the question (in print, and on the front page, no less!) through a discussion that 'innocently' raised the question as a legitimate question about ministry. In 1889, this would not have been a question that could be easily asked, and if asked, would most likely be quickly dismissed. When one of the discussion members says that he would have to laugh at seeing a woman in the pulpit, Cohen's protagonist retorted that every good cause is apt to meet with ridicule at first. The remarkable thing about Cohen's article is the aptitude she showed for anticipating much of the rhetoric and argument that would follow the women's ordination debate for the next century. Are the people ready for it? Is it permissible by the Torah? Isn't this just a societal innovation out of keeping with the 'timeless truths?' Shouldn't women be happy with their more traditional role? And, if women give up the traditional roles, who will fill them? She wrote that Cohen prophesied that this 'thing will be'

because so many innovations even by that time had already taken place and, in fact, continued to take place, in American Jewish religious life. American Jews of various persuasions, Orthodox to Reconstructionist, accept changes in various ways, but are nonetheless willing to at least question and debate. Nadell follows from these early beginnings to early, unordained preachers (such as Ray Frank, 'the girl rabbi of the Golden West'); to Chicago and other large city club women who banded together to change restrictive rules; to the admission of women to theological and rabbinic studies (including showing the picture of Helen Levinthal with a story in the New York Herald Tribune which was headlined: Girl Completes Rabbinic Study; 9 Men Ordained); to the ordination of women in Judaism the 1970s (beginning with Sally Priesand); and finally to the continuing debates in various denominations of Judaism on the appropriate roles of women, and the nature of ministry generally. Will there ever be women ordained as Orthodox rabbis? The Epilogue has an interesting, engaging discussion, which shows likewise the relationship of the different voices in Judaism. While Orthodoxy took little notice of the ordination of women to the rabbinate from the Reform or Reconstructionist parts of Judaism, the actions of the Conservative branch are of more consequence. This book is a fascinating history, showing the beginning of a history of a process which is still unfolding in our own time.

Author Pamela Nadell exhaustively documents the history of Jewish women rabbis in America. This is an important aspect of history that hasn't been well-documented in the past, and the publication of this book brings a valuable addition to the small but significant body of work already written about the history of Jewish women rabbis.

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