Women, Gender, and Health, Susan L. Smith and Nancy Tomas, Series Editors

"Unlikely Entrepreneurs is an important text on a much neglected topic. It is a fascinating story of the women who built the social institutions that we take for granted."
—Sioban Nelson, The University of Melbourne

"Unlikely Entrepreneurs is a ground breaking study that brings together major issues in the history of medicine, women's history, and immigration history in a unique and original manner. Wall shows a great sensitivity toward her subjects and shows how they negotiated their way through the uncertain medical marketplace of 19th- and early 20th-century America. This is a highly readable book suitable for anyone interested in the intersection between gender, medicine, and spirituality both past and present."
—Heather Munro Prescott, Central Connecticut State University

In Unlikely Entrepreneurs, Barbra Mann Wall looks at the development of religious hospitals in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the entrepreneurial influence Catholic sisters held in this process. When immigrant nuns came to the United States in the late 19th century, they encountered a market economy that structured the way they developed their hospitals. Sisters enthusiastically engaged in the market as entrepreneurs, but they used a set of tools and understanding that were counter to the market. Their entrepreneurship was not to expand earnings but rather to advance Catholic spirituality.

Wall places the development of Catholic hospital systems (located in Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Texas, and Utah) owned and operated by Catholic sisters within the larger social, economic, and medical history of the time. In the modern health care climate, with the influences of corporations, federal laws, spiraling costs, managed care, and medical practices that rely less on human judgments and more on technological innovations, the "modern" hospital reflects a dim memory of the past. This book will inform future debates on who will provide health care as the sisters depart, how costs will be met, who will receive care, and who will be denied access to health services.

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Cover design: Jay Bastian
The Ohio State University Press
Columbus
www.ohiostatepress.org