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WOMEN ON THE GREAT PLAINS

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS RESEARCH

GLEND A RILEY

During the past dozen years or so, scholars have become increasingly involved in researching the lives and experiences of women on the Great Plains. At the same time, interest in learning more about the lives of all types of western, frontier, farm, and rural women has burgeoned. As a result, researchers now devote their careers to these topics, national conferences convene to disseminate and refine this increasing scholarship, and journals commit theme issues to presenting research results.

This essay is a survey of research developments concerning plainwomen between the early 1970s and the present day. The purpose of such an examination is twofold: first, to gain an understanding of the dimensions of current research and scholarly perspectives regarding women on the Great Plains, and second, to suggest some crucial methodological issues yet to be explored. An underlying

assumption is that scholarship regarding plainwomen has now reached a stage that demands introspection so as to continue to grow and become more sophisticated.

During the early 1970s, agricultural historian Mary W. M. Hargreaves was the first modern scholar to focus attention on researching Euro-American women on the Great Plains.¹ In two essays published in *Agricultural History*, Hargreaves approached a topic that most historians had not yet thought about.² While it is true that at this time women's history was gaining increasing impetus, few women's historians had the awareness to initiate investigations into the historical experiences of particular types of women. The customary practice was to consider predominant groups of white women rather than to explore those of various regions, cultures, or races. Those historians of the West who mentioned women did so almost exclusively in terms of image and myth. These stereotypes included the Saint in the Sunbonnet, the Pioneer Mother, the Frontier Feminist, the Helpmate, and the Light Lady.³

When Hargreaves first approached the topic of female settlers on the plains, little evidence of scholarly acumen existed. In a 1973 review essay, Hargreaves observed that, although

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plainswomen "performed a partnership role more difficult than on any previous frontier," their story had been customarily overlooked by most historians. In critiquing three recent books by women settlers on the Great Plains, Hargreaves noted that these women's statements finally provided some insights to scholars about women who participated in "an important and generally neglected segment of the westward movement."⁴

In her consideration of memoirs by Grace Fairchild, Faye Cashatt Lewis, and Sarah Roberts, Hargreaves began by noting that it was unfortunate that all three accounts were reminiscences rather than on-the-spot records.⁵ They were, she argued, colored by "the afterglow through which age views the past." In addition, all three women were well educated, a factor that raised the question of how representative they were of women involved in the homesteading experience in general. Hargreaves pointed out, however, that these women's writings did offer a good deal of detail concerning daily life on homesteads, work schedules, and challenges to domestic responsibilities. They also contained women's comments regarding topics such as loneliness, families, and cultural activities. But she concluded that historians interested in plainswomen were in need of "a more abundant literature, and probably a more representative one" than volumes such as these provided.⁶

Although she raised several problem areas basic to research in the history of Euro-American plainswomen, Hargreaves was not deterred from continuing her own investigation into their lives. In a 1976 essay, she attempted to delineate their roles as civilizing influences, their involvement in the western woman suffrage movement, and their attempts to deal with prevalent loneliness, primitive housing, and a general lack of services.⁷ While this essay raised some issues crucial to understanding early female settlers, it also reflected a continuing difficulty with women's source materials. Hargreaves' sources were sparse and published, rather than wide-ranging and in manuscript form. This limitation echoed Hargreaves' own

earlier reservation that the available materials would not be representative of the typical westering woman, but would mirror only those women whose activities were unusual enough to merit publication.

This lack of women's source materials was reflected in the stereotyped treatment of frontierswomen in general histories of women and the West during the mid-1970s. One of these characterized women as intrinsically weak and domestic, "natural" traits that made women's success on the frontier unlikely:

Clinging to a few treasured heirlooms as reminders of a kinder life, they accompanied their husbands across the continent, suffering the most desperate physical hardships as well as a desolating sense of loneliness. More place-bound than men, more dependent on the company of other women, on the forms of settled social life, they grew old and died before their time, on the trail, in a sod hut or a rude cabin pierced by icy winds.⁸

But other writers portrayed frontierswomen as strong and hardy people. "Beneath her linsey-woolsey dress or calico frock was a sturdy body," one claimed. She was a "builder" who "wrapped a shawl around her shoulders, tied on her sunbonnet, cradled the youngest babe in her arms, and pointed her face West."⁹ Another writer maintained that although women were "the most conservative of creatures, hating with a passion those three concomitants of the western frontier—poverty, physical hardship and danger," it was really they who tamed the "Wild West."¹⁰

By the mid-1970s, the emergence of the contemporary feminist movement fostered a critical view of such pat typologies of women. Several feminist scholars soon applied this attitude to scholarship concerning frontierswomen in general and plainswomen in particular. These investigators contributed not only a healthy disrespect for traditional interpretations of western women but also a methodology that emphasized documents written by women themselves.¹¹

Fortunately, the situation concerning women's source materials was beginning to alter, a trend that has accelerated during the 1980s. Numerous documents by all types of plainswomen, including American Indian women and women of various ethnic origins, are now in print. These sources include letters, diaries, and daybooks, as well as memoirs. They appear in both book form and in local, state, and regional historical journals. The philosophy behind their selection no longer limits them to just the unusual or colorful women. Rather, the accounts written by typical, grassroots women are now considered worthy of publication because they reflect the lives of the vast majority of women.¹²

Another important trend is that archivists are increasingly aware of the need to locate and make available documents of the sort that formerly were lost or ignored. Women's writings such as daybooks and diaries that might once have been rejected because they required more space in an archive than their "value" dictated are now aggressively sought out. Documents such as personal letters that were casually tossed into a box of family letters or a husband's collection without more than a passing notation on a catalog card now receive an entry of their own. This new awareness has been fostered by Cynthia E. Harrison's 1979 *Clio* bibliography concerning women in American history and, more recently, by the compilation of a massive guidebook to women's history manuscript sources by Andrea Hinding and Clarke Chambers at the University of Minnesota.¹³ Regarding the Great Plains in particular, Sheryll and Gene Patterson-Black's 1978 bibliography on western women and Carol Fairbanks and Sara Sundberg's 1983 guide to prairie women both emphasized the research area of plainswomen.¹⁴

This massive retrieval effort has resulted in the recovery and establishment of a rich and growing supply of women's source materials for researchers. Such archives as the American Heritage Center at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, the Nebraska State Historical Society in Lincoln, the Kansas State Historical Society in Topeka, the South Dakota State Historical

Resource Center in Pierre, the Orin G. Libby Manuscript Collection at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks, the Western History Collection at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, and the Barker Texas History Center at the University of Texas in Austin are some of the better-known libraries that offer such women's resources as daybooks, letters, memoirs, reminiscences, clipping files, minutes of women's clubs, records of suffrage associations and women's religious and civic groups, daily dockets of women officials and bureaucrats, official documents including legislative acts relating to women and suffrage memorials, postcard collections, invitations, broadsides, and autobiographical and biographical sketches.

In addition, the results of such special projects as Works Progress Administration interviews conducted during the 1930s are available in the Indian-Pioneer Papers at the University of Oklahoma and in the WPA Collection at the Wyoming State Archives, Museums, and Historical Department in Cheyenne. Other interview collections that include women are housed in the American Heritage Center at the University of Wyoming and the Pioneer Collection at the Montana State Historical Society in Helena.

Many archives are also increasingly offering special services that are helpful to researchers on plainswomen. Both the Kansas State Historical Society and the Nebraska State Historical Society loan women-related documents on microfilm to other research institutions. The Montana State Historical Society has both an extensive photograph collection and knowledgeable photo-archivists. And in many research centers, particularly the two just mentioned, special exhibits concerning women supplement the archival materials. In other cases, exhibits in nearby museums, such as the Cheyenne Days Pioneer Museum in Wyoming, complement the holdings of the state historical society. Finally, it is now possible to expect to find a catalog section titled "Women" and often an archivist or librarian versed in the topic in most major research collections on the Great Plains.

Furthermore, published materials by and

about plainswomen are included in such publications as the *Great Plains Quarterly*, *Great Plains Journal*, *Plainswomen*, and historical journals of the individual plains states, thus supplementing archival holdings. To say that the problems that Hargreaves encountered have been solved would be overstating the case. But it is accurate to say that a small revolution has occurred in the assumptions underlying the collection and publication of women's documents.

As the availability and amount of evidence has grown, the complexity of perspectives has also multiplied. A general recognition that stereotypes and myths are one-dimensional and limiting now exists in the literature.¹⁵ In addition, a growing awareness of the need to examine various types of women also pervades research. Considerations of ethnic, racial, immigrant, urban, rural, religious, reform-minded, working, single, widowed, and military women are some of the refinements in approaches to women that now add subtle shadings and exciting insights to the study of women on the plains.¹⁶ The many women who helped settle the Great Plains by taking up homesteads are being studied in their own right rather than being overlooked because of the assumption that homesteaders were male.¹⁷ The history of women on the Canadian Plains is now being researched.¹⁸ Plainswomen in literature and film are yet another focus.¹⁹ And despite the difficulties of dealing with largely oral sources and overcoming a long-standing prejudice against America's native peoples, Plains Indian women are finally receiving the widespread attention and intensive study that their history and invaluable cultural heritage deserve.²⁰

So too has the level of the questions being posed risen dramatically. No longer content with knowing simply how women on the plains managed their households or dealt with the harsh demands of their environment, scholars are now pursuing a broader range of concerns. What was the role of the plainswoman as a domestic producer? What was the impact of her economic contributions both within and outside of the home? How did the prevailing

nineteenth-century ideology of domesticity affect the white plainswoman? Why did she often seem more committed to suffrage and actually achieve it earlier than her eastern sisters? Did she really interact with the native population in the destructive way that myth and media have led us to believe? How did technology, ranging from an improved washing machine to birth control methods, change her life? What was the effect of the Great Plains region upon the westering woman as compared with the influences of other regions on her counterparts across the country? These are only a few of the many queries being raised by increasingly informed and aware scholars of plainswomen.

At least part of this growing diversity of research interests and approaches can be attributed to the influence of various feminist perspectives, including the radical, Marxist, and conservative. Regardless of approach, all feminist historians agree that plainswomen are worthy of serious and extensive study. They also stress the idea that women were absolutely crucial to the early development, eventual settlement, and more recent progress of the Great Plains region. Some, however, emphasize such issues as discrimination on the basis of gender, concepts of inferiority of women and resulting prejudicial treatment of them, and exploitation of women by men. Others are more interested in questions regarding work roles, rewards by the system, and power relationships. Still others choose to look at gender roles and expectations in their study of women on the plains. Of course, there are additional issues that each group of feminist scholars raises, just as there are other types of feminist views. The significant point is that a multitude of approaches now exist, each contributing yet another dimension to the study of women on the Great Plains.²¹

Accompanying this proliferation of feminist viewpoints has been the development of a wider range of research techniques. Literary and content analysis of fiction and other women's sources offers many insightful perceptions.²² Demographic analysis provides such essential

information as the number of American Indian women in different eras, the ratio of single and married women, family size, longevity, and settlement patterns, to name just a few of the types of useful data.²³ Economic analysis determines the number of women who held paid employment, acted as entrepreneurs, and ran their own businesses, again to list just a few concerns.²⁴ As with the various feminist approaches, these differing types of analysis of the evidence supply new kinds of information about plainwomen's lives. All indications suggest that the multiplication of techniques will continue, rather than abate.

This survey of research on the history of plainwomen today as compared with Hargreaves' early work brings to mind adjectives such as complex, growing, and vigorous. The progress achieved in this area since the early 1970s offers much to be proud of for those who contributed their skills and energies. It provides tremendous promise for the leaps that scholarship regarding plainwomen may take during the coming years. Perhaps more importantly, it furnishes a base from which scholars can raise and explore some crucial methodological concerns. Although rapid growth is heady and exciting, planned and deliberate growth is often more productive in the long run. Consequently, there are a number of issues that might be examined at this time for future profit.

One key area of consideration is the question of women's long-term exploitation by men. John Mack Faragher points out that among white rural people the traditional relationship between men and women "was not only one of male domination but of female exploitation." He effectively argues that an understanding of "rural antebellum political economy must begin by recognizing women's exploitation and subordination."²⁵ Emphasizing the importance of this issue, he suggests several creative ways in which the historian might approach the topic of exploitation. The significance of this matter demands that it receive wider consideration by scholars, who must meet a multitude of challenges in analyzing and defining the impact of exploitation on

women who seemed largely unaware of its existence, or at least did not articulate it clearly.

Should historians and other scholars impute modern notions of oppression to previous generations of women and men? Clearly, perceptions of persecution vary with cultures and eras. As a case in point, early European observers of American Indian peoples saw native women as beasts of burden. They appeared, to white eyes, to be downtrodden victims of native males, who preferred to "play" at hunting and fighting. A more modern view is that these women were actually carrying out the domestic and agricultural tasks of their society while men engaged in the equally serious chores of providing meat and protection for the group.²⁶ This example alone is sufficient cause for exercising caution and care in the dangerous, yet essential, study of women's exploitation.

A closely related area is the study of gender roles. Sociologist Carolyn E. Sachs claims that American conceptions of farm people's gender roles—that is, men as "farmers" and women as domestic laborers—have been translated into United States policies for developing nations that stress agricultural methods for men and home economics for women. Despite the fact that women are widely involved in agriculture in developing countries, traditional American notions of what men and women do still prevail among American policymakers concerned with these countries, even to an alarming and destructive degree. In considering the effect of gender expectations on American farming, Sachs finds that women (who are not expected to farm on their own) are denied access to land, credit, training, and necessary information. From nonadjustable tractor pedals and seats that do not fit female dimensions to information-sharing sessions at the local grain elevator that exclude women, female farmers find themselves shut out by a pervasive system of gender roles.²⁷

The importance of gaining insight into such long-standing conceptions of gender and into resulting policies that reflect such discrimination is apparent. One approach to the question of role prescriptions that deserves much more attention and development is the examination

of male gender roles and the comparison of them with those for women. For example, both white rural women and men on the plains commented on their physical environment, yet men, more than women, tended to be interested in the fertility of the soil, questions of mileage and dimensions of property, and natural resources such as timber. This is not an unexpected finding, given the fact that men were charged primarily with tilling the fields, but it demonstrates that they were not free of role prescriptions and their effects either. On the other hand, the reactions of women and men to their physical environment were similar in many ways. Both established interior spaces for themselves—the women in their homes and the men, their barns. In gardens and fields, both planted crops that they were familiar with from their former homes. And both rearranged their immediate space by removing plants and trees, planting new ones, and fencing in portions of the land.

Looking at gender distinctions from another angle, one might hypothesize that because women were expected to support the arts, culture, and the family, men were largely excluded from activities such as folk art or child care. The samplers that often recorded family history or taught moral lessons to the family were female-defined undertakings, so here too were men excluded from important family-related functions. The ongoing quilting bee that provided so much support and disseminated so much information was similarly closed to males.²⁸ For men, then, the equivalent of misproportioned tractor pedals that conveyed a message to women regarding their gender roles and duties was perhaps the quilting frames and other similar tools of household arts that were clearly dominated by women. The moral is that a more complete understanding of women's experience on the plains may be gained by contrasting it with men's. An understanding of the uniqueness of women's lives can be seen by comparing them with the larger human experience.

In a similar vein, Joan Jensen and Darlis Miller emphasize the need to consider the

impact of many cultures when studying women. In their call for a "new multicultural framework" as a focus for the study of western women, Jensen and Miller point out that "once refocused on cultures, many new insights, approaches, and questions immediately appear." They offer examples of such innovation by discussing the topics of migration, the demography of settlements, relations among women of various cultures, politics, and occupations from a multicultural perspective.²⁹

While investigators of plainswomen are accepting the need to consider specific cultures, recent studies have placed less emphasis on following women's experiences through time. But the study of ancient American Indian and Mexican civilizations, for example, is important to a full understanding of the historical developments affecting later generations of female inhabitants of the plains. Moving forward into the twentieth century can provide a feeling for continuity and change that may lead to unexpected insights. In observing contemporary rural women on the plains one notes that many now work outside of their farm homes in paid employment in order to provide cash income for the family farm operation. Is this not essentially a modern version of the earlier female settler who supplied operating cash through her butter and egg business? Yet, at the same time, marked changes in the degree of isolation and physical labor endured by the plainswoman are easily observable.

Another type of comparative approach might attempt to cut across regions and countries. Were westering women's lives on the plains shaped by its arid environment, or was there a "female frontier" that could be found on all frontiers, wherever they might be located? Do the gender roles that affected both native and Euro-American plainswomen appear in Chinese or perhaps Yugoslavian rural societies as well? What might the answers to these and other similar questions reveal about the lives and roles of plainswomen?

While an admirable goal, the actual execution of comparative studies of the sort mentioned can be complex, demanding, and fraught

with unexpected difficulties. Overcoming language and word usage differences between countries can be problematic, as can gaining awareness of racial and ethnic sensitivities, an understanding of women's artifacts, and a knowledge of many nations' histories, to mention just a few issues. How does one deal with demographic statistics if one is not a trained demographer, a researcher might reasonably ask. Or how does one interpret folk art when lacking a grounding in the arts? How does one who is not a geographer analyze land systems? The difficulties are legion, yet an answer is available. Investigators can reach outside their own specialities to draw upon the work of historians, sociologists, folklorists, geographers, statisticians, psychologists, biologists, and many others. Multicultural, multiracial, and multiregional analysis can proceed through cooperation among practitioners of the various disciplines. If each group talks only to itself in conferences and journals, all will suffer. Although difficult, the combatting of such provincialism could contribute to a fuller, fairer picture of plainswomen's lives and experiences.³⁰

Another very common type of scholarly isolation occurs when researchers fail to mine the resources offered by community groups and other organizations. For instance, when dealing with the lives of native women on the plains, it would be useful to work with American Indian women now living in the region.³¹ **Farm women are represented today by organizations such as Rural American Women, Extension services and their agents are another source of information regarding farm women in the plains region.** Materials from extension services, as well as the Farm Bureau and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, including the various types of statistics and other data that they collect, are extensive and often easily accessible.³² In fact, some extension agents are themselves engaged in the study of such topics as the impact of gender roles upon agriculture, the development of a historical perspective on the informal education of women provided by their services, and the portrayal of women in extension materials.³³

Yet another possible approach in the utilization of community resources is oral history. Interviews of farm women often pay unexpected dividends, yielding information concerning not only their own lives and work but also those of generations of family women who preceded them. Making case studies of particular women or farming operations as well as developing family histories are still other ways to gather source materials.³⁴ Investigators, especially those who received traditional training in graduate school, are beginning to recognize and pursue such unconventional types of evidence in their study of women.

This discussion suggests at least some of the approaches that scholars concerned with women on the Great Plains might examine and utilize. But there are also some practices that might be avoided. One is an over-eagerness to reject and destroy long-standing stereotypes and myths regarding plainswomen. Of course, legends that obscure reality must be approached critically. Because they often float like a veil between scholars and historical reality, images demand scrutiny. Yet, it may not be desirable to discard them entirely. Because stereotypes and legends reflect ideas that were actually held by many generations of plains women and men, they are a type of historical evidence in themselves. For instance, myth and media often told women what to expect from the plains environment, as well as how they "should" react to it. Thus, many women expected to be harassed and even scalped by Plains Indians. In addition, nineteenth-century dictums regarding women told them they would be weak and helpless when confronting their "enemies." Although both of these stereotypes were in fact inaccurate, examining them helps to explain frontier women's high anxiety levels when setting out on the plains and their near panic at the sighting of their first Indians.³⁵

A related caution is the need to go slowly in eschewing the "old" questions asked by scholars like Hargreaves. Such issues as those concerning domesticity, marital relationships, and cultural activities raised by earlier investigators are often still germane and do not deserve to be ignored.

Their domestic roles and contributions were the central concerns of most plainswomen's lives. Marriage and family were the primary focus for the majority of them. And cultural contributions grew from widely held values among nineteenth-century white plainswomen.³⁶ It could very well be counterproductive in the long run if zealous scholars become so reformist and revisionist that they create a whole new set of stereotypes and myths to be struck down by future generations of researchers. While it is clearly necessary to consider women as laborers, political beings, or emergent feminists, it is neither useful nor balanced to do so at the expense of the consideration of domestic and family roles.

Another practical matter, smaller in scope than those already discussed, also creates problems. Confusion regarding terminology might best be resolved now, while the field of research on plainswomen is still in a formative stage. The muddle that surrounds the terms "frontier" and "West" seems to be an object lesson in avoiding the same type of blurring around the phrases "rural women" and "farm women." Some collective thinking is needed to determine what is actually meant by these inexact and already widely used expressions. Does a woman who lives on a farm but works away from it qualify as a farm woman? Is the woman who is engaged in an agribusiness such as hog futures a farm woman? Is a woman who lives in a small town a rural or an urban woman? What if she is a female blueberry farmer in Michigan, lives in town, and commutes to her farm daily? Is a woman who operates a beefsteak tomato greenhouse in a city a farm woman? Although the U.S. Bureau of the Census has defined a rural area as being composed of fewer than twenty-five hundred people, there is no clear indication in the literature that researchers have adopted this description. If we are to study and understand the groups that are characterized as rural and farm women, it would be helpful to have a generally accepted standard regarding the composition of those populations.

The study of women on the Great Plains requires a systematic methodology that can

encompass diversity. The contributions of American Indian and European women to the development of the plains are of the utmost importance. American female settlers on the Great Plains cannot be slighted in favor of men or bypassed with the assumption that they were just like women in other frontier regions. Contemporary plainswomen of all types must also be studied and interviewed in order to establish a continuum of women's experiences from the earliest era to the present. An approach committed to diversity would also involve a wide variety of sources, research questions, guiding perspectives, techniques, eras, and regions.

The many complex pieces can be fit together by the work of many kinds of researchers who are willing to draw upon each other's findings. It is no longer necessary for the history of plainswomen to be shrouded in image and myth. Nor must it be restricted by limited source materials and narrow perspectives. All the needed ingredients are now available to investigators who can both refine the scholarship of the past and contribute a new sophistication to the future study of women on the Great Plains.

NOTES

1. Although at least one earlier scholar wrote on plainswomen, he did so largely in stereotypical terms of hardship, deprivation, and misery. See Everett Dick, *The Sod-House Frontier, 1854-1890* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1937), and "Sunbonnet and Calico: The Homesteader's Consort," *Nebraska History* 47 (March 1966): 3-13.

2. Mary W. M. Hargreaves, "Homesteading and Homemaking on the Plains: A Review," *Agricultural History* 47 (April 1973): 156-63, and "Women in the Agricultural Settlement of the Northern Plains," *Agricultural History* 50 (January 1976): 179-89.

3. For a fuller discussion of these myths, see Beverly J. Stoeltje, "'A Helpmate for Man Indeed': The Image of the Frontier Woman," *Journal of American Folklore* 88 (January/March 1975): 25-41, and Glenda Riley, "Images of the Frontierwoman: Iowa as a Case Study," *Western Historical Quarterly* 8 (April 1977):

189-202, and "Women in the West," *Journal of American Culture* 3 (Summer 1980): 311-29.

4. Hargreaves, "Homesteading and Home-making," p. 156.

5. Hargreaves critiqued Walker D. Wyman (ed.), *Frontier Woman: The Life of a Woman Homesteader on the Dakota Frontier, Retold from the Original Notes and Letters of Grace Fairchild* (River Falls: University of Wisconsin-River Falls Press, 1972); Faye Cashatt Lewis, *Nothing to Make a Shadow* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1971); and Sarah Ellen Roberts, *Alberta Homestead: Chronicle of a Pioneer Family* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971).

6. Hargreaves, "Homesteading and Home-making," pp. 157-63.

7. Hargreaves, "Women in Agricultural Settlement," pp. 179-89.

8. Page Smith, *Daughters of the Promised Land* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), p. 223.

9. Richard A. Bartlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 350, 149.

10. Dee Brown, *The Gentle Tamers: Women of the Old Wild West* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), p. 269.

11. See, for example, Johnny Faragher and Christine Stansell, "Women and Their Families on the Overland Trail to California and Oregon, 1842-1867," *Feminist Studies* 2 (1975): 150-66; Christine Stansell, "Women on the Great Plains, 1865-1890," *Women's Studies* 4 (1976): 87-98; and Lillian Schlissel, "Women's Diaries on the Western Frontier," *American Studies* 18 (Spring 1977): 87-100.

12. See, for example, Elsie North Allison, "A One-Room School in Labette County," *Kansas Quarterly* 8 (Spring 1976): 5-8; Maurine Hoffman Beasley, "Life as a Hired Girl in South Dakota, 1907-1908: A Woman Journalist Reflects," *South Dakota History* 12 (Summer/Fall 1982): 147-62; Enid Bern (ed.), "They Had a Wonderful Time: The Homesteading Letters of Anna and Ethel Erickson," *North Dakota History* 45 (Fall 1978): 4-31; "Etta's Journal, January 2, 1874-July 25, 1875," *Kansas History* 3 (Winter 1980): 255-78; Flora Moorman Heston, "'I Think I Will Like Kansas': The Letters of Flora Moorman Heston, 1885-1886," *Kansas History* 6 (Summer 1983):

70-95; Lorna B. Herseth (ed.), "A Pioneer's Letters," *South Dakota History* 6 (1976): 306-15; Dorothy Kimball (ed.), "'Alone on that Prairie . . .': The Homestead Letters of Nellie Rogney," *Montana, The Magazine of Western History* 33 (Autumn 1983): 52-62; Susan Leaphart (ed.), "Montana Episodes: Frieda and Belle Fligelman: A Frontier-City Girlhood in the 1890s," *Montana, The Magazine of Western History* 32 (Summer 1982): 85-92. See also Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

13. Cynthia E. Harrison (ed.), *Women in American History: A Bibliography* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 1979) and Andrea Hinding and Clarke Chambers, *Women's History Sources*, 2 vols. (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1979).

14. Sheryll and Gene Patterson-Black, *Western Women in History and Literature* (Crawford, Nebr.: Cottonwood Press, 1978) and Carol Fairbanks and Sara Brooks Sundberg, *Farm Women on the Prairie Frontier: A Sourcebook for Canada and the United States* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1983).

15. See, for example, Claire R. Farrer, "Women and Folklore: Images and Genres," *Journal of American Folklore* 88 (January/March 1975): v-xv; Stoeltje, "'A Helpmate for Man Indeed'"; and Sandra L. Myres, "Romance and Reality of the American Frontier: Views of Army Wives," *Western Historical Quarterly* 13 (October 1982): 409-27.

16. See, for example, Theodore C. Blegen (ed.), "Immigrant Women and the American Frontier: Three Early 'American Letters,'" *Norwegian American Historical Association Studies and Records*, vol. 4-5 (Northfield, Minn.: Norwegian American Historical Association, 1930), pp. 14-29; Patricia O'Keefe Easton, "Woman Suffrage in South Dakota: The Final Decade, 1911-1920," *South Dakota History* 13 (Fall 1983): 206-26; Patricia V. Horner, "Mary Richardson Walker: The Shattered Dreams of a Missionary Woman," *Montana, The Magazine of Western History* 32 (Summer 1982): 20-31; Polly Welts Kaufman, *Women Teachers on the Frontier* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984); Minnie Dubbs Millbrook, "Mrs. General Custer at Fort Riley, 1866," *Kansas*

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17. Sheryll Patterson-Black, "Women Homesteaders on the Great Plains Frontier," *Frontiers* 1 (Spring 1976): 67-88 and "Women Homesteaders on the Great Plains Frontier," in Patterson-Black, *Western Women*, pp. 5-6; and Glenda Riley, "Farm Women's Roles in the Agricultural Development of South Dakota," *South Dakota History* 13 (Spring/Summer 1982): 87-90.

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21. For examples of a feminist approach to the topic of plainswomen, see Lillian Schlissel, "Women's Diaries on the Western Frontier," *American Studies* 33 (Spring 1977): 87-100,

and Christine Stansell, "Women on the Great Plains, 1865-1890," *Women's Studies* 4 (1976): 87-98.

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25. John Mack Faragher, "History From the Inside-Out: Writing the History of Women in Rural America," *American Quarterly* 33 (Winter 1981): 550, 555.

26. For further discussion of this issue, see Liberty, "Hell Came With Horses"; Valerie Sherer Mathes, "A New Look at the Role of Women in Indian Society," *American Indian Quarterly* 2 (Summer 1975): 131-39 and "Native American Women in Medicine and the Military"; and Glenda Riley, "Some European (Mis) Perceptions of American Indian Women," *New Mexico Historical Review* 59 (July 1984): 237-66.

27. Carolyn E. Sachs, *The Invisible Farmers:*

Women in Agricultural Production (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), pp. 114-15, 128, 132.

28. C. Kurt Dewhurst, Betty MacDowell, and Marsha MacDowell, *Artists in Aprons: Folk Art by American Women* (New York: E. P. Dutton in association with the Museum of American Folk Art, 1979) and Suzanne Wabsley, *Texas Quilts, Texas Women* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1984).

29. Joan M. Jensen and Darlis A. Miller, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West," *Pacific Historical Review* 49 (May 1980): 185.

30. A study that attempts to combine the disciplines of sociology and history is Scott G. McNall and Sally Allen McNall, *Plains Families: Exploring Sociology through Social History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983).

31. For a discussion of the value of American Indian women's life stories, see Gretchen M. Bataille and Kathleen Mullen Sands, *American Indian Women: Telling Their Lives* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).

32. For instance, much of this type of information was presented at the American Farm Women in Historical Perspective Conference, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico, 2-4 February 1984.

33. See, for example, W. F. Kumlien, *Basic Trends of Social Change in South Dakota*, South Dakota Experiment Station Bulletin 357 (Brookings, 1941), and Walter L. Slocum, *Migrants from Rural South Dakota Families: Their Geographical and Occupational Distribution*, South Dakota Experiment Station Bulletin 359 (Brookings, 1942).

34. See Susan Armitage, "Household Work and Childbearing on the Frontier: The Oral History Record," *Sociology and Social Research* 63 (April 1979): 467-74; Teresa Jordan, *Cowgirls: Women of the American West, an Oral History* (New York: Doubleday, 1982); Sherry Thomas, *We Didn't Have Much, But We Sure Had Plenty: Stories of Rural Women* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1981); and Jensen and Miller, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited," pp. 185-86. Outstanding examples of oral history projects that include plainswomen are the South Dakota History Project of the early 1970s titled "The South Dakota Experience: An Oral History Collection of Its People,"

and the North Dakota Oral History Project, "Prairie Pioneers: Some North Dakota Homesteaders," *North Dakota History* 43 (Spring 1976): 22-87.

35. Glenda Riley, *Women and Indians on the Frontier, 1825-1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984).

36. Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), pp. 11-13, 22-24, 72-73, 189-90; and Sandra L. Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800-1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), pp. 171-72, 174, 185-86, 204-9, 211-12, 269-70.