

Twenty Thousand Roads: Women, Movement, and the West

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Comes for the Archbishop." A brief afterword, "Having Done with Calendared Time," brings completion.

All told, this fascinating and challenging book gets my strong recommendation. A couple of quibbles deserve mention, with little or no intention of undoing the praise. Hypostasized terms confront readers a bit too often. "American Manhood" wore out its welcome for this reader. More important, "Manifest Destiny" enters at page 2 and 3: "The American citizen had for some time lived and breathed the 'spirit' of Manifest Destiny." Two dozen index entries would seem to bear that out. Some forty years ago eminent historian Daniel Boorstin remarked (in *The Americans: The National Experience*) that no subject in American history was "more plagued by clichés than 'Manifest Destiny.'" Still, that Manifest Destiny beat goes on. Joel Daehnke's book remains impressive, however.

Twenty Thousand Roads: Women, Movement, and the West, by Virginia Scharff. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. xi, 239 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$49.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

Reviewer Anne M. Butler is Trustee Professor of History Emeritus at Utah State University. A longtime former coeditor of the *Western Historical Quarterly*, she is also the author of several books, including *Uncommon Common Women: Ordinary Lives of the West* (1996).

Twenty Thousand Roads embraces a topic that on its surface appears to teeter toward the obvious. After all, everyone knows that the narrative of the American West springs from the forces of migration, growth, and change across diverse terrains, through disparate cultural environments, and over many historical eras. How can a book about getting from one place to another add to the literature of western history? Virginia Scharff, author of *Twenty Thousand Roads*, wraps the mantle of gender around western mobility. In doing so, she achieves an admirable goal for any historian: using new ideas to rearrange the contours of a well-known subject.

Many Americans devour information about the West; here they will find it described in moving, often lyric prose. There is, regrettably, no precise definition of either the location of the West or who is a westerner. Scharff says that the West is situated in "fluid landscapes between the Mississippi and the Pacific," but exactly what that encompasses, when it applies, and how that produces the concept of "a westerner's belief in entitlement to mobility" are not explained (5). Once again, a western historian, despite new models and revised perspectives, ap-

pears to struggle with the tantalizing conundrum of whether the West should be identified as a place, a process, both, or none of the above.

The book is divided into three time periods, the chapters within each segment devoted largely to biographies of women Scharff asserts were uniquely representative of the West. The primary documentation about these women is stronger in some chapters than others, but the secondary literature has been mined, mingled, and integrated to an impressive degree. In choosing her subjects, the author demonstrates an appreciation for the ways local and personal history create the fabric of regional and national identity. Further, not only gender concerns, but also ethnic and racial considerations inform the work throughout. For example, Scharff uses New Mexico's Fabiola Cabeza de Baca, a promoter of multifaceted Hispanic cultural elements, and California's Jo Ann Robinson, an African American activist, to bind the mobility of region to women of color.

Yet some readers will question whether it is legitimate to draw connections between the migratory Native woman Sacagawea and the 1960s' nomadic Pamela Des Barras. The justification for linking a nineteenth-century female explorer (who also is compared, surprisingly, to the film performer Ginger Rogers and a Haight-Ashbury groupie) remains unconvincing (18, 162-63).

The major strength and the major weakness of *Twenty Thousand Roads* are one and the same: the use of language. Scharff crafts and turns words with style and wit. She excels as a raconteur, frequently illuminating the humanity of her subjects with striking images. Unfortunately, she allows this talent to overpower the scholarly face of her material, willing to let a clever phrase trump her discipline. As the writing flows into the modern era, this tendency increases. The person of the author, somewhat different than voice, permeates parts of the book, as much as Susan Magoffin in the second chapter or Grace Raymond Hebard in the fourth. As an outcome, the final chapter, rather than unifying all the components, relies on autobiography for the concluding thoughts, a device that adds to the unevenness of the work.

Although these criticisms are significant, they in no way dismiss the imagination and boldness, fortified by command of subject, that provide the underpinnings of *Twenty Thousand Roads*. The author is an original thinker with provocative ideas. Those interested in western history, especially as lived in the experiences of women, will find much to ponder in Virginia Scharff's work.

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