The Editor's Perspective

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The Editor’s Perspective

THIS ISSUE of the Annals of Iowa focuses on women in Iowa history. There are feature articles on two sisters who worked in Civil War diet kitchens and on women freethinkers in nineteenth-century Iowa. In addition, there is an article describing the collections related to Iowa political life in the Iowa Women’s Archives. It is noteworthy that all three articles make at least some reference to the work of one remarkable woman: Louise Rosenfield Noun.

Noun told her own unlikely story in her autobiography, Journey to Autonomy (1990). Her journey was not only from a privileged life of dependence to one of empowered autonomy, but also toward ever increasing involvement in a network of progressive activism on behalf of women and civil liberties. As part of that journey, she decided to investigate the roots of the women’s movement in Iowa that had become so important to her. The result was the book that is cited in all three articles here: Strong-Minded Women: The Emergence of the Woman-Suffrage Movement in Iowa (1969). Written before the emergence of women’s history and women’s studies in the academy, the book has become an indispensable source for anyone researching and writing about the history of women in Iowa.

Unfortunately, as Noun pursued the research for that book, she discovered a paucity of primary sources about the women she wanted to write about. That led to her dream of establishing an archive devoted exclusively to collecting and preserving the records of Iowa women. The story of how she worked with Mary Louise Smith (another remarkable Iowa woman) to fulfill that dream—and a description of some of the resulting records that are being preserved—is told in Sharon Lake’s article in this issue.

But not all women whose stories deserve to be preserved maintain written records. So Noun interviewed a number of Iowa feminists and recorded the results of those interviews in More Strong-Minded Women: Iowa Feminists Tell Their Stories.
(1992). That book will become an increasingly important re-
source as historians begin to turn their attention to the history of
Iowa women's achievements in the last half of the twentieth
century.

In the last dozen years of Noun's long and productive life,
her efforts to preserve and tell the stories of women in Iowa
history only intensified. In those years, she not only helped to
found the Iowa Women's Archives and completed her memoir
and *More Strong-Minded Women*, but she also wrote *Iowa Women
in the WPA* (1999) and *Leader and Pariah: Annie Savery and the
Campaign for Women's Rights in Iowa, 1868–1891* (published
posthumously by the Iowa Women's Archives in 2003).

Her publications record is one to make most professional
historians envious, but Noun was at least as important as a his-
torical actor in her own right. Through leadership roles in the
League of Women Voters, the Iowa Civil Liberties Union, and
the Chrysalis Foundation, she led fights for urban reform, reap-
portionment of the Iowa legislature, protection of free speech
rights for high school students, and women's access to higher
education, among many other issues in which she was involved.
Everyone who is concerned about the preservation of Iowa his-
tory is indebted to Louise Noun, as is every Iowa citizen who is
concerned about civil liberties, the rights of women, and good
government.

—Marvin Bergman, editor

P.S. In my "Editor's Perspective" in the Fall 2003 issue, I called
attention to the need to put wages and prices in historical per-
spective. I suggested a Web site that offered a simple way to do
that, then noted that it's not really as simple as that simple cal-
culation makes it seem, citing several sources that illustrated
that point. Since then, a helpful librarian pointed out on the H-
Iowa discussion list a useful Web site that complicates the pic-
ture even further; interested readers should check out the Eco-
nomic History Services Web site at www.eh.net/hmit/.