

## Read This Only to Yourself: the Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910

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## Book Reviews

for the journal. It is unsatisfying, since she shared so much with us, that we can only guess that she was finally happy with her life.

*Not by Bread Alone* will be rewarding reading for all those interested in pioneer women or for those with a specific interest in Mormon history. It is an impressive addition to that long, full shelf of books by Juanita Brooks.

THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

DEBBY ZIEGLOWSKY

*Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910*, by Elizabeth Hampsten. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982. xiii, 242 pp. Notes. \$22.50 cloth.

During the last decade a revolutionary change has occurred in scholars' attitudes toward the private writings of women. After being virtually ignored, women's letters, diaries, journals, memoirs, and reminiscences have become the foci of editorial projects, intensive study, and active retrieval efforts. Elizabeth Hampsten's first book is yet another attempt to restore women's source materials to a position of respect. Hampsten collected and studied the epistolary writings of North Dakota women from 1860 to 1910 in order to determine the realities of their everyday lives. She quickly learned that their work and roles transcended region in that they were not radically different from those of southern, eastern, or western women of the same time period. Hampsten points out that regionalism is much more apparent in men's activities and writings.

Locating these women's letters was a task in itself since they have not received the interest from archives and other collectors that have men's writings. Incorporating segments from the letters into her analysis also presented a problem as constant shifting between narrative and reproduction of primary materials is a difficult task at best. Hampsten handles this by interspersing women's words with her own thoughts in a topical fashion until the very last section of the book when she focuses on three individual women.

For the major portion of the study Hampsten divides women by social class and then relates a particular group's thoughts on subjects such as death, disease, sexuality, and American Indians. This unfortunately leaves some other and perhaps larger variables unaddressed, such as marital status, number of children, or religious, ethnic, and racial background of these women. Many interesting perspectives became apparent, however, including that most women described Indians calmly and matter-of-factly as simply part of the landscape. It is also interesting to contemplate Hampsten's suggestion that letter

## THE ANNALS OF IOWA

writing allowed women a certain amount of privacy in small homes filled with many family members and was, in fact, often the only activity that they could call their own. But it is rather surprising that she makes so much of the affectional ties between women which emerge from the letters, since scholars such as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg have already done extensive work on these close female relationships.

The book is disappointing in that it lacks scholarly apparatus such as an index. The endnotes are also extremely brief and reflect little familiarity with the secondary literature on western women. Perhaps more attention to the existing scholarship would have contributed a more coherent thread of analysis to this work. On the other hand, literary scholars like Hampsten may find it useful to pursue a different set of questions than historians would choose. In either case, this study is a welcome addition to the growing literature on western women.

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

GLEND A RILEY

*A Century on the Northern Plains: The University of North Dakota at 100*, edited by Robert P. Wilkins. Grand Forks: University of North Dakota Press, 1983. v, 206 pp. Photographs. \$8.00 paper.

The centennial of the founding of the University of North Dakota occurred in 1983. For the past century, the university had fulfilled higher education needs on the northern plains and so the University Centennial Committee authorized the publication of a centennial history. *A Century on the Northern Plains* consists of six essays written by several university history professors and the sports information director. Presidents, professors, students, athletes, alumni, and the campus are the topics they give selective but comprehensive treatment. Excellent black and white photographs coordinated with the essays appear throughout the work.

Unlike many collections of essays, the articles are equal in quality and coverage of their subjects. D. Jerome Tweton examines the eight presidents and two acting presidents. Webster Merrifield, president from 1891 to 1909, dominated the first twenty-five years of the university. He established the institution on a permanent basis to serve the entire state. During his tenure the university hired better-qualified faculty, obtained more funding, and better prepared entering freshmen for college study. Strong presidential leadership characterized most of the first century, however the administration of Thomas F. Kane concluded in 1933 amidst rumors that the president would be fired. Kane had maintained very poor relations with the faculty. In recent years the university has had competent administration, and

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