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## Review of Women with Vision: The Presentation Sisters of South Dakota, 1880-1985

Sandra Schackel  
*Boise State University*

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*Women with Vision: The Presentation Sisters of South Dakota, 1880-1985.* By Susan Carol Peterson and Courtney Ann Vaughn-Roberson. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988. Tables, notes, bibliography, glossary, index. x + 332 pp. \$24.95.

In the mid-eighteenth century, a young Irish woman, Nano Nagle, renounced her wealthy upper-class background and dedicated herself to ministering to the poor. Her belief in "women's potential as nurturers and ethical models for children" prompted her to establish several schools for needy boys and girls as well as to minister to the sick. After Nagle's death, the order she founded in 1776 became known as the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and as part of a growing movement among Catholics in America in the nineteenth century, the Presentation sisters expanded their outreach to the American West, arriving in San Francisco in 1854 and in the Dakota Territory in 1880. In *Women with Vision*, Susan Carol Peterson and Courtney Ann Vaughn-Roberson chronicle the American experience of the Presentation sisters as they struggled to minister to the Dakota Sioux, Anglo

Catholics, and eventually, non-Catholics as well.

The sisters, like others who migrated to the West, quickly found they had to adapt to frontier conditions and gradually adjusted their educational and health care goals to long distances, lack of finances, and frequently, anti-Catholic attitudes. Drawing on their skills as community builders, the Presentations established schools, hospitals, an orphanage, and, in 1951, Presentation Junior College in Mitchell, South Dakota. The trauma and turmoil of the 1960s did not spare the sisters, and like their counterparts nationwide, they suffered a decline in their numbers while the more liberal of the sisters began to demand more recognition, beyond the official church position of separate male and female spheres. In the 1980s, the Presentations have argued for nuns' entry into the priesthood and ministry as an extension of Nagle's intent to minister to the destitute. The authors conclude, however, that the current conservative papal view of women primarily as mothers and wives reinforces the "separate but equal" ideology and presages an uncertain future for South Dakota Presentations as well as other women religious.

Peterson and Vaughn-Roberson have done an admirable job of chronicling the history of a group of female community builders important to South Dakota. Less clear is the impact of the Presentation sisters in a broader context, one that would place their work in relation to other Catholic orders, to Protestant missionary efforts, or to secular organizations. Well written for the most part, the text sometimes lapses into religious terms and phrases that detract from the clarity of the work. As part of an ever-growing body of community studies, however, *Women with Vision* is yet one more important piece we need to place women of all persuasions into the broader historical context that includes the fields of women's history, religious history, and regional history.

SANDRA SCHACKEL  
Department of History  
Boise State University