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Review of A Prairie Populist: The Memoirs of Luna Kellie.

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A Prairie Populist: The Memoirs of Luna Kellie. Edited by Jane Taylor Nelsen. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992. Foreword, afterword, notes, bibliography. xix + 188 pp. \$22.95 cloth. \$9.95 paper.

Jane Taylor Nelsen has performed a great service for scholars of agrarian life by making available the autobiographical writings of Luna Kellie. Kellie, who migrated from Minnesota to the Nebraska frontier as a young wife in 1877, played an active part in Populist politics beginning in the 1890s. The awakening of her political consciousness grew out of her own experience as a farm wife struggling to wrest a living from the Nebraska soil while she and her husband raised a large family. Catapulted to the position of secretary to the state league by the popularity of a song she wrote, Kellie's formidable organizational skills were first used to coordinate speaking tours and publications. Later she printed a Populist sheet which engendered grass-roots support via reports from the field and Kellie's own songs and poetry.

While she was engaged in political activity, Kellie continued to raise her family, taking along the baby to the printers or drafting her daughters' help in putting out the paper. As such Kellie's memoirs are more than a political autobiography; her personal memoir serves as the underpinning to her politicization. Indeed, her writings are inherently valuable because they record the experience of being a farm wife and raising a family in a sod house on the Nebraska frontier. Kellie's engaging reminiscences portray the hopefulness of her early married life with her husband and small babies, the despair of the deaths of her children and the risks of farming, and the constant labor to stay financially afloat.

In an afterword, Nelsen undertakes an interpretation of Kellie's life through her texts. Nelson does a fine job of setting Kellie's story within Nebraska Populism and carefully teases issues of gender out of Kellie's narrative. One might also have wished for a fuller exploration of issues central to the new rural history—

the tensions between the desire to remain independent producers in a market served by transportation monopolies, the strong inter-generational ties that sustained the family farm enterprise, and ethnic and religious differences in a farming community. Because Nelsen does not supply supporting documentation to Kellie's texts in the form of notes, one would have wished for handy information while reading Kellie's memoirs, perhaps a spare chronology of her life and identification of important characters in the story.

The engaging style of Kellie's prose and the brevity of the book makes it appropriate for classroom use by those interested in not only the Great Plains and Populism, but also in gender and western settlement. The book joins the growing body of scholarship by feminist historians in giving voice to rural women of the past.

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