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Review of *Schoolwomen of the Prairies and Plains: Personal Narratives from Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska, 1860-1920* By Mary Hurlbut Cordier

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Schoolwomen of the Prairies and Plains: Personal Narratives from Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska, 1860-1920. By Mary Hurlbut Cordier. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992. Introduction, epilogue, notes, bibliography, index. xi + 365 pp. \$32.50 cloth.

This two-part history of the lives of women teachers from the heartland relies on the personal documents of the women, a trend seen more and more frequently in recent research on the teaching profession. Cordier sets the background for her study in Part One with a description of the heritage and culture of western life and education, establishing the thesis that schooling was a central aspect of life on the Plains. This portion of the book also includes chapters on how the women were educated, what their living and working conditions were, and how they taught. Part Two examines the narratives of five of the ninety-six women included in her study to illustrate the issues as well as the diversity in the lives of working women. The volume's major contributions include the addition of women teachers' voices from the prairies and plains to the growing chorus of working women from other areas of the country and the inclusion of five intriguing case studies.

The book is disappointing, however, in at least two respects. Although Cordier asserts that the women in her study both conformed to and challenged expectations of their gender, she fails to provide supporting evidence. The threads of autonomy for women, demands for equality (at the early date of 1860), and activism toward those ends are evidenced by these schoolwomen throughout the work, but they are not woven together into a coherent argument. It is difficult, therefore, to assess the contribution women teachers from the heartland might have made to the women's movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Cordier might also have made a significant contribution to the history of education had she analyzed the teaching methodology of the women included in her sample. Again there

are unsupported claims: teachers were aware of pedagogical practices resembling those used successfully today; their teaching activities extended beyond simple memorization of texts. Cordier never elaborates on what those activities were, however, or how they were implemented.

A follow-up to this volume is needed that would focus on the sample as a whole rather than on five case studies. More analysis of the questions raised in this work could have a forceful impact on the literature on women teachers as well as the history of education.

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