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Review of *Ho for California! Women's Overland Diaries from the Huntington Library* Edited and annotated by Sandra L. Myres

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Ho for California! Women's Overland Diaries from the Huntington Library. Edited and annotated by Sandra L. Myres. San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1980. Illustrations, bibliography, index. xv + 314 pp. \$20.00.

The Huntington Library, located in an exclusive suburb of Pasadena, is less famous than the Rose Bowl and is probably even less well-known than its companion, the marvelous Huntington Botanical Gardens. In the scholarly world of English literature and American history, however, the Huntington Library is distinguished for its collection of rare books and manuscripts, which place it among the foremost research libraries in the world. Included in its collections are more than 150 original manuscript diaries and letters of persons who traveled from "the States" to the Pacific Coast before the railroad revolution. From them Sandra Myres has selected and edited five travel accounts written by women to produce the most accurate and balanced work published

to date on the female role in "the Great Migration."

Two of these emigrant ladies followed the main overland route in the 1850s up the Platte River to South Pass and from there via the Bear, Humboldt, and Carson rivers to the Golden State. Two others were latecomers (1869-1870) up the "Southwest Trail" or Gila River route in the desert land along the Mexican border. And the fifth, in 1849, followed (in reverse) the ocean-land route from New Orleans to Panama to Acapulco to San Francisco. Supporting the richly annotated diaries are introductory chapters and maps of each of these three geographical traverses, together with well selected illustrations. Although she is meticulous in her research on all five travelers, Myres is most effective in her interpretation of Mary Bailey and Helen Carpenter, the two who followed the central overland route. At any rate, these journals will be of particular interest to readers of the *Great Plains Quarterly*, for they record the impact of Major Long's "Great American Desert" on emigrant women of culture and refinement.

In the introduction the editor emphasizes what her five diarists have in common. None of their writings may be classified as literary or historical gems. Their essential quality is to exemplify "the everyday experience of ordinary people" who made the epic crossing (though the fact that they kept articulate diaries makes them at least a cut above "ordinary"). But Myres goes beyond this fair generalization to emphasize what her ladies are *not*. None of them fit the moth-eaten stereotype of the heroic sunbonneted madonna of popular fiction; neither do they match the false image of a persecuted "trail drudge" conjured up by recent historians of rabid feminist bias. They and their men were all in it together, most reaching their goal, many dying en route, but all having equal opportunity for joy and suffering during their transcontinental ordeal.

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