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Winter 1981

Review of *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* By John Mack Faragher

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Munkres, Robert L., "Review of *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* By John Mack Faragher" (1981).
Great Plains Quarterly. 1913.

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Women and Men on the Overland Trail. By John Mack Faragher. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. Maps, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. 281 pp. \$17.50.

Instead of a general treatment of life on the road west, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* by John Mack Faragher is an analysis of several rather specialized aspects of interpersonal relationships within the context of the westward movement. These relationships are then further examined in connection with rural midwestern life generally during the time period under consideration. Among the topics considered in some detail are gender roles and the division of work both on the farm and on the trail, the significance of differences in men's and women's diaries, the frequency and costs of child-bearing and rearing, and the impact of the differing levels of social interaction available to men and women. The analysis in each of these areas is supported by a variety of socio-economic data presented in fourteen tables in an appendix.

In addition to an appendix on methodology, Faragher has provided a bibliography which, though selective, has considerable breadth. There are, of course, the expected trail diaries and secondary accounts of trail travel, but the author has also included brief listings in demog-

raphy, political economy, folklore, content analysis, sociolinguistics, family studies, and gender roles.

Faragher's commitment to a "radical feminist perspective," noted in the preface, together with suggestions concerning the reconstruction of the past in order to liberate it from "its own ideologies" has a polemical ring to it that may raise some hackles. Talk of "creating a society" through "the creation of a history of women and men" will probably be distasteful to those more Burkean in their thinking; yesterday's "reality," after all, has with some frequency come to be seen as nothing more than an unliberated "perception" today. Be that as it may, Faragher's study is solidly researched, well written, and, in general, closely reasoned. Caveats appropriate for any work whose author has a self-identified intellectual orientation are included at various points throughout the book; the author specifically recognizes the dangers and difficulties of imposing contemporary values on historic beliefs.

Parts of the introductory description of trail topography are questionable. "The road left the protection of the river after Fort Laramie and headed across barren flatlands of alkali beds and sulfurous springs for the Sweetwater River." One may wonder what happened to La Prele, La Bonte, Box Elder, and Deer creeks, not to mention the North Platte itself near present Casper, Wyoming, before the trail headed for the Sweetwater at Red Buttes. The reference to "names carved in the soft stone" at Independence Rock on the Sweetwater perhaps results from it being confused with the truly soft stone of Register Cliff on the North Platte. Although not topographical in nature, the statement that Fort Laramie was "taken over by the army in the early 1850s" is in error; the post was acquired by the government in 1849.

This worthwhile book should be of interest to anyone concerned with more than the drama and romance of the westward movement.

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