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Review of *Woman of the Plains: The Journals and Stories of Nellie M. Perry* Edited by Sandra Gail Teichmann

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Woman of the Plains: The Journals and Stories of Nellie M. Perry. Edited by Sandra Gail Teichmann. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000. Illustrations, notes, works cited, index. xiii + 204 pp. \$24.95.

Sandra Teichmann discovered a charming piece of Anglo women's regional literary tradition when a librarian introduced her to a descendant of Nellie M. Perry in 1996. "Miss Nellie," as Teichmann came to know her, traveled from Iowa to visit her brother George in the Texas Panhandle's Ochiltree County in 1888. Perry, a schoolteacher, wrote lively, polished, and frequently witty narratives about this and other trips to Ochiltree (now Perryton), where she herself settled in 1916. Perry's narratives and short fiction came into the possession of her descendant, who eagerly shared them with Teichmann.

The editor does not indicate (and perhaps could not determine) to what extent Perry attempted to publish her work. She notes only one of Perry's essays, an engaging portrayal of Panhandle life for potential visitors, as a previously published (under a male pseudonym) text. Teichmann's collection thus grants readers access to a loose chronicle of a ranching community, from its sod houses to the formation of its first school board, on which Perry served as the only woman member. Teichmann augments Perry's words with brief remarks as well as footnotes and an appendix referring to other women writers from the area.

Some of Perry's narratives reveal how ranch women experienced the "necessary custom" of hospitality in this sparsely settled area. Perry noted the trials of a woman who "has worked hard all the morning . . . getting enough food cooked up for her own family" only to be discouraged at dinnertime when unexpected travelers "cause everything to disappear like dew before the sun." She perceived that such scarcity hardly prevented ranch women from taking pride in opening their homes to friendly callers. After receiving Louisa Bates's invitation for Sunday dinner, Perry expressed surprise "to find that a sod house could be made so pleasant and homelike." Amazingly, Bates also recorded this visit, and Teichmann includes a segment of her journal entry in the footnotes. Comparing the two accounts illustrates the varying pleasures that the schoolteacher and ranch woman took in their conversation.

Placing Bates's often bleak remembrances of ranch experiences directly alongside Perry's journalistic musings might have produced a volume of more interest to Great Plains scholars concerned with how a variety of women shaped their lives on Panhandle ranches during this era. The book's appendix, which contains the writings of Perry's niece, Anne Louise Perry Spicer, includes a blunt portrayal of the racial dynamics involved in building the Santa Fe Railroad through the county in 1919. Such contextual information about the community's racial hierarchy (and its roots in recent conflicts) deserved a more prominent location in the text. Teichmann implies that such entries can "speak for themselves," but a more active presentation by the editor might have allowed readers to see more clearly that the threads that constitute these women's writings, far from creating a separate tradition, emerge from a deeply woven position in a community's social fabric.

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