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Fall 2002

## Review of *Letters from the Dust Bowl* By Caroline Henderson

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Cannon, Brian Q., "Review of *Letters from the Dust Bowl* By Caroline Henderson" (2002). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 2294.

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*Letters from the Dust Bowl.* By Caroline Henderson. Edited by Alvin O. Turner. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index. xv + 278 pp. \$34.95.

In 1907, Caroline Boa, a thirty-year-old school teacher and graduate of Mount Holyoke College, filed on a quarter section in the Oklahoma Panhandle. The following year she married Will Henderson, a one-time cowboy, well-digger, and would-be rancher. For the next fifty-seven years the couple farmed their homestead, although Caroline also taught school for three years in another community and later spent two years working on a master's degree.

Henderson is best known for her "Letters from the Dust Bowl," published by *Atlantic Monthly* in 1936, one of dozens of articles she wrote for popular magazines between 1913 and 1937. In addition to these published articles, Henderson was a prolific correspondent, writing frequently to her childhood friend Rose Alden, to Rose's mother, to Communist writer and organizer Eli Jaffe, and later in life to her daughter Eleanor. Both her published articles and her private letters illuminate the history of agriculture and settlement on the High Plains. Caroline Henderson was not a typical Plains farm woman; her level of education, commitment to liberal education and literature, gift for writing, unorthodox religious views, and husband who made time for her literary pursuits distinguished her from most of her neighbors. Nevertheless her housing, her work in the home and on the farm, and her struggles with drought, dust, blizzards, isola-

tion, crop failure, ill health, housekeeping, and low farm prices were common among Plains residents, and Caroline Henderson vividly portrayed those struggles through her writing. She was indeed, as Alvin O. Turner claims, a "remarkable woman whose qualities far exceeded those seen in her analyses of the dust bowl era." Reading her rich, descriptive letters constitutes time-travel at its best.

Thanks to Alvin O. Turner's editorial efforts, the range and depth of Caroline's insights are now readily accessible to readers. In this attractively illustrated volume, Turner and the University of Oklahoma Press have reproduced over twenty of Henderson's magazine articles—many other articles published in *The Practical Farmer* and *Ladies' World* were omitted because of space constraints—and a rich sampling of her correspondence. Her writings represent nearly all of her years in Oklahoma, with the major exception of 1920-26. Fifteen pages of explanatory notes provide historical context and illuminate obscure elements in Henderson's writings, although some people, places, and events mentioned in the letters are passed over in the notes. In an engaging interpretive biographical essay, Turner offers an overview of Henderson's life, traces her intellectual development, and evaluates her personality and values. Brief introductory comments for each of the book's six chronological chapters provide additional commentary on Caroline's life and writings.

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