

## Book Notices

*"This State of Wonders": The Letters of an Iowa Frontier Family, 1858-1861*, edited by John Kent Folmar. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1986. xxix, 154 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$15.95 cloth.

Iowa had been a state for just nine years when John Hugh Williams moved his wife, Eleanor, and his six children from St. Clairsville, Ohio, to Homer, Iowa, in 1855. In Ohio Williams had been not only a successful watchmaker and engraver but also a leading figure in the establishment of the Church of New Jerusalem (Swedenborgian). Missionary zeal perhaps accounts for his moving to the Iowa frontier. Although Williams's first work in Homer was to run a watchmaker shop, economic deprivations, brought on by the moving of the county seat from Homer and the Panic of 1857, forced him into farming. He continued, however, to be very active in the New Church, preaching and debating, but he was never "able to make the arrangements" (131) to do full-time missionary work in Iowa.

Because of the family's economic privations, the Williams's eldest son, James, also a watchmaker, was sent to Georgia in 1858 to work for a family friend and coreligionist, Henry J. Osborne. James's move to Georgia precipitated the letters that make up this book. This work is a collection of seventy-five letters from the parents and four of James's brothers and sisters to James. The Williams family was close-knit and highly religious, as the letters reveal: for example, "we often miss you, particularly on Sabbath mornings when we surround the family alter [*sic*]" (21) or "That the Lord will guide and direct you in all that you do is the prays [*sic*] of your Mother" (111).

Rich in detail, the letters afford insights into life on the Iowa frontier in their coverage of business conditions, farming, weather, women's and children's daily activities, education, religion, Pike's Peak fever, and the impending Civil War. Through the letters one gains information about both the Iowa scene and national events in the period, 1858-1861.

John Kent Folmar, professor of history at California University of Pennsylvania, also provides an excellent introduction which gives background material on the family and places the letters in context.

His epilogue is also of interest in relating what paths the lives of both the writers of the letters and the recipient, James, took after 1861.

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*Frontier Times: The 1874-1875 Journals of Sylvester Daniels*, edited by Tim I. Purdy. Van Nuys, CA: Tim Purdy, 1985. Distributed by Lahontan Images, P. O. Box 1093, Susanville, CA 96130. ii, 186 pp. Maps, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$12.95 paper.

This volume, privately published by the editor, consists of four journals for the period May 25, 1874, through October 10, 1875, of Sylvester Daniels's sojourn from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, to California. His first California destination was Honey Lake Valley, the home of his half-sister Polly Parks, where he arrived on June 4, 1874. Daniels spent the next several months traveling through southern California. The purpose of his journey was to see if the California climate would prove beneficial to his health. Daniels kept the journals as an account for his family back in Iowa.

In the journals Daniels recorded comments on places and people, California family activities, the weather, his work, the terrain, and his health. He was convinced the California climate was better for him and thought his Iowa family should come West. On January 1, 1875, he wrote, "I feel really well now" and "I think this climate would be good for all of us" (79-80). In the epilogue the editor states that Daniels bought property in Surprise Valley, California, in December 1875, and his family arrived from Iowa that same month. Daniels and his wife Mary lived there until their deaths: he, in 1908 and she, in 1892.

The journals of Sylvester Daniels are of some interest as one man's recording of his trip west; however, the volume as a whole has several flaws. Much of the material in the epilogue, such as material on Daniels's early life, would be more helpful in the introduction. The reader is given no reason why Daniels left Michigan for Iowa nor what type of work Daniels did while either in Michigan or Iowa. In addition, the volume contains no notes; people are identified in the text by editorial insertions. In the bibliography, titles of works are not underlined or put in quotation marks; hence, the reader is left to guess if a work is an article or a book. Both the introduction and the epilogue have stylistic problems such as tense shifts and sentence fragments.

Mr. Purdy secured the first two journals from Edith Cetera Barry in 1983; Ms. Barry is not identified. Mr. Purdy states the Barry family was not related to Sylvester Daniels and that he does not know how the Barry family came into possession of the journals: "Somewhere there is

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