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army and others remained loyal to the Union. For Lydia Lane, army life apparently was a succession of moves from one isolated post to another. She described in much detail the variety of problems she had in trying to be a homemaker. Written to inform her children of what life was like, the author seems to have felt that the officers of the 1890s and their wives had it easy; the "good old days" were much tougher.

The reader must wonder, however, why this book was reprinted. It consists mainly of accounts of travels across the plains, and tells us almost nothing about life at an army post, or even what it was like to raise a family in the frontier army. There is only casual mention of the author's children and little about her husband. Based on this memoir, the reader would come to the conclusion that much of Lane's life was a succession of trips back and forth across the plains in bumpy wagons. The introduction by Darlis Miller summarizes much of the book and provides some background information, but really does not add much to the paucity of information provided in the autobiography. Since there are better and more inclusive memoirs of officers' wives from this time period, it is questionable whether this particular work deserved republication.

Taken together these two books provide some insight into the life and times of the frontier army. Lane's autobiography is so narrow in scope, however, as to be almost useless. Hutton's biographical sketches are interesting but lose much of their value because of the lack of any overall analysis or focus. The reader interested in learning more about life in the frontier army should turn elsewhere, especially to Edward Coffman's *The Old Army*, rather than to these two volumes.

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MARVIN E. FLETCHER

Prairie Women: Images in American and Canadian Fiction, by Carol Fairbanks. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986. xi, 300 pp. Notes, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$22.00 cloth.

Carol Fairbanks's book, *Prairie Women: Images in American and Canadian Fiction*, is an overview of the novels of women writers of the prairie regions with particular attention to landscape and to the experiences of opening new lands. It is an angle of vision that has become increasingly important to both feminist and regional historians. The canon of books in this area has grown rather quickly: Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* and *The Land before Her*, Glenda Riley's *Frontierswomen*, Julie Jeffrey's *Frontier Women*, Sandra Myres's *Westering Women*. The books are somewhat different, but beneath them lies a debate that is growing more heated. Western women's his-

torians have a sharp sense that their regional history has been deformed in the readings of eastern scholars, and that their proud tradition has been somehow diminished. Thus, historians labeled both "eastern" and "feminist" are understood to have described the women of the western frontiers as victimized by hard work and an aggressively patriarchal frontier society. Western historians prefer to find the women of their past empowered by the westering experience. Fairbanks's intention, therefore, is to give us a reading of the fiction of prairie women writers as containing, in her words, "ideal Frontier Heroes" (167).

This may be a justifiable cause in which to be enlisted, but the polemics of her argument take up a good deal of the book. Refuting one's colleagues, however heady an exercise to the participant scholars, is seldom as interesting to the general reader. It is also problematical in this case because Fairbanks's refutation of Kolodny's idea of women making "a garden" of their wilderness home is based on misunderstanding. Kolodny's phrase was offered as a metaphor for a complex cultural attitude, not necessarily as a literal reference.

One may want to read that true female "Frontier Heroes" exist, indeed that they fill the novels of women writers of the prairie regions, that they are "robust, enthusiastic, independent" homesteaders, but the argument becomes insistent. Fairbanks extols novels when heroines fit the catechism, and sets them aside when they do not. But even Fairbanks admits that women novelists are "reticent on such subjects (uterine madness, female problems [such as] prolapsus uteri, menstruation) as though they had entered a conspiracy with their foremothers to discuss nothing that those women . . . had not been willing to reveal" (111-12).

Fairbanks does retrieve the works of many prairie women writers who have not previously been part of the canon of recognized works, and she provides a patient review of their contents. The more works we know and read, the closer we come to an accurate reading of the lives of women during the years of frontier settlement. But prairie women writers are as complex as those who wrote in Boston or in Philadelphia. One has to adjust for a society that did not encourage women to consider themselves as authors; that imposed restrictions on discussions closest to women's lives, childbearing and the consequences of childbearing; that placed taboos on revelations of sexuality and family violence. We may need to correct, too, for women's needs to earn money by writing as much as by selling eggs.

Regional writing is not a simple form. Landscape is a complex weaving of the natural world with one's perceptions of the natural world, and those perceptions are functions of language and of gender,

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of class and of race, and of cultural attitudes. The discovery of female "Frontier Heroes" may represent the fiction of an innocent time and it may be a reading of fiction that reassures those who want to be reassured, but it is not the whole story of prairie women or their literature any more than Frontier Heroes is a sufficient literary category to describe the lives of men.

BROOKLYN COLLEGE-CUNY

LILLIAN SCHLISSEL

Conflict Between Communities: American County Seat Wars, by James A. Schellenberg. New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1987. xiv, 130 pp. Acknowledgments, bibliography, notes, county and town index, general index. \$22.95 cloth.

A survey history of county seat wars—the uniquely American phenomenon of conflict between communities for the privilege of representing their county as its seat of government—has been long neglected in American historiography. Most writing on the subject has been restricted to journal articles, with regional history volumes providing only limited discussion. There is little explanation for this. Indeed, the subject offers a challenge to historians to produce a work on a fascinating, quite American, topic. As Daniel Boorstin said in *The Americans: The National Experience* (1965), county seat conflict in America would be a "dramatic subject" for any creative and imaginative historian (461).

This void has now been filled commendably, not by a trained historian, but by sociologist James A. Schellenberg. His book is the product of more than twenty years of research on the subject, which includes the publication of seven journal articles and a major work on social conflict. *Conflict Between Communities*, one in a series of works published under the aegis of the Professors World Peace Academy, makes important contributions on two fronts: for the historian, it tells the story of the peculiarly American phenomenon of county seat war and recalls its "most notable stories" (xii); and for the sociologist and student of social conflict, it captures definite forms of social discord (local pride, economic pressures, conflict between major personalities) which can be related to other forms of human strife.

Schellenberg's well-organized and highly readable work traces the history of county seat conflicts in America, finding few on the eastern seaboard primarily because the town, not the county, was the principal form of government. He states that county seat conflict blossomed in the nineteenth century as human settlement entered the Midwest and Great Plains, largely due to the increased importance of

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