

contemporary historiography that suggests that in the Civil War period politicians faithfully responded to voter opinion.

Nineteenth-century Missouri was very different from Iowa: it was a slave state, witnessed extensive guerilla warfare during the Civil War, and had a speedy resurrection of the Democratic Party during Reconstruction. In contrast, most Iowans were staunch Republicans whose affiliation with the party grew during the Civil War. The book will deepen understanding of Republican politics on the national level, and that of Iowa troops who fought in Missouri.

Frank Blair was, by the standards of the national Republican Party, a "conservative." But by the standards of his state in his time, he was a radical much of the time. Parrish closely examines the transition from the Democrats to the Republicans, but begs the larger question of the relationship between Blair's Jacksonian politics and Free Soil politics. Are Jacksonian Democratic ideals and attitudes toward race especially congenial to antislavery men in the border states? In many respects, Blair's world view resembles that of his friend Andrew Johnson. W. E. B. DuBois rightly described the politics of such antislavery Jacksonians in the South as those of "unconscious paradox and contradiction." Some of that sense of paradox is missing here.

Blair is too complex, and led too rich and varied a life, to be pigeon-holed as a conservative. But it is almost impossible to criticize Parrish's views on Blair except on the basis of the wealth of information and research that Parrish himself provides on his subject. Parrish's industrious mining of the sources makes the book useful for historians of the politics of the Civil War era.

Constructing the Little House: Gender, Culture, and Laura Ingalls Wilder, by Ann Romines. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997. ix, 287 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, indexes. \$55.00 cloth, \$16.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY CHERYL ROSE JACOBSEN, WARTBURG COLLEGE

Whether or not one has read the Little House series, Ann Romines's interdisciplinary study makes a compelling case for the richness and complexity of both the narratives and their production by Laura Ingalls Wilder and her daughter, Rose Wilder Lane. *Constructing the Little House* is an equally rich and complex—but wonderfully readable—analysis that draws from literary criticism, cultural studies, feminist theory, history, and autobiographical reader-response. Romines maintains that this critical matrix is necessary to understand the "ongoing

conversation among U.S. readers and consumers about some of the largest and most personal issues of our lives: the questions about gender, mobility, housekeeping, materialism, and racial and cultural identity" (10).

Using this critical, interdisciplinary matrix, Romines discusses the eleven novels of the Little House series in chronological order but emphasizes the thematic tensions within the text and their connections to the authors. In the first chapter, devoted to *Little House in the Big Woods* and *Farmer Boy*, she identifies the centrality of the male hero and male voice, while also exploring the problems that "centerpiece" (23) creates for the daughter and the daughter's stories. In *The Little House on the Prairie*, Romines identifies competing cultural claims for the frontier—Native American, immigrant, and Anglo. Her analysis of *On the Banks of Plum Creek* concentrates on the girls' education in material culture and how gender may be "confirmed by the choices that are offered them by a restrictive social order but where they also have considerable opportunity for independence and growth through consumer decisions that express their own priorities" (107). Subsequent chapters on the rest of the novels in the series explore adolescence, mother-daughter relationships, and Laura's development of an independent voice and agency.

The thematic discussions are highly contextualized. At the same time that Romines offers a feminist literary criticism, she also provides histories of the frontier, women and women's literature, and the Great Depression. Part of her discussion of the series highlights the issues and dynamics of the books' production and publication: the mother-daughter collaboration and competition in the series receives careful scrutiny. An example of this critical matrix at work occurs in the discussion of Laura Ingalls Wilder's development as a writer. Several personal factors came together in the 1930s to prompt the series: Wilder's experience in a rural woman's club, which led to her long career as "household editor" and columnist for the *Missouri Ruralist*; the deaths of her mother and sister, which intensified her interest in an autobiographical project; the financial pressures of the depression economy; and the proximity of her daughter, Rose Wilder Lane, a writer who had professional success writing fiction and biographies of men such as Herbert Hoover and Henry Ford.

What emerges is the recognition that Wilder and Lane were promoting the values of self-sufficiency and paternal authority that were threatened by the depression and the New Deal, while creating a nostalgic myth of their own male family members' success. The irony was not lost on Wilder and Lane, whose collaboration ultimately rejected

the paternal "centerpiece," gave voice to the developing girl in Laura's story, reinforced their professional identities as writers, and provided the economic success that sustained the family that had been an economic failure on the midwestern frontier.

Romines's research is significant. Primary resources held at the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library are the basis for the analysis of the Wilder-Lane relationship; additional family and western history materials come from Wilder collections in South Dakota and Missouri and from the Western Historical Collection of the University of Missouri. Secondary materials include the major scholars and critical theories for all levels of her analysis: Anzuldua on multicultural theory; Armitage, Jameson, Riley, and Schlissel on the western experience; Baym, Coultrap-McQuinn, Kelley, and Radway on women's literary history; Bakhtin, Derrida, du Pleiss, Friedman, and Thompkins on literary and narrative theory, and more. Romines also presents her own autobiographical responses to the text.

Clearly the Little House series offers more complex, dynamic cultural texts than one might assume. Ann Romines's *Constructing the Little House* is an exceptional exploration of an "enduring cultural construct"—the house—which is "elastic enough to accommodate multiple, competing discourses" (253).

Iowa Stereographs: Three-Dimensional Visions of the Past, by Mary Bennett and Paul C. Juhl. A Bur Oak Original. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997. xviii, 371 pp. Illustrations, map, bibliography, index. \$34.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY DEBORAH L. MILLER, MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Iowa Stereographs provides many three-dimensional views of nineteenth-century Iowa. The little plastic viewer provided in a pocket on the inside back cover is the key to the third dimension. By using it to look at the book's stereographs, readers can see what many places in Iowa looked like. In addition, readers will find biographical details about the stereograph photographers and how they chose the views. We learn about the audience for the pictures and how they were used by those who bought them. Layout and format are particularly important in a book of photographs, and for the most part those elements work well here.

The visual core of the book is chapter four's "Iowa Views," 264 pages of reproduced stereo images subdivided into aptly named categories that show the types of pictures stereo photographers made:

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