

quotation suggests, Rohrbough writes with balance and a keen sense for the dramatic story of western mining. *Aspen: The Story of a Silver Mining Town* is a welcome addition to the literature of western American mining history.

No Step Backward: Women and Family on the Rocky Mountain Mining Frontier, Helena, Montana, 1865-1900, by Paula Petrik. Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1986; distributed by the University of Washington Press. xix, 206 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$19.95 cloth.

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The Rocky Mountain frontier was essentially an urban frontier that included women and even children, although the numbers of both were relatively small in the early years. Paula Petrik, in her book *No Step Backward*, aims to put women "in their place" as important participants in the mining frontier experience. A secondary purpose of her work is to correct the overemphasis on agricultural women in the study of the frontier. To accomplish these goals, Petrik has studied the "interaction of different groups and generations of women in one locality over time" (xvi). *No Step Backward* is thus a community study that focuses on the women of a frontier mining city. Petrik hopes that her work will do more than recount the story of Helena's women; she sees it as a "prism" that will "refract women's experiences into its component parts" for the whole Rocky Mountain mining frontier (xvi). Petrik's thesis is that the mining frontier prompted increased economic and social equality for its not always willing women residents. To support her thesis, Petrik did substantial research in quantitative and manuscript sources. The result is an impressively researched book with much of interest to say.

No Step Backward is not a narrative history of the town of Helena and its women so much as it is an analysis of certain groups or social processes, such as divorce. The first chapter outlines the history of Helena and its population. The following chapters then assess assorted female groups and their roles. For example, Petrik provides a fascinating analysis of prostitutes in Helena, several of whom owned substantial property and presided over a tenderloin empire. This chapter features several prominent madams, whom Petrik characterizes as "capitalists with rooms." Other chapters describe mothers and daughters in Helena and the ways their lives changed over time; divorce in Helena; and the drive for equal suffrage in Montana, a development that Petrik sees as a vitally important product of the

frontier experience. Each section contains a number of personal vignettes that illustrate very nicely the underlying statistical framework.

Petrik's interpretive framework is problematic in a few respects. She assumes that there was one all-encompassing "cult of true womanhood" or "cult of domesticity" in the nineteenth century and that it affected all women in the same way. Based on this assumption, Petrik attributes major changes in Helena women to the frontier experience. The "cult of true womanhood," however, is a fundamentally limiting interpretation of women's history that does not take into account the complexity or the variety of women's experience that stem from class, region of origin, race, ethnicity, individual choice, personal tragedy, or just plain happenstance. This variety is clearly depicted in Petrik's book: the women on the farming frontier that Elizabeth Fisk meets while traveling to Helena; the women on the steamer that she dislikes because they violate her standards of true womanhood; the "Jews, Catholics, non-believers, and uneducated or socially unrefined women" (75) who inhabit Helena. They all live in the nineteenth century, they are all women, yet they are not followers of the ideals articulated as the "cult of domesticity."

Another problem results from Petrik's interpretation of change over time, especially as it shapes the daughters of Helena. Petrik sees the second generation of Helena women as vitally different from their mothers and from other women in America, and she attributes the change to frontier influence on the later generation. Yet the changes she mentions were occurring almost everywhere in the United States at the time. By 1900, the end of the period covered in this study, women in the United States were moving into the work force in greater numbers, at least before marriage; settlement houses and the emerging field of social work attracted idealistic young women; more women attended college; and women were even moving west from nonfrontier areas to homestead alone. Obviously, environment does shape a society, and the frontier certainly had some effect on the lives of those who lived there, but the social changes Petrik attributes to frontier conditions were happening throughout American society at the time.

The story of Helena and its women is intrinsically interesting, and Petrik's contribution is a valuable one. The research is substantial and intriguing. The individuals introduced make the book much more personal than many studies that rely on quantitative research alone; Petrik has balanced narrative and analysis nicely in a very readable style.

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