

This book is meticulously researched, using an impressive array of archival materials and an interesting assortment of images. It is, above all, written in a gracefully sophisticated manner with art and style in language usage. Wood has produced a first-rate study crafted into the most elegant and convincing of writing, with conclusions based on solid standards of scholarship. This is a book that raises the bar in terms of regional urban history, especially as it concerns labor, prostitution, and the interactions of women across economic class and religious affiliation. On several levels, *The Freedom of the Streets* is a striking and outstanding contribution to the scholarly literature.

Sharon E. Wood won the 2006 Benjamin F. Shambaugh Award for *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City*. With this award, the State Historical Society of Iowa recognizes the most significant book on Iowa history published each year. — Editor

Impertinences: Selected Writings of Elia Peattie, a Journalist in the Gilded Age, edited and with a biography by Susanne George Bloomfield. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. xx, 335 pp. Illustrations, notes, works cited, bibliographies, index. \$20.00 paper.

Reviewer Carolyn Stewart Dyer is professor of journalism and mass communication at the University of Iowa. She has written a number of articles on nineteenth-century newspapers.

Susanne George Bloomfield discovered writer Elia Peattie during a search for stories of the West written by people with firsthand experience. The Omaha work of this prolific journalist, novelist, poet, and playwright was a significant find for its illumination of turn-of-the-century midwestern urban life and journalism.

For *Impertinences*, Bloomfield selected 44 of Peattie's editorials, essays, columns, and stories from more than a thousand pieces published between 1888 and 1896 in the *Omaha World-Herald*. Peattie's writing intimately portrays community institutions and practices, the good works of individuals, and the social dynamics of Omaha as its population quadrupled between 1880 and 1890 and declined during the recession of the 1890s.

Peattie's Omaha pieces painted vivid three-dimensional pictures of daily work, home, and institutional life among the underclass. For the wealthy, however, she had mostly scorn, presented in parody-like

commentary on what she portrayed as their excesses, greed, and self-serving social institutions.

To report on the common person, Peattie immersed herself in the lives of her subjects. To dispel myths and stereotypes with facts, she went into the homes, refuges, and workplaces of individual members of marginal communities in Omaha society – blacks, Eastern European immigrants, Native Americans, prostitutes, the working poor, and the unemployed – and portrayed them sympathetically. Peattie used the rich description and storytelling of the novelist to take readers right into the cottage crowded with children, the orphanage, the charity hospital at Creighton University, and onto the bloody hog kill floor at the Cudahy meatpacking plant.

The only Iowa institution she profiled was the Christian Home of Council Bluffs, a refuge for orphaned and neglected children. One piece presented the work of Dr. Freda Lankton, a State University of Iowa medical school graduate who cared for residents of a maternity home for abandoned women.

Peattie was a strong advocate of women's rights, their welfare and enrichment. Bloomfield offers a broad selection of her writing for and about women, including commentary on child-rearing, divorce, the isolation of farm women, prostitution, careers, and the work of women's clubs (Peattie was a founder of the Omaha Woman's Club).

She exposed deplorable situations and conditions, but she was neither a sob sister nor a muckraker. Her commentary on social issues is sharp and still refreshingly impertinent more than a century later. Reading Peattie's journalism is as pleasurable as indulging in a historical novel.

Bloomfield divides the book into five thematic chapters and disregards chronology as she orders writings within chapters. This organizational device may make literary sense, but it is disconcerting for the historian. Each piece, however, is dated.

This sample of Peattie's writing introduces the range and quality of her work. Bloomfield's bibliography of the thousand pieces Peattie wrote for the *World-Herald* will lure scholars into the rest of her Omaha journalism. The whole body of her work will be especially valuable for Midwest, urban, journalism, and women's historians.

And there is more. Peattie was also a journalist for the *Chicago Times*, *Chicago Daily News*, and *Chicago Tribune*, where she served as literary editor for the last 16 years of her career. The sampler of the *World-Herald* pieces suggests that there are Peattie gems for the prospecting in Chicago newspaper archives. Her books and poems await the casual reader's discovery.

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