

Ritner, a Civil War officer. Most state and local archives have collections of letters from Civil War soldiers. Such letters were sent home from the front and carefully preserved by loved ones. But letters sent *to* the soldiers are rare. Letters from wives and sweethearts were carried on the march, read and reread, subjected to weather and camp life, and, as a result, were often destroyed. *Love and Valor* represents a refreshing exception. Larimer was able to find letters from Jacob's wife, Emeline—not as many as one might want, but the real thing—and her letters bring a magnificent home-front dimension to this collection.

A true love story unfolds as one reads the letters. Ritner was not eager to leave his wife and family to go to war, but his valor is exemplified by his willingness to serve, first for three months in the First Iowa Volunteer Infantry and later for the duration of the war in the Twenty-Fifth Iowa Volunteer Infantry. Emeline did not want her husband to be away, and often expressed her resentment of his absence, but she understood the magnitude of the struggle and tried to maintain life at home when it seemed that her husband and most of her male relatives were serving the Union.

This is also a first-rate Iowa story, with Jacob and Emeline and other family members writing to each other and expressing their views on the crucial issues of the age: the need to preserve the Union, the evils of slavery, the qualities of the officers under whom the men served, and the role of Christian faith in a family's life. The letters are rich in their descriptions of hometown life at each stage of the war as well as the process by which civilian volunteers slowly became true soldiers. If there is a deficiency, it is in Jacob's sparse battle descriptions. Although he was in some of the fiercest fights of the war, it is as if a gentleman does not offer the bloody details of combat to his wife.

The greatest strength of the book is its complete story, from the dream of a short war that would be over in three months to the grinding reality that the war seemed to go on forever, a reality that had profound effects on both the soldiers and their loved ones at home. Anyone interested in going beyond the scholarly narratives of the war and looking at primary sources will be well served by this collection.

*Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836–1920*, by Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999. ix, 327 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$49.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

Reviewer Janet Welsh, O.P., is assistant professor of history at Dominican University. Her dissertation was "Where the Spirit Dwells: Catholic and Protestant

Women and the Development of Christianity in the Upper Mississippi River Valley Lead Region, 1830-1870" (University of Notre Dame, 1995).

According to *The Official Catholic Directory*, in 1920 approximately 1,700 Catholic sisters representing 22 different communities of women religious served the rural and urban populations of Iowa. Sisters instructed 34,000 children in the state's 229 parochial schools and furnished academy and college education for 3,000 young women. They staffed and administered 29 hospitals, 15 of which provided nursing training for 459 students. The women also established orphanages, sanitariums for the mentally ill, and homes for young women, the aged, and single pregnant women. Iowa was not the only state to benefit from the labors of Catholic sisters; by 1920, more than 90,000 Catholic sisters provided myriad educational, medical, and social services throughout the nation (221).

Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, the authors of *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920*, maintain that "the expansion of American Catholic culture and identity and its subsequent influence in American society could not have occurred without the activities and labors of these women" (2). Coburn and Smith offer an intriguing investigation into how one particular community of women religious, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, participated in the phenomenal creation of educational and social services that shaped the American Catholic landscape. The authors use the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet as a prototype for their study of U.S. Catholic sisters in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Sisters of St. Joseph ministered throughout the United States in urban and rural settings. Unlike some religious communities that concentrated their endeavors in one avenue of service, the Sisters of St. Joseph toiled in all three of the dominant ministries of the era: education, medicine, and social services.

*Spirited Lives* consists of seven chapters. The first, "The French Connection: Founders, Origins, and Early Activities," establishes the historical context relative to the Sisters' establishment in 1650 at Le Puy, France. This chapter provides the knowledge necessary to understand the sisters' aspirations and the challenges they accepted in forging new roles for women. The following six chapters present an account of the sisters' lives and activities situated in the historical narrative of the nation.

The founding sisters emigrated from France in 1836 and established a convent in Carondelet, Missouri, outside of St. Louis. Like many immigrants, they struggled with language, braved frontier conditions and encountered the persistent anti-Catholicism of the nine-

teenth century. As their community increased, they drew new members from diverse ethnic groups and divergent economic and educational backgrounds.

Although these sisters called Carondelet "home," their religious commitment mandated a mobile lifestyle. Sisters traveled to the urban centers of the Midwest and East not to fuel the industrial growth of cities but to alleviate the sufferings wrought by rapid urbanization. As the nation moved westward, so did the sisters. They journeyed not in search of gold, silver, or land but to establish schools, hospitals, and orphanages to serve the miners, homesteaders, and indigenous peoples who suffered from that westward expansion.

In *Spirited Lives* Coburn and Smith skillfully examine the question: How did these sisters create and sustain "a network of support and services that insured the transmission of Catholic values, culture and education" well into the mid-twentieth century (2)? Coburn and Smith acknowledge that this inquiry necessitates an analysis of how the Sisters of St. Joseph, in their convent and ministerial lives, charted and navigated the turbulent seas of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century understandings of gender, religion, and power. The authors render cogent evidence that illustrates the strategies the sisters employed to use the religious and gender ideologies of the era in order to define and expedite their various ministries. Despite successful endeavors, patriarchal forces in the Catholic church and society at times thwarted the women's labors. In some instances, the sisters succumbed to the dominant powers; in most situations, their determination, commitment, and wit circumvented clerical control. Although their ministries afforded them more opportunities than most nineteenth-century women, sisters, unlike white Protestant women, failed to establish a "public voice on social issues involving women and children" (221-22). Nonetheless, *Spirited Lives* elucidates Catholic sisters' pivotal role in the history of American Catholicism and the nation.

*The Young John Muir: An Environmental Biography*, by Steven J. Holmes. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999. xv, 309 pp. Illustrations, notes, index, appendixes. \$55.00 cloth, \$22.95 paper.

Reviewer Thomas K. Dean is special assistant to the president of the University of Iowa. He is the author of "The Pedagogy of Place: Valuing Environment and Community in Education" in *JAEP: Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*, 1997.

Steven J. Holmes is trying something new and valuable in this biography of John Muir. He defines "environmental biography" as moving

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