

privilege. His style is that of a nineteenth-century editorialist. His fulsome prose, however, does not seem inappropriate for this reminiscent labor of love.

The work is not particularly well organized. It lacks chronology and, thus, makes it difficult for a stranger to Estherville to avoid getting lost. Chapters are unnumbered and their titles do not necessarily describe their contents. The book constitutes a recitation of facts and anecdotes unaccompanied by any profound synthesis of experiences, philosophies, or trends.

It was apparently not Deemer Lee's aim to summarize his great wealth of experience and information in a succinct and sweeping epilogue. Even so, his conclusion includes these well-ordered words: "When I'm asked by a stranger to spell [Estherville], I sometimes hear a snicker. . . . 'Yes, Estherville!' I repeat. Why not? 'Estherville'—the only one in the world. After all, if Robert Ridley had married someone other than Esther, this could have been Phoebeville, Lenaville, Kittyville, or Daisyville. Esther is a pretty name for a pretty ville, nestled along a meandering river under bluffs wooded by native oak, walnut, maples, and other dense timber."

Esthervilleans are fortunate indeed that Deemer Lee was among them, watching and writing.

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*The Life of an Ordinary Woman*, by Anne Ellis. (Foreword by Elliott West, introduction by Lucy Fitch Perkins.) Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980. pp. 301. Illustrations. \$6.25.

In his foreword to *Life of an Ordinary Woman*, Elliott West states that writings by women living in mining camps are rare. This reviewer would argue that there are many more extant diaries, memoirs, and reminiscences by mining camp women than most scholars realize, but would agree that Ellis' story is one of the most gripping, touching, and compelling among them.

Writing in the late 1920s, Anne Ellis looked back over a long and full life to recount her mother's girlhood recollections and later years in mining camps, her own childhood, her infatuation with a man she was destined never to marry, the death of two husbands and a daughter, and her struggle to survive as a poverty-stricken widow with two children. In 1918 her grit attracted the attention of a local Republican

party leader who encouraged her to run for county treasurer. She stumped the country, was elected, and eventually served three terms. But in 1924 she developed asthma and except for her writing, never worked again.

In 1929 Houghton Mifflin published this, her first book, which was the most successful of her writings. In 1938 she was awarded an honorary master of letters degree by the University of Colorado at Boulder, an astonishing event for a woman who had only completed the fifth reader in a mining camp school. Then sixty-three years old, she was tired and ill; within a few months her long and incredibly full life came to an end.

As literature, Ellis' writing draws, even compels, the reader to become engrossed with the twistings and turnings of her life in the mining regions of the Rockies. Not maudlin or overly-dramatic, Ellis told her tale in a straightforward manner that elicits a variety of emotions. As history, however, the book is more difficult to assess. Reminiscences and memoirs' typically tend to recount events as larger or smaller, harsher or easier, happier or sadder than other sources written at the time indicate they actually were. Since Ellis did not keep a diary and so few other mining camp women's diaries have as yet been published, it is almost impossible to determine the amount of distortion which may have crept into her story. Only scholarship as yet undone on this segment of women's history in the West will provide the perspective necessary to judge Ellis' worth as an historian.

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*Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present*, by Sheila Rothman. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1978. pp. xiv, 322. Photographs, index. \$12.50.

In *Woman's Proper Place*, Sheila Rothman examines two issues central to the contemporary controversies concerning social policies affecting women's position: 1) woman's proper place in society; and 2) the presumed conflict between what is good for women and what is good for children, families, and society in general. The author contends that where we perceive conflict between the many roles women assume in current society, our ancestors found interdependence. While in the past, expectations concerning woman's "proper place" and her role were in harmony, today we find discord. Today's woman

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