

*Bachelor Bess: The Homesteading Letters of Elizabeth Corey, 1909-1919*, edited by Philip L. Gerber. American Land and Life Series. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1990. lxviii, 462 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$42.50 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY SUSAN C. PETERSON, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA

Professor Philip Gerber stumbled on this treasure of letters at the South Dakota Historical Society Archives. His edited volume of letters from Elizabeth Corey puts her voluminous correspondence about homesteading and teaching in west central South Dakota at the reader's fingertips. Her letters tell the story of a single woman settling west of Pierre in the early years of the twentieth century.

Bess migrated from Iowa to western South Dakota with a female friend to homestead on the recently opened lands of the Rosebud Indian Reservation. Her early letters are replete with train schedules and hotel locations. Then she tells us about the "adventure" of proving up on a homestead where she did most of the work herself or hired neighbor men to do the heavy hauling or digging for her. This venture illustrates Bess's strength and vigor.

Yet homesteading was only one of the projects Bess undertook in her full life. She supported herself on her homestead by teaching in a series of one-room rural schools in Stanley County. Clearly, teaching took up more of her interest and love than homesteading. Her letters are filled with references to teachers' summer institutes, and, later, her quest for certification at the Northern Normal and Industrial School in Aberdeen. She corresponded frequently with former students, always encouraging them to pursue further education. These letters about teaching reflect the experiences of many more women than those about homesteading.

A foreword by Bess's brother Paul describes the family Bess left behind. (Discussions of family members' health or financial woes in the correspondence reveal her continuing interest in her brothers' and sisters' activities.) Editor Gerber's introduction sets the stage for the section on Bess's homesteading activities—the centerpiece of the volume—while an epilogue, which includes many more letters about her teaching career, brings the story of Elizabeth Corey's life on the South Dakota frontier up to the 1950s. In another section, Gerber describes how he edited the letters.

This volume is a fine companion to Edith Eudora Kohl's *Land of the Burnt Thigh*, an earlier rendition about homesteading in western South Dakota reissued in 1986 by Minnesota Historical Society Press with a new introduction by Glenda Riley. Both volumes deal with the same general topic—women homesteaders in South Dakota—but

each has a different slant: Kohl's with Riley's feminist perspective, and Gerber's purporting to be only Bess's words.

Bess Corey's letters, with their detail about homesteading, show us that single women led full, active lives long before the end of the twentieth century. Gerber's entire volume, with its discussion of Corey's teaching career after her homesteading experience, tells us that women's lives have always been multidimensional.

*Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939*, by Peggy Pascoe. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. xxiii, 301 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography. \$24.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY RUTH M. ALEXANDER, COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

*Relations of Rescue* is an original and important work of scholarship about women's quest for empowerment. Peggy Pascoe's study of Protestant missionary women in the American West is driven by her concern about contemporary "cultural feminism"—a branch of feminism that rejects egalitarianism as a model for male-female relations. Today's cultural feminists emphasize the dissimilarities between men and women and seek to elevate "women's values" to a position of cultural authority. Similarly, Protestant missionary women tried to improve women's status by stressing difference rather than equality between the sexes. Hoping to discover whether it is possible "to promote 'women's values' without ultimately reinforcing limited definitions of womanhood" (xv), Pascoe investigates the strengths, limitations, and implications of missionary women's ideology and strategy.

Late nineteenth-century missionary women subscribed to a Victorian gender system that neatly divided the sexes, identifying women as the pious and pure guardians of the home, men as the worldly custodians of the political arena and marketplace. But then, making an ideological leap that "stretched these conventions almost beyond recognition" (33), evangelical women rejected the tradition of male dominance in social relations between the sexes. Arguing that men demonstrated little natural concern for women's welfare and did not deserve their obedience, these missionary women proposed that women's greater purity entitled them to moral authority over the opposite sex. Conditions in the American West gave the search for female moral authority particular urgency: unchecked by women's unerring virtue, the masculine populations of Denver and San Francisco indulged in prostitution and seduction, "exploiting" innocent women. Likewise, the Mormon patriarchs in Salt Lake City "abused"

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