

*Lottie's Diary*, by Lottie Wetmore; edited by Joan Arnold. Ann Arbor, MI: Rock Branch Productions, 2010. 100 pp. Illustrations, genealogical data, notes, bibliography, index. \$14.95 paper.

Reviewer Anne Beiser Allen is an independent researcher and writer on mid-western history. Her articles have won the State Historical Society of Iowa's Throne-Aldrich Award in 2003 and the Nebraska Historical Society's James Sellers Award in 2010.

*Lottie's Diary* provides a snapshot of life on a northwest Iowa farm in the 1890s. Lottie Wetmore began the diary when she went with her family to the Chicago World's Fair in September 1893, and it ends a year-and-a-half later, a few months before her death from tuberculosis in October 1895. The diary itself fills only one-third of the book. The remainder consists of family papers, photographs, and an extensive genealogy of the Wetmore family going back to the 1630s, gathered and edited by Joan Arnold, Lottie's great-niece. Of particular interest is Lottie's mother's description of her own trip to the World Cotton Centennial in New Orleans in 1885.

In her diary, Lottie shows us the challenges nineteenth-century Protestant theology sometimes presented to everyday people. She first begins to question the easy faith of her childhood when a neighbor and close friend dies, but eventually regains a deeper understanding after attending a revival, followed by the personal counseling of a sympathetic pastor. The poignant entries of her last year allow readers to share the uncertainties, discomfort, and fears of a young woman who suffered from a disease that was one of the major health problems of her time. The background material illustrates some of the ways that the changes of the early twentieth century affected the lives of people in small Iowa towns by describing the subsequent lives of Lottie's siblings and close relatives. The book will appeal to those interested in genealogy or rural life in the Midwest at the turn of the previous century.

*An Iowa Schoolma'am: Letters of Elizabeth "Bess" Corey, 1904-1908*, edited by Philip L. Gerber and Charlotte M. Wright. A Bur Oak Book. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011. xxxi, 191 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$25.00 paper.

Reviewer Karen Leroux is associate professor of history at Drake University. Her research and writing focus on the histories of women, work, and education.

This edited volume of letters allows readers to peer into the life of a young country schoolteacher in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Iowa.

Equipped with only a ninth-grade education and attendance at a summer teachers' institute, Bess Corey began teaching at age 17, shortly after her father's death. The letters, written to her mother and siblings, offer insights into this young woman's journey from farm to schoolhouse at a time when one-room schools were the norm, not only in Iowa, but across many parts of the nation. The volume represents a prequel to *Bachelor Bess*, a 1990 edited collection of Corey's letters written home after she set out to homestead in South Dakota in 1909.

Corey's letters remind us that country schools provided paid work for women who needed it. Lacking alternatives for earning income, young women often had to leave home to teach, even if only to venture as far as a neighboring county. The letters illuminate the range of new relations teachers had to negotiate as they established their authority with parents, students, and county superintendents, made friends and acquaintances in the community, and tried to adapt to the families with whom they boarded. Through Corey's descriptions of inadequate space and furnishings, late and meager meals, and interpersonal conflicts, readers will grasp that teaching and boarding were not always conducive to fostering women teachers' independence or autonomy. While the letters attest to Corey's robust and resilient personality, they also demonstrate how social practices and traditional hierarchies informed her choices.

Some of Corey's letters mark the sharp social differences between her world and ours. Corey insists that she cannot bring herself to write the "unwritable" (93) things a student's father said to her. Yet she does not hesitate to use the word "nigger" (73, 80), once to describe white students in blackface; and on several occasions she pokes fun at European immigrant dialects, showing the extent to which norms of social conduct have changed.

Other letters speak to gendered experiences that continue to resonate. When Corey advises holding students back a grade, we see a young teacher reacting to a father in a struggle over public and private authority. Corey's letters also help us imagine how young rural women navigated the dangers of moving about in public, issues more typically explored in urban histories of gender. Corey dares to board a freight train rather than wait hours for the scheduled passenger train, rationalizing that "what men have done, women may do" (63). Yet, as a young woman living apart from family, she also realizes her vulnerability. Another letter describes her declining a ride home from two young men, concerned that their conduct might not be gentlemanly. The letters help us see a young woman making her way through the rural landscape of gender and other hierarchical relations.

This volume is likely to appeal to readers curious about rural women's lives, as well as instructors teaching the history of women and education. The folksy informality of the letters will likely draw some readers in; others may find the tone and diction from another era difficult to penetrate at times. Enhancing readers' understanding of Corey's world is a generous selection of archival photographs, maps, and images. Finally, a valuable foreword by Paul Theobald contextualizes the letters in the history of rural education and offers well-selected reading recommendations to guide further research. While the volume stands alone, it could also be used as a revealing contrast to the historical literature on urban women teachers, calling attention to the wide range of schools and women who taught them at the turn of the twentieth century.

*Proving Up: Domesticating Land in U.S. History*, by Lisi Krall. Albany: SUNY Press, 2010. xx, 132 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$65.00 cloth.

Reviewer James W. Oberly is professor of history at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire. He is the author of *Sixty Million Acres: American Veterans and Public Lands before the Civil War* (1990).

Economist Lisi Krall has written a slim volume that starts with a bang – a murder, actually – and ends with a digression. In short, this is a frustrating book to read and review. In the preface, Krall tells the story of her grandfather, William Krall, who homesteaded a parcel of land in Wyoming. Krall filed his claim to the homestead in 1918 and had three years to “prove up” that claim, that is, to show improvements, such as crops planted and acreage fenced, to the local Land Office staff in order to obtain title to the homestead. To make improvements, Krall needed access to water. In that pursuit, he soon quarreled with his neighbor, Steve Lasich, over water rights. The dispute escalated in the summer of 1920, culminating when Lasich shot and killed Krall. When finally brought to trial, the defendant managed to convince a jury that the victim had it coming. The author wonders what type of land system could place her grandfather in the position where he was able to stake a claim yet unable to gain access to water and thereby improve his homestead as required by law in order to receive fee simple title. The author muses that she originally intended to write a book on this family tragedy but instead decided to write an institutional economic history of the anomalies and peculiarities of the U.S. public land system. The author pays tribute to Karl Polyani, Douglass North, and other institutional economists in trying to understand why a dysfunctional land system served William Krall and others so badly.