

*Old Betsey: The Life and Times of a Famous Dakota Woman and Her Family*, by Mark Diedrich. Rochester, MN: Coyote Books, 1995. 170 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, appendix, bibliography, index. \$24.95 paper.

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The history of Native American women has come alive in the past decade or so, spurring on the necessary task of uncovering the lives of specific Indian women from the past. Mark Diedrich's biography of the nineteenth-century Mdewakanton Dakota woman, Old Betsey, provides a summary of what the lives of Dakota women were like in the early nineteenth century, followed by biographical and genealogical information on Old Betsey, who witnessed the transformation of her homeland in south central Minnesota as non-Native settlers and the U.S. Army invaded and set about making the land their own. The subtitle of the book hints at the fair amount of material on Dakota history and Minnesota history in general, and on Betsey's particular community of Mdewakanton people. Betsey seems to have aided in saving Euroamerican captives from their Dakota captors during the Dakota War of 1862. Although hard evidence is elusive, Diedrich has exhausted the historical records in his search for accurate information on this woman and her family.

The narrative style of this book is engaging, but it stands in need of editorial discipline. More importantly, substantial analysis of the subject matter is lacking. Diedrich expends much effort in answering the questions surrounding Old Betsey's birth and death, but some much more interesting questions go unexplored. He does not question Betsey's commitment (if the existing historical evidence is accurate) to saving the lives of white captives. Readers may be left wondering how Betsey was viewed by other Dakota people and whether she might have been considered a traitor. Perhaps because of the limits of his sources, Diedrich views his subject from a "white" perspective only. In addition, the mythology of Old Betsey based partly on her status as a favorite subject for professional photographers is ripe for investigation, but Diedrich has not included such inquiries in his book.

Although some useful information about Old Betsey and her historical context emerges from this biography, treatment of the larger interpretive issues surrounding this Dakota woman will have to wait for further analysis.

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