

ences: hauling water and chopping wood, canning meat, making clothing out of feed sacks. Margaret Lien, age 68, from North Dakota, recalled, "The first things I had was bloomers and slips out of flour sacks that they bleached the names off of. Mom was good at that. She didn't leave parts of the name. Some people had Pillsbury on their seat" (154).

There are, of course, some caveats to keep in mind while marveling at the ingenuity and determination of the women who tell their stories in *Voices*. Oral history has become more sophisticated, and scholars have grown wary of memory as a trustworthy source of historical data. As these women aged and seemingly fulfilled community expectations, they tended to downplay the ways they may have resisted or sabotaged conventional expectations in earlier stages of their lives.

But just as importantly, *Voices* preserves the materiality of everyday life in a world far less mechanized, more localized, more laborious. Some observations help to explain the lack of appeal middle-class urban feminism may have had for rural working women. As 73-year-old Ozetta Sullivan of Indiana remarked, "Well, I've had my equal rights all of my life, and I don't think much of it. I said if a woman wants to get out and work like a man, that's all right, but I had to do it whether I wanted to or not. I worked in the fields. I plowed. I cultivated. I disked. I done everything a man does, and I wasn't enjoying it one bit."

*Social Housekeepers: Women Shaping Public Policy in New Mexico, 1920-1940*, by Sandra Schackel. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992. ix, 213 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

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Sandra Schackel's account of the role women played in social welfare during the interwar years appropriately opens with a geographic and demographic profile of the state of New Mexico. Schackel describes a very rural, very poor, sparsely populated, culturally diverse, and recently organized western state. In many respects, these conditions present a stark contrast to the rest of the nation. Nationwide in 1920 the population was for the first time slightly less rural (49%) than urban, while New Mexico was overwhelmingly rural (82%), and had been a state for only eight years. By comparison, Iowa was 57% rural and 74 years old.

These conditions help to explain why it feels like there is a time warp in the book. In 1921, when Congress passed the Sheppard-Towner Act to provide states with matching federal funds for prenatal and child health centers, New Mexico had no bureaucracy for administering the program. The state even had to ask the New Mexico Federation of Women's Clubs to purchase a building to house the program (22). This is a good example of the ways married women volunteers in New Mexico provided essential organizational and fund-raising services, services that bear a striking resemblance to those of Chicago's "managers and patronesses" during the 1870s and 1880s described by Kathleen D. McCarthy in *Noblesse Oblige: Charity and Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago, 1849-1929* (1982). Furthermore, New Mexico nurses and midwives functioned within a pragmatic tradition of "women caring for women" (50). Like Anna Oleson, a late nineteenth-century Iowa farm woman described by Deborah Fink in the *Annals of Iowa* (48:251-63), their sphere was much wider than their own private household, but was still largely confined to a community of women. On the whole, women's participation in social welfare organizations and health services in New Mexico between 1920 and 1940 much more closely resembles the pattern of voluntarism in social reform prevalent in late nineteenth-century America than it does the pattern of early twentieth-century Progressive "municipal housekeeping" with which Schackel tries to identify it.

*Social Housekeeping* is about the considerable ingenuity and personal skills women used in private, voluntary organizations and public programs to *carry out* policies made by others. Although her subtitle suggests otherwise, none of Schackel's evidence shows that women actually helped to *shape* public social welfare policy in New Mexico; indeed, they were consistently prevented from doing so. Margaret Reeves, the book's paramount example of a woman determined to shape public policy, lost her position as director of the Bureau of Child Welfare because of her efforts (155).

Yet the concrete activities of Schackel's women did make a real difference. The infant mortality rate in New Mexico dropped from 145 per 1,000 children under age 1 in the mid-1920s (by comparison, Iowa's was 56 per 1,000) to 100 per 1,000 by 1940. These women accomplished a great deal even though they were isolated in their efforts, thinly supported, could serve very few persons adequately on a regular basis, and were hampered by competition between organizations. Schackel's story reveals that the heroic efforts of women in New Mexico during the interwar years could not overcome the inadequacies of social welfare policy.

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