

often as possible, and that the Eskimo needed to learn those conventions. Occasionally she reveals the attitudes of her generation, referring, for example, to the Eskimo religious beliefs as "superstition." But she never mocks their customs and her obvious fondness for the indigenous people of Alaska shines through on every page. She respected and admired a number of her new neighbours and genuinely loved the children in her care, seeking to make their lives as happy and comfortable as she knew how. This is the gentle face of assimilation.

The book is intended to be entertaining rather than educational and it certainly succeeds in its goal. One is left, however, hungering for more information. What did the people of Kukulak think of their schoolteacher and her husband, the novice reindeer-herder? Under what circumstances did she obtain the beautiful clothing made by Eskimo women? What exactly did she teach in school, and, with experience, did she change her mind about any of the curriculum? What did the community think about the new technologies and ideas reading them from "outside?" What did the parents want their children to learn at school?

Although the book contributes nothing of substance to our knowledge of the history of education, it makes delightful reading for a winter's evening. It also serves as a snapshot reminder of the experiences and attitudes of a previous generation in the Arctic.

Kerry Abel
Carleton University

Mary Hurlbut Cordier. *Schoolwomen of the Prairies and Plains: Personal Narratives from Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska, 1860s-1920s.* Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1992. Pp. 365. \$32.50 U.S.

There exists an enduring stereotype of the selfless spinster schoolmarm, born and bred to eastern values and ideals, who travels west to effect a civilizing influence upon the children of the little red schoolhouse. Of course, this stereotype contains more fiction than fact, but just how far removed it was from the reality of the 1860s to 1920s is brought to light via Mary Cordier's discourse on prairie schoolwomen. Cordier's subject is indigenous schoolteachers, heartland women by birth and choice, for it was they, and not their eastern counterparts, who participated in the early creation of an educational system. These women, the role of teaching in their lives, and their own role within emerging communities form the subject of this book. To recover the lives of schoolwomen the author has turned to their own narratives, letters, diaries, interviews with living pioneers and their descendants, memoirs, and school reports. Where possible she has included photographs documenting individual lives, the development of schools, and the importance of the land. Many schoolwomen are represented through these sources, but the second half of the book is devoted to an in-depth treatment of five of them. Cordier chose to focus her research about schoolwomen on the heartland

states of Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas because this region produced the highest rates of literacy in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Here, American public education was a success.

Settler families who came to these prairies and plains were from New England, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan; others came in large numbers from northwestern and central Europe. Together they combined to make this the "most representative part of the American nation," with its stability, traditional moral values, and veneration of family and hard work. These were "clear-eyed pragmatic folk" who demonstrated the importance of education in their lives by building and then managing school-houses as elected school directors, monitoring the educational progress of their children, and treating the school as a community social centre. Women who taught in these schools stemmed from the same stock as the schools' builders. The majority were second-generation Anglo women from lower-middle and middle-class backgrounds who found in teaching an opportunity for independence and self-direction while at the same time contributing to the culture and institutions that they shared with their employers.

The earliest teachers in school districts may have had very limited qualifications; possibly literacy and a willingness to attempt teaching were all that was needed. But, as Cordier points out, state and county requirements for certification to teach gradually increased so that continuing certification came to be based upon on-going education designed specifi-

cally for teachers. Until the 1900s, institutes were the most common means of teacher education. Planned by county superintendents, these involved a series of courses concerning the basic content of school subjects and teaching methods. Institutes met from one to six weeks during the summer and were taught by local teachers and administrators. Teachers were expected to pay their own expenses and use their unpaid vacation time to attend the local institute. Yet the expense was worthwhile to most teachers since institutes provided one of the few opportunities for both novice and experienced teachers to gather in a supportive environment that was as much academic as social. Eventually the professional education of teachers evolved from institutes to normal schools, to four-year programmes at teachers' colleges and universities.

School structures underwent a series of transitions, with the earliest being no more than abandoned soddies or dugouts, known havens for insects, rodents, and snakes. Equipment and supplies for schools, including desks, blackboards, books, outhouses, wells, and fences, were bought piecemeal as tax funds allowed. One-room schools were ungraded, with class sizes ranging from two children to forty or more. The curriculum tended to be shaped by the availability and content of textbooks and children were grouped according to their ability to comprehend those texts rather than by chronological age. Beginning in the late 1800s, school districts attempted to improve the quality of education through consolidation and the movement of students into large, graded town schools.

There is a widespread assumption that married women were prohibited from teaching. But in the heartland states they did teach, particularly in rural areas. However, this was not necessarily the case in urban centres where teachers were more plentiful.

Part One of Cordier's book examines the establishment of schools, the education of teachers generally, and the conditions under which they worked and lived. Part Two focuses specifically on the lives of five heartland schoolwomen; the life of each is explored in individual chapters. Cordier classifies the schoolwomen into three groups. There were the short-term teachers, the largest in number, who taught for only a few terms. Their own level of education, especially in the early years, was equivalent to grade eight followed by attendance at the teacher institutes. Later on, teacher education courses became available as electives in high school, and this increased the level of education of short-term teachers. The lives of two short-term teachers, Nancy Higgins Gaddis and Bessie Tucker Gilmer, are presented in the second half of the book. Cordier describes another group of teachers as the long-term professionals. These were married and unmarried women who left teaching from time to time in order to meet the demands of their families or to upgrade their own qualifications at normal school. Since they were experienced, these women tended to secure jobs at the more affluent and well-paying schools. The career of one long-term professional, Sarah Jane Price, is examined in detail in the book. Cordier provides two examples of her remain-

ing classification, the long-term educational and community leaders. These were Sarah Gillespie Huftalen and Ethel Hale Russel. The fewest in number, these schoolwomen were educated beyond the institutes, at colleges and universities, where they obtained degrees. Many became teacher educators and prominent community leaders. Using the women's own narratives, Cordier meticulously reconstructs the lives of these five schoolwomen, highlighting not only their professional experiences but the delicate ways in which they balanced home and work responsibilities. These are interesting portrayals set within the contexts of women's life cycles.

Schoolwomen of the Prairies and Plains spans the years between the 1860s and 1920s, a transitional period in American public education. Teaching became feminized during this time, the school year was lengthened to eight or nine months, the curriculum was expanded and redefined through state-designated courses, and the requirements of teacher education and certification became codified and professionalized. Schoolwomen themselves filled the roles of "changers and changed," "reformers and reformed," as they participated in the regional transitions from frontier to established communities, from one-room schools to multi-graded consolidated schools, and from pioneer teachers to professional educators. Apart from the more obvious applications of this research, to women's studies and history of education courses, neophyte teachers may find in this history of five pioneer women a heartening perspective on

hardships met and overcome which may serve to fortify and sustain them in their arduous first years of teaching.

Shelley Bosetti-Piché
White Rock, BC

K. Casey. *I Answer With My Life: Life Histories of Women Teachers Working For Social Change.* New York: Routledge, 1993. Pp. 196.

I Answer With My Life: Life Histories of Women Teachers Working For Social Change appears as part of Routledge's Critical Social Thought Series. Series editor Michael Apple recommends the work to readers as "a model for democratically working with teachers so that they are not silenced, and in the process helps us see new ways in which nonexploitative research can be carried on" (p. xv). The work is cast in neo-Marxist orientation built upon the assumption, as the title states, that teachers must work for fundamental changes in schools as a part of a larger social transformation. Casey describes the work as "historical sociology" (p. 16) which utilizes life-history narratives to explore the "relationship between teaching and political action in the lives of ordinary teachers" (p. 10).

The study, based on Casey's dissertation, was "given 'ground to stand on' by Michael Apple" (p. 10). The six chapters outline the methodology and report the results of interviews with thirty-three women teachers. Only women were selected as subjects be-

cause Casey's intent is to give voice to women who have been historically silenced and stereotypically portrayed. Casey's definition of "ordinary" is "women teachers who were progressive political activists" (p. 14). She concludes, "the more interviewing went on, the more ambiguous the issue of political naming became" (p. 14). She is now convinced that "living persons do not conform to abstract definitions...the contemporary progressive political scene is diffuse and diverse [yet] progressive teachers [are] out there" (p. 14).

After rejecting current models of collecting teachers' narratives as losing the uniqueness of the individual, Casey creates a theoretical framework with the writings of the Popular Memory Group (1982) and Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) as key works. It is from Bakhtin's work that Casey takes the title for the book—"I answer with my life." Naming for Casey is most significant. The titles of the chapters which present collective biographies of three groups of women indicate both her naming of the groups and her chosen framework. These titles—"An Existential Discourse of Catholic Women Religious Teachers Working for Social Change"; "A Pragmatic Discourse of Secular Jewish Women Teachers Working for Social Change"; "A Signifying Discourse of Black Women Teachers Working for Social Change"—emerge as problematic.

Casey begins her analysis with a personal narrative, her own life history, thereby situating herself within her research. She describes how she came to her research topic and her chosen methodology, explaining that "oral