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Introduction

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Introduction

ELIZABETH JAMESON

This special issue of the *New Mexico Historical Review* adds new faces to the historical portrait of New Mexico women. It also contributes to the field of western women's history, which expanded dramatically during the 1980s. Historians began to explore how western environmental, social, and economic realities affected women's roles and options, and how women helped to build the region.¹

The search for our western foremothers broadened our view of both women and the West. Historians increasingly insisted that western women's history be inclusive, that new interpretations be informed by the experiences of all western women, and that they reflect the

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1. Among the many books that have appeared in the past decade are two anthologies that resulted from the first major conferences in the field. Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, eds., *The Women's West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987) includes papers from the Women's West conference, sponsored by the Institute of the American West, Sun Valley, Idaho, August 10-13, 1983. Lillian Schlissel, Vicki Ruiz, and Janice Monk, eds., *Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988) includes work presented at the conference "Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives," sponsored by the Southwest Institute for Research on Women, Tucson, Arizona, January 12-15, 1984.

many cultures of the region. One consequence of a multicultural focus is an expanded historical timeframe, from prehistory to the present, rather than a narrow concentration on the nineteenth-century Euro-American frontier. A longer historical focus reveals ethnocentric assumptions about something as fundamental as what we call the region. What was for Euro-American migrants the "West" was, for Spanish-Mexicans "el norte" or northwest Mexico, and for American Indians simply "here."²

New Mexico historians were among the first to call for an expanded vision of western women's history. The multicultural reality of New Mexico found expression in the serious exploration of differences. The diverse relationships of ethnicity, class, culture, and gender all shaped New Mexico's history. That awareness informs the best of the new scholarship. We owe particular debts to Professors Darlis Miller and Joan Jensen of New Mexico State University, whose formative essay "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West" called for a multicultural approach to histories of western women. Responding to their own imperative, Jensen and Miller later edited *New Mexico Women: Intercultural Perspectives*, an outstanding anthology that demonstrates the rich harvest to be reaped from an inclusive vision.³

Some of the essays in *New Mexico Women* first appeared in the pages of this journal.⁴ This special issue continues the *New Mexico*

2. Although many historians acknowledge the ethnocentric assumptions in regional names, few have been able to resolve them in daily language. Most continue to use "West," as I do here, in the context of current national boundaries, not to describe the direction of migrants' journeys. For more on multicultural approaches to western women's history, see Joan M. Jensen and Darlis A. Miller, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West," *Pacific Historical Review*, 49 (May 1980), 173-213; Armitage and Jameson, *The Women's West*; Schlissel, Ruíz, and Monk, *Western Women*; and Elizabeth Jameson, "Toward a Multicultural History of Women in the Western United States," *Signs*, 13 (Summer 1988), 761-91.

3. Jensen and Miller, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited"; Joan M. Jensen and Darlis A. Miller, eds., *New Mexico Women: Intercultural Perspectives* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986).

4. An October 1982 special issue on women included Darlis A. Miller, "Cross-Cultural Marriage in the Southwest: The New Mexico Experience, 1846-1900," *New Mexico Historical Review*, 57 (October 1982), 335-60, and Joan M. Jensen, "Canning Comes to New Mexico: Women and the Agricultural Extension Service, 1914-1919," *ibid.*, 361-86. Other articles from *New Mexico Women* that appeared in the *New Mexico Historical Review* include Joan M. Jensen, "'Disenfranchisement Is a Disgrace': Women and Politics in New Mexico, 1900-1940," *ibid.*, 56 (January 1981), 5-15; Vera L. Norwood, "'Thank You for My Bones': Connections Between Contemporary Women Artists and the Traditional

Historical Review's contribution to the history of women and gender in New Mexico. It reflects the broad framework of western women's history in the diverse subjects of the essays, the historical timeframe which spans some three centuries of female experience, and the variety of methodologies and approaches the authors use. We see the diversity of western women and of their historians as well.

In her article "*Pido y Suplico*," Rosalind Z. Rock uses colonial court records to explore the status of Spanish-Mexican women from 1697–1763. Women's appearances in court as principals or as witnesses revealed much about their status, their rights, and about the standards of behavior expected of them. Rock finds, as have other historians, that Nueva Mexicanas were guaranteed important rights, such as property ownership, for which married women had to struggle in the nineteenth-century United States. But she also finds that in cases of domestic violence, women did not receive protection dictated by law. Legal practice in eighteenth-century New Mexico supported marriage, even violent and abusive marriage. The legal record thus reveals a complex and sometimes unhappy picture of women's options on the Spanish-Mexican frontier.⁵

While Rock explores the rights of women as a group, Jack B. Tykal's "Taos to St. Louis" focuses on one woman, María Rosa Villalpando of Taos, who, according to Josiah Gregg, provoked a Comanche attack and her own captivity by refusing to marry a chief.⁶ Using a variety of civil and church records, Tykal demonstrates that Gregg's account was romanticized and inaccurate. He also illustrates the frustrating contradictions and omissions in many historical sources. Sifting through a variety of partial records, Tykal gleams a fascinating odyssey of the settlement of northern New Mexico, of Villalpando's ten years as a captive of the Comanches, and of her subsequent marriage to fur trader Jean Sale dit Lajoie of St. Louis. The sparse details of her life help document women's roles in several cultures, and remind us that from

Art of Their Foremothers," *ibid.*, 58 (January 1983), 57–78; and Joan M. Jensen, "Farm Women in New Mexico, 1920–1940," *ibid.*, 61 (January 1986), 27–52.

5. Janet Lecompte, "The Independent Women of Hispanic New Mexico, 1821–1846," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 12 (January 1981), 17–35 and Deena J. González, "The Spanish-Mexican Women of Santa Fe: Patterns of Their Resistance and Accommodation, 1820–1880" (doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1985) reach somewhat differing conclusions about women's legal status during the Mexican national period.

6. Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels* (31 vols., Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1904), 19: 285.

the perspective of eighteenth-century Taos, the frontier extended north and east.

Sandra L. Myres and Cheryl J. Foote provide contrasting entries into the roles of the Euro-American women who came to New Mexico with the United States army in the nineteenth century. In "Army Women's Narratives as Documents of Social History," Myres explores the journals, memoirs, and letters of officers' wives as social commentary. Her careful analysis of many women's writing reveals their ethnocentricity and racism, as well as occasions when their experience led women to reexamine prevailing nineteenth-century values. Myres emphasizes that military hierarchy reinforced the women's class biases. Using the narratives to reveal the understandings of race, class, and gender of one group of privileged Euro-American women, Myres addresses issues that connect western history with social history and women's history.

Their adherence to social hierarchy may have been related to their desire to contain what Myres calls "the darker side to life along Officers' Row," which included alcohol, narcotics, adultery, and abuse.⁷ Cheryl Foote's "My Husband Was a Madman and a Murderer" opens the door on that "darker side" with a sensitive portrait of author and conservationist Josephine Clifford McCrackin's marriage to James Clifford. Foote uses fiction as an historical source, carefully documenting the experiential roots of the short stories Josephine Clifford wrote after leaving her husband. Combining fictionalized autobiography with military records, Foote produces a horrifyingly intimate entry into private domesticity. The wife of an officer but not of a gentleman, Josephine Clifford's sojourn in the Land of Enchantment was one of repeated physical and emotional abuse. Foote uses literature and new psychological interpretations of battered women to explain Josephine Clifford's difficulty escaping her brutal husband, and to render a chilling glimpse into a too-common reality.

Given the jagged confines of her marriage, Josephine Clifford's best option was to leave. But other women were able to expand their cultural and personal horizons in New Mexico. In her article "The Tales Those Nurses Told!," Sandra K. Schackel demonstrates how public health nurses employed in the 1920s and 1930s to improve Indian

7. Sandra L. Myres, "Army Women's Narratives as Documents of Social History: Some Examples from the Western Frontier, 1840-1900," this volume.

health care expanded their own roles as they met professional challenges. Performing traditional female roles as caretakers, nurses significantly reduced infant mortality and disease and improved health conditions for many Pueblos and Navajos. Their success depended on their sensitivity, flexibility, and ability to adapt public health nursing to Indian lifestyles and healing practices. The challenges of cultural mediation, of widespread disease and alarming death rates, provided new opportunities for women within an accepted female profession. Public health nursing was one avenue through which twentieth-century women could satisfy desires for growth, service, and fulfillment.⁸

Kathleen Manley explores female responses to another twentieth-century frontier in "Women of Los Alamos during World War II." Manley uses oral history interviews to probe the experiences of the women who lived and worked in the new wartime community. Primarily wives, nurses, schoolteachers, and secretaries, their reactions were shaped by patriotism and by the particularities of their life cycles and domestic duties. Mostly young women with young children, their lives were filled with the most mundane of chores even in an extraordinary environment. Like the nineteenth-century officers' wives, they were concerned with housekeeping in difficult circumstances, and like women on many previous frontiers they built the networks and institutions that knit personal and communal ties in a new place. But they differed from earlier pioneers in important respects. The desire to limit the local population led to the employment of many wives. They, like other wartime women, pointed to women's future roles combining work and family responsibility.

Among the positive aspects of life in Los Alamos, many women noted the lure of the scenery, of the countryside itself. Vera Norwood offers useful insights into the relationship of women to the land in "Western Women and the Environment," a review of three books about women involved with natural preservation. Norwood perceptively argues that gender relations explain how women's work as naturalists and environmentalists was subordinated to that of men to whom they were related, and how changing definitions of gender clarify the marital and career choices of female naturalists. Norwood further suggests

8. For a similar interpretation of how nineteenth-century pioneer teachers used traditional roles to achieve adventure and economic independence, see Polly Welts Kaufman, *Women Teachers on the Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

that environmental preservation is related to cultural responses to female values such as beauty. She thus contributes the insights of gender studies to western historians' concern with the relationship of settlers to the land.⁹

These articles demonstrate the variety of sources and frameworks that inform histories of western women. Oral history and literature join traditional sources like legal and church records, journals and diaries. To their various sources these authors bring new emphases on life cycle, women's unpaid labor at home and in the community, theories of domestic violence, and an awareness of the importance of gender as an historical and cultural category.

These diverse and seemingly-disparate essays evoke several common themes. The dual focus in the concern of western women's history with both place and gender is expressed in what the authors reveal about women's domestic and private concerns and about western society. As Myres notes, women's social commentaries reveal as much about women as about the West. Spanish-Mexican women on the eighteenth-century frontier, army officers' wives, public health nurses, and the women of Los Alamos were all concerned with maintaining households and creating community in difficult circumstances. They all encountered people of different cultures and classes. Some women reacted with racist repugnance, but others accommodated, as María Rosa Villalpando adjusted to three cultures, and as Anglo nurses became flexible toward Indian lifestyles.

Although there are obvious differences of time, class, and culture that distinguish these accounts, there are also similarities that cut across the centuries and external events. The importance of daily domestic reality, the internal focus on relationships and households is a common thread in these pages. The fact that they were female fundamentally shaped western women's choices. On many frontiers the relative scarcity of women narrowed their options to marriage. As Rosalind Rock notes, there were not even convents in eighteenth-century New Mexico to which to banish rebels. For women on the Spanish-Mexican frontier, for María Rosa Villalpando, as for the army officers' wives, the women

9. For related work on women's relationship to the environment, see also Vera Norwood, "Women's Place: Continuity and Change in Response to Western Landscapes," in Schlissel, Ruíz, and Monk, *Western Women*, 155-82; Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); and Vera Norwood and Janice Monk, eds., *The Desert Is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women's Writing and Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

of Los Alamos, and the women naturalists of Norwood's essay, relationships with men determined where and with whom they would live. Gender shaped their social boundaries.

A striking and ominous note in these pieces is the recurrent theme of domestic violence. Woman abuse tends to increase in stressed and isolated circumstances. Such circumstances were common to frontier settlement, and the sobering accounts that Rock and Foote uncover should cause us to rethink the theme of frontier violence from a female perspective. For some women the frontier may have brought a persistently violent reality, devoid of the romantic self-encounter of Hollywood westerns.¹⁰

Instead of heroic drama, these essays offer concrete glimpses of women broadening their horizons and their options, as public health nurses, as wartime workers, as observers of other cultures and classes, as activists building new professions and new communities. Creating social networks, caring for the public welfare, refusing sanctioned roles, they forged new options for themselves. Josephine Clifford lived a grim reality. She also left it, to continue her western odyssey in California as an author and conservationist.

The dual focus of western women's history encourages us to expand our sense of the western landscape, to include household furnishings as well as mesas, to add the interior landscape of relationships and feelings to the larger relationship of people to the land. It is a focus that could enrich the history of the masculine West as well. As these histories demonstrate, New Mexico women helped shape their environments, both interior and exterior. Their frontiers were not only those of place and culture, but of gender as well.

10. See also Melody Graulich, "Violence Against Women: Power Dynamics in Literature of the Western Family," in Armitage and Jameson, *The Women's West*, 111-26.

New Mexico Historical Review



Martin Ridge

Gilberto Espinosa Prize 1989

Martin Ridge, senior research associate at the Huntington Library, San Marino, California, and professor of history at the California Institute of Technology, has been selected by the Board of Editors as the recipient of the 1989 Gilberto Espinosa Prize for the best article appearing in volume 64 of the *New Mexico Historical Review*. Ridge's article, "The American West: From Frontier to Region," appeared in the April 1989 issue.

A native of Chicago, Ridge received his doctorate in history from Northwestern University. He was for many years a professor of history in Indiana University, and editor of the *Journal of American History* from 1966 to 1977. He is the author of *Ignatius Donnelly: The Portrait of a Politician* (1962), and co-author, with the late Ray Allen Billington, of *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier* (5th edition, 1982).

Gilberto Espinosa, researcher, writer, well-known New Mexico lawyer and strong supporter of New Mexico state history, served as a consultant to the *New Mexico Historical Review* for many years. Following his death in 1983, Mr. Espinosa's family and friends established the award in his honor. This is the seventh year for the award, which includes a \$100 prize. Previous winners include John O. Baxter, Michael C. Meyer, Robert M. Utley, Jake Spidle, Robert A. Trennert, and John P. Wilson.

Subscriptions to the *New Mexico Historical Review*, a scholarly journal affiliated with the University of New Mexico, are \$18 a year, \$50 for sponsors, and \$100 for patrons. For information on the journal, or to subscribe, write *New Mexico Historical Review*, 1013 Mesa Vista Hall, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131, or call (505) 277-5839.