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*Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1840-1890, vol 1., 1840-1849* Kenneth L. Holmes, ed. and comp.

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KENNETH L. HOLMES, ed. and comp. *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1840-1890*. Vol. 1, 1840-1849. Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1983. 272 pp. \$27.50.

Reviewed by Roger D. Launius, a military historian stationed at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland.

The study of women's history has blossomed during the past two decades, and the result has been the production of several outstanding works on the subject. *Covered Wagon Women* is one of the latest contributions to this growing field of investigation. It is a useful work that makes available to historian and buff alike several fascinating letters and diaries written by women involved in the westward movement of the 1840s. The editor, Kenneth L. Holmes, and the publisher, the Arthur H. Clark Company, have undertaken an ambitious project, and, once completed, the proposed ten volumes in this series will certainly serve as a benchmark in this field's historiography.

The material presented in this first volume has been arranged by the editor into twelve chapters with entries by fourteen women. These accounts are representative rather than exhaustive. However, there are important documents discussing the experiences of several intelligent and articulate women on the Oregon, California, Santa Fe, and Mormon trails. The editor chose his documents well. They are all primary resources, written at the time of the incidents described or immediately thereafter. More important, Holmes did not reprint commonly used diaries. I was pleasantly surprised that Susan Magoffin's diary of her trip to Santa Fe in 1846 was not included in the collection. It is an outstanding diary but readily available elsewhere. Instead, Holmes scoured the nation's archives and libraries, and solicited copies of documents from individuals, to assemble what should be considered an exemplary collection of manuscripts.

Holmes's editorial work is also outstanding. He allows the individual writers to tell their own story without correcting grammar, punctuation, and syntax. He adds, moreover, useful annotations providing additional background information about key personalities and events without overediting, certainly no easy task judging from the number of edited works that suffer from this defect.

Readers of *BYU Studies* will, no doubt, be most interested in the attention given to Mormon women during the westward trek to Utah. Holmes includes as a major piece within the collection a diary of Patty Bartlett Sessions, dated 21 June 1847 through 26 September 1847. The original, located in the Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has been well used by scholars investigating the Mormon trek to Utah, the role of women in the Church and in western history, and the development of medical treatment, but its publication for a wider audience is most welcome.

While *Covered Wagon Women* is a fine book of lasting historical value, it could have been made better with additional work. For instance, the editor chose to omit both a bibliography and an index, opting for the issuance of a cumulative bibliography and index with the publication of the tenth volume of the series. This decision will, of course, make the volume less usable by researchers in the interim. Additionally, Holmes is inconsistent in his editorial work. He is at his best in his treatment of the diary of Patty Sessions. First, it has an excellent introduction that draws heavily upon the research of such leaders in the study of Mormon women on the frontier as Leonard J. Arrington and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher. Second, it includes a useful *dramatis personae*, briefly describing characters mentioned in the diary. Finally, Holmes attaches a solid bibliography pointing the direction for further study. In contrast, Holmes's editing of other diaries and letters possesses nothing approaching the depth of scholarship he demonstrates in his

work on Sessions. Most other entries contain only a cursory introduction, and none has either a description of characters or bibliography. It would have been commendable had Holmes been able to bring to the other accounts in this volume the fine editorial work he displays in his work on the Sessions diary.

In spite of these shortcomings, Kenneth L. Holmes has compiled a well-balanced, enjoyable book that should be of interest to all readers concerned with the study of women, the frontier movement, and Mormonism. This type of documentary history, although until recent years considered somewhat esoteric, should be encouraged, for it can open entirely new avenues of investigation when handled by skilled historians.