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Editor's Introduction

Elizabeth Jameson

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Editor's Introduction

The three articles in this issue, while quite diverse in subjects and approaches, illustrate the range of strategies historians can use to interpret the histories of “ordinary” people. Richard Flint and Shirley Cushing Flint demonstrate how the most seemingly mundane records—in this case previously unavailable daily records of the 1540–1542 Coronado Expedition into northern Nueva España—can be mined to reveal a great deal about daily life as well as about more conventional historical subjects. Using a single set of documents regarding the death of one member of the expedition, the Flints use their considerable expertise to illuminate such daily realities as what ordinary members of the expedition wore, how fast they traveled, and how they cared for horses. As an added treat, they provide an excerpt of the original document both in the original Spanish and in English translation.

Donna Crail-Rugotzke shifts our focus to the late Territorial Period, and to the wealth of information that can be gleaned from legal and penal records. Crail-Rugotzke quantifies the records of persons convicted of crimes in Territorial New Mexico, using statistics to demonstrate how racism manifested in the conviction and sentencing of Hispanos and Mexicans, and to explore how poverty and attitudes toward gender affected the treatment of Hispanics by courts and penal institutions.

Sandra Varney MacMahon explores a common western experience—homesteading—through the unusual memoir of Scottish immigrant Jessie de Prado MacMillan. MacMillan might be seen as one particular example of the single women homesteaders whose lives historians have documented and explored since the mid-1970s. Until then, homesteading was portrayed in masculine terms, despite the fact that U.S. policy was progressive in allowing single women and women heads of households to file for land. MacMahon suggests a new facet of women’s history to consider, by introducing a woman who was not poor, but who, like many men who could not inherit wealth from their families, found her “fortune” and considerable scope for self-empowerment on a New Mexico homestead.

In combination, the articles in this issue suggest the possibilities and the variety of histories that can be tapped through mundane materials and a sensitivity to differences of class, ethnicity, and gender, as well as time and place.

With this issue we bid farewell to Kim Suina and Amanda Taylor-Montoya, who did themselves and us proud by graduating with honors in history, and to Ramona Caplan who is continuing her own western history research. We wish them happy trails, and our readers a good summer and good reading.

Elizabeth Jameson
for the *NMHR* staff