

Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910. By Elizabeth Hampsten. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982. Pp. xiii, 242. Notes. \$22.50.)

Historians interested in the lives of ordinary people will find an abundance of material in the letters and diaries of late-nineteenth-century midwestern women who are quoted and analyzed by Elizabeth Hampsten in *Read This Only to Yourself*. Passages from letters written by women over a long period of time enable the reader to trace the life experiences of rural women in their own words. Hampsten, who collected all of her sources in North Dakota, contends that these writings are representative of women throughout rural America, not only because correspondents came from other parts of the country but, more importantly, because regionalism is not a significant factor in the writings of women. Male writers are often preoccupied with the politics and topography of their regions, but the women Hampsten presents limit their concerns to their homes and the health and activities of themselves, their families, friends, and neighbors. Although the absence of regionalism in women's writings is confirmed by the examples Hampsten provides, this remains a provocative thesis that will require further testing.

Hampsten demonstrates that social class, unlike region, does influence the manner in which women write. Correspondence in *Read This Only to Yourself* reveals differences between the unaffected conversational tone of rural working women and the more self-conscious and sometimes figurative language of more prosperous writers. Hampsten's working women include not only those who worked for wages but also those whose days were taken up with the myriad chores that "indirectly supplement family income by drastically reducing expenditures" (p. 50). These working women wrote "in order to assert a pattern and to blurr distinctions between recurring and unique events" because "keeping the pattern intact day after day" was "a mark of a well-regulated and successful life" (p. 68). In words that were written "to create substitutes for their own voices," Hampsten detects a clear sense of self-assurance (p. 95). "Through it all women are not particularly cheerful, but neither are they helpless. What they are is sure of themselves" (p. 89). These women did not refer to themselves as pioneers, for they "were less strangers to a new land than familiars to a condition of living" (p. 89).

Hampsten's fourth and most important chapter, "'Don't Read Aloud': Class and Sexuality, Disease, and Death in Women's Writings" provides further evidence to refute the stereotype of Victorian sexual prudery. Their lack of knowledge about their bodies frustrated and angered these rural women as they sought to gain some measure of control over their reproductive systems. Letters contain both subtle hints and explicit instructions on birth control. Women who frequently encountered gruesome illnesses and deaths in their communities and families did not shy away from the grim details in their accounts. Since many of the letters cited were primarily obituary listings, one has the impression that mortality rates in late-nineteenth-century North Dakota were very high. Failure to include any demographic statistics for the state for the period covered in the study makes it difficult to judge whether or not that impression is accurate or to compare this region to others. Hampsten did not intend to write a social history of pioneer life in North Dakota, but there are places in the book where more information on the social, economic, and historical context would enhance the value of the letters and diaries.

The two chapters in which Hampsten presents detailed accounts of three specific women and those around them constitute the least successful part of the book. Hampsten apparently felt that she had found some potentially rich manuscript collections, but she reproduced these materials without integrating them into the rest of the book. These three case studies were not as illuminating as Hampsten suggests, and information from the two chapters could have been included in earlier discussions. Despite problems with these chapters, the book contributes to knowledge of rural life in the nineteenth century by allowing previously invisible women to address a twentieth-century audience.

DePauw University, Greencastle

Barbara J. Steinson

The Papers of Henry Clay. Volume 6, Secretary of State, 1827.
Edited by Mary W.M. Hargreaves and James F. Hopkins.
(Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1981. Pp. vi,
1448. Notes, index. \$35.00.)

The Clay Papers Project was conceived "with an assumption that our work served the interests of a wide audience . . . concerned about identification and explanation of Clay's role in the local setting as well as on the national and international scenes. . . . We aimed to illuminate that history,