

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

---

2004

## Book Review: Children's Voices from the Trail: Narratives of the Platte River Road

Emmy E. Werner  
*University of California*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

---

Werner, Emmy E., "Book Review: Children's Voices from the Trail: Narratives of the Platte River Road" (2004). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 245.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/245>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

*Children's Voices from the Trail: Narratives of the Platte River Road.* By Rosemary Gudmundson Palmer. Spokane, WA: Arthur H. Clark Company, 2002. 336 pp. Map, illustrations, appendix, bibliography, index. \$39.50

Between 1850 and 1869, some 350,000 pioneers crossed the Great Plains, following the Platte River Road from the Missouri River to South Pass, Wyoming, and on to California and Oregon. Others made the trek to Utah, Colorado, or Montana. This book tells the story of the crossing of the Plains from the viewpoint of children—one fifth of the participants in the great overland journeys. Palmer lets their voices be heard.

The author analyzes the eye-witness accounts of 453 white children who traveled on the Platte River road's Oregon, California, and Mormon trails between 1841 and 1869. Her unique contribution to the literature on the overland trail is twofold: she provides a comparison of the similarities and differences between contemporary accounts of ten- to sixteen-year-old youngsters (in diaries, letters, and journals) with reminiscences of adults who made the journey when they were young, *and* she places these travelers' stories in the proper historical context. Her account focuses on the attitudes, expectations, and values that prevailed in mid-nineteenth-century society and that motivated the participants in the westward migration.

Palmer examines the youngsters' vision of the journey from several perspectives: their descriptions of their travels on the overland trail; their relationships with parents and siblings; their interactions with other members of the wagon train; and their perceptions of friends or potential foes encountered along the way. Generally, children judged people they had not previously met (Mormons, Native Americans) less harshly than their adult counterparts. Endowed with youthful resilience, most remained optimistic despite the hardships of the journey and the loss of family members.

In the future, Palmer suggests, we also need to examine the views of African American, Hispanic, Asian American, and Native American children of the Westward Migration, a reminder that different travelers may see the same events in a different light. Her book is a valuable addition to our present knowledge of the world of children on the overland trail.

EMMY E. WERNER  
Department of Human and Community  
Development, Emerita  
University of California, Davis