

*History of Nebraska*, by James C. Olson and Ronald C. Naugle. Third edition. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997. xv, 502 pp. Maps, illustrations, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$40.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.

REVIEWED BY HARL A. DALSTROM, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA, OMAHA

The publication of James C. Olson's *History of Nebraska* in 1955 was an outstanding contribution to the writing of state history. The book, including its second edition (1966), has been the basic text for the study of the development of the Cornhusker State.

In preparing the third edition, Ronald C. Naugle retained most of Olson's fine narrative, while expanding material on women, native people, and African Americans. Like its predecessors, this edition emphasizes the period before 1900, but three new chapters trace the history of the state from about 1965 to 1990. Among the topics covered in the new chapters are Nebraska's recent political development, revision of the tax system, the farm problems of the 1970s and 1980s, and economic development efforts. Various circumstances undoubtedly made coverage of the most recent period especially difficult. However, brief discussions of center pivot irrigation, other environmental challenges, the problems facing rural and small-town Nebraskans, and a bit more on recent urban development would have been helpful. The deletion of some of Olson's material on Nebraska authors was unfortunate. The greatly expanded appendixes include valuable data on politics, precipitation, and agriculture, and the revised bibliography reflects recent scholarship.

When the second edition of Olson's history went out of print, students of Nebraska history experienced a true loss. Through the good work of Ronald Naugle, with the help of James Olson, the Virginia Faulkner Fund, and the University of Nebraska Press, an indispensable companion has returned.

*The Gate City: A History of Omaha*, by Lawrence H. Larsen and Barbara J. Cottrell, enlarged edition with new conclusion by Harl A. Dalstrom. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997. xv, 356 pp. Illustrations, bibliographical essay, index. \$15.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY PATRICIA BURGESS, CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY

A traditional city biography, *Gate City: A History of Omaha* is a fine example of narrative history. This reissue of a 1982 work, with a new conclusion covering the years 1980-1997 and an updated biblio-

graphical essay, covers the full scope of Omaha's history—its geographic expansion, economic development, changing demographics, political fortunes and foibles, and all aspects of social life. Authors Lawrence H. Larsen and Barbara J. Cottrell ably place Omaha in its larger context, relating what happened there to both the state of Nebraska and the larger region (especially Iowa, whose people and institutions figure frequently in the story). They also examine the effect of other midwestern cities and national events on Omaha.

Omaha's story is not one of inevitable progress. The authors discuss the city's problems—most notably labor unrest, ethnic and racial tension and violence, and crime and corruption. *Gate City* includes detailed, specific information but humanizes the story in discussions of major political, social, or business figures and events. There are also lively anecdotes and colorful figures. The book is nicely written and well balanced.

Although it is a good city biography, *Gate City* is also frustrating. It does not present any argument, as such, which will limit its appeal beyond the purely local audience. The many photographs, distributed throughout the book, are not referred to specifically in the text, lessening their value. And there are no footnotes or specific text references. The bibliographical essay is well done but makes it difficult to follow up on a particular point.

Would I recommend *Gate City*? That depends. The scholar or researcher must approach it knowing its limitations. But for the general reader who wants a good understanding of how Omaha came to be the way it is and how it fits into its state and region, it presents a good general history of the city. For the people of Omaha and the larger region, that is worthwhile.

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