

Book Reviews

of class and of race, and of cultural attitudes. The discovery of female "Frontier Heroes" may represent the fiction of an innocent time and it may be a reading of fiction that reassures those who want to be reassured, but it is not the whole story of prairie women or their literature any more than Frontier Heroes is a sufficient literary category to describe the lives of men.

BROOKLYN COLLEGE-CUNY

LILLIAN SCHLISSEL

Conflict Between Communities: American County Seat Wars, by James A. Schellenberg. New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1987. xiv, 130 pp. Acknowledgments, bibliography, notes, county and town index, general index. \$22.95 cloth.

A survey history of county seat wars—the uniquely American phenomenon of conflict between communities for the privilege of representing their county as its seat of government—has been long neglected in American historiography. Most writing on the subject has been restricted to journal articles, with regional history volumes providing only limited discussion. There is little explanation for this. Indeed, the subject offers a challenge to historians to produce a work on a fascinating, quite American, topic. As Daniel Boorstin said in *The Americans: The National Experience* (1965), county seat conflict in America would be a "dramatic subject" for any creative and imaginative historian (461).

This void has now been filled commendably, not by a trained historian, but by sociologist James A. Schellenberg. His book is the product of more than twenty years of research on the subject, which includes the publication of seven journal articles and a major work on social conflict. *Conflict Between Communities*, one in a series of works published under the aegis of the Professors World Peace Academy, makes important contributions on two fronts: for the historian, it tells the story of the peculiarly American phenomenon of county seat war and recalls its "most notable stories" (xii); and for the sociologist and student of social conflict, it captures definite forms of social discord (local pride, economic pressures, conflict between major personalities) which can be related to other forms of human strife.

Schellenberg's well-organized and highly readable work traces the history of county seat conflicts in America, finding few on the eastern seaboard primarily because the town, not the county, was the principal form of government. He states that county seat conflict blossomed in the nineteenth century as human settlement entered the Midwest and Great Plains, largely due to the increased importance of

the county as a governmental unit, and because county seat location was being decided less by arbitrary decision of a central authority than by the local decisions of its residents.

Schellenberg devotes much of his book to the study of violence within the county seat war setting. Using three criteria—death or serious injury from fighting associated with county seat conflict, the forcible removal of county records from one community to another, and the calling out of the state militia or a similar body to quell a disturbance—he finds that most violent county seat conflicts took place in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, in an area of rapid settlement, during the first ten years of county organization. He located the majority of such conflicts “within 200 miles of a line running north by northwest from Dodge City, Kansas to Grand Forks, North Dakota” (32). Lack of effective law enforcement and the unsettled economic conditions of the period were important factors as well.

Even though physical force was an important characteristic in many county seat conflicts in the nineteenth century, the author found that it was seldom an effective means of resolution. Rather, he states that the majority of county seat conflicts were resolved peacefully through elections and adjudication, or, in rare instances, by negotiations between county seat contenders or county division. Overall, he notes, conflict resolution became “more effective with the development of political institutions” (96).

County seat relocation in the twentieth century has all but disappeared, with only a handful taking place since the 1930s. Relocation today is a long, drawn-out process, with adjudication taking place in a much less emotionally charged environment. A major reason the conflicts have slowed, Schellenberg contends, is that local communities have lost their impact; what booster spirit remains has shifted to more regional or national affiliations, namely business associations, labor unions, and the nation-state. A more fluid environment, he suggests, has replaced the once important local community. In view of this ever growing world community, the author closes by wondering if succeeding generations might see international conflicts in the same light as we view past incidents of county conflict—as “oddly parochial behavior that belies the wider loyalties humans have come to take for granted” (116).

Schellenberg makes excellent use of the work done by early writers about county seat conflict, including Everett Dick, Ernest Shockley, and Iowa’s Jacob Swisher, as well as the work of present-day scholars, history buffs, and local historians from across the nation. His research of a full range of dynamics of county seat conflict is rich and colorful, with descriptive accounts on the role of town partisans and boosters,

Book Reviews

the local newspaper, and railroads as factors in county seat selection. Iowans will appreciate his treatment of numerous county seat wars in their state, including discussion of particular conflicts in Adair, Marshall, Webster, and Mitchell counties. His book has few weaknesses, though greater discussion of county seat controversies in the South, where the county form of government is unusually strong, would be appreciated. The book would also be strengthened by the inclusion of a categorized list of American counties in which the author found conclusive evidence of conflict or controversy between two or more towns for the county seat crown. Still, the author offers a well-researched account of county seat battles to the present, and complements his work with an excellent study of conflict resolution. His is a valuable work on county seat wars which should find a home on the bookshelves of nineteenth-century regional and frontier historians, local historical societies in counties with a history of county seat controversy, and those interested in a unique form of human conflict.

CEDAR FALLS, IOWA

JOHN TIMOTHY VON TERSCH

Prohibition in Kansas: A History, by Robert Smith Bader. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986. xiii, 322 pp. Illustrations, tables, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$19.95 cloth, \$12.95 paper.

"Give to the Winds Thy Fears": The Women's Temperance Crusade, 1873-1874, by Jack S. Blocker, Jr. Contributions in Women's Studies 55. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985. xix, 280 pp. Illustrations, tables, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cloth.

These highly disparate books share a revisionist view of prohibition. Probably no topic has generated greater interest and been reinterpreted to the extent of prohibition in the last decade. Once derided as repressive zealots and ridiculed as cranks, drys have been rehabilitated, and prohibition presented as an extension of American social conscience. Revealing dry virtues and imparting new interpretations, the recent books by Robert Smith Bader and Jack S. Blocker Jr., are important additions to the swelling collection of authoritative prohibitionist writing.

Nearly no unifying feature is present in these books. Bader's ideographic book is a long and narrow slice of history. Blocker's slice is a chronologically thin but inclusive cross-section of one significant juncture in the prohibitionist movement. One consequence is that the books intersect only briefly, tenuously, and asymmetrically.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.