

little capital, and he had to borrow. He was also unlucky, and he failed. Morse was one of thousands of underfinanced farmers who tried to make a farm by hard labor in the increasingly capital intensive agricultural world of the late nineteenth century. That he failed is not surprising. That Marshall finds his failure surprising is curious.

There were many others like Morse who began to leave the land within a few years of their arrival. The censuses tell their story in the diminished populations in rural counties, in the growing size of individual farms, and in the larger sums invested in equipment and livestock. Farming had become a business. Those who could not make it as a business retreated to farming as a lifestyle on twenty acres, the small estate that was the final resting place of Omar Morse.

Marshall sometimes lets his heart speak for his head. When he describes Morse's account as "unique" (4) and "among our national treasures as a witness to the frontier" (6), he displays either ignorance of the manuscript materials in the field or an overly protective attitude toward a distant family member. Morse's account is strong enough to stand by itself without resort to hyperbole.

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

MALCOLM J. ROHRBOUGH

*After the West Was Won: Homesteaders and Town-Builders in Western South Dakota, 1900-1917*, by Paula M. Nelson. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1986. xvi, 220 pp. Notes, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$22.50 cloth.

*West of Wichita: Settling the High Plains of Kansas, 1865-1890*, by Craig Miner. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986. viii, 303 pp. Notes, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$19.95 cloth.

Travel west past the Ninety-eighth Parallel, and as the miles slip by you will notice the changes. Fields become larger. There is less cropland and more pasture land. The land turns brown earlier. There are fewer towns, and farm and ranch houses are farther apart. Even the grass changes from the tall grass of the prairie into the short bunch grass of the plains. There are fewer streams and a lot less rain. The people, men and women, somehow look stronger and tougher, and they probably are. The conquest of nature is a difficult thing; some succeed while more fail. This is a land portrayed by Paula Nelson and Craig Miner. The one has studied western South Dakota, the other Kansas. Both shed a good deal of light on the high plains environment and its peoples.

### *Book Reviews*

Paula Nelson concentrates on the myriad immigrants who came to western South Dakota between 1900 and 1915. Most of them came expecting to reproduce the farming society of Iowa in western South Dakota. A great many of them failed. They hit a run of luck upon their arrival because rainfall was minimally adequate, and homesteading looked possible. When the drought came in 1910 and 1911, they were dried out to a degree they had not considered possible. Many of them simply left to look for their Nirvana somewhere else or to retreat to what they had known before. Others stayed and created a life for themselves that incorporated solitude, hard work, endurance, and a sense of great accomplishment in merely surviving. Nelson is especially good at delineating the effect of the homesteading experience on individual lives. She is even better when discussing the women pioneers, some of whom were wives but surprising numbers of whom were homesteading on their own. She has explained better than anyone the South Dakota delineation of East River versus West River, a distinction that may help to prove Frederick Jackson Turner's notion that the frontier could create a new personality. The myth tended to dry up and blow away like the tumbleweeds drifting by the claim shack on the western edge of Dakota. This is well explained in Nelson's account and is a significant part of Great Plains history.

Craig Miner's book is also about the dryland West, but the dates are different as the study ranges from 1865 to 1890. Kansas's story is also a little different than Dakota's. Miner, like Nelson, is extremely polished at getting down to individual people, whose own words frequently tell their story. Kansas was perhaps a little better place to settle than western Dakota. It did not have as much land tied up in Indian reservations and had better transportation. Its people did not develop the irony of the Dakota pioneers. Perhaps they did not need to, because they had more success. They did have droughts and blizzards and all the rest of the problems that make the plains a challenge to even the most hardy folk. The extensive railroads built in the nineteenth century could not be matched in the north and helped quite a bit. Certainly there was failure but not to the awful degree that one found in South Dakota.

In both of these works, authors take on an area difficult for the pioneers but possible for historians. Yet the historians have traditionally not paid much attention to this West except in mythic terms. The dry winds blew away the myth for those who cared to look. Both authors should be congratulated for making distinct contributions to the history of the American West. Both have avoided the flashy and concentrated on the real. These books should be read and reread by those

wanting to understand the United States between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains. Both tell you what it was like.

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA

JOSEPH H. CASH

*Ranchers' Legacy*, by Lewis G. Thomas, edited by Patrick A. Dunae. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1986. xxv, 217 pp. Illustrations, notes. \$14.95 paper.

*Ranchers' Legacy* reminds us, once again, of the grace, sophistication, and insight that distinguish the narrative of one of Canada's most able historians, Lewis G. Thomas. These essays also serve to emphasize that narrative history, with cursors capering through the cerebellum, are as interpretive as cursors of raw data compiled by cliometricians. For Lewis Thomas's style is not only graceful, but on occasion his perceptions are so subtle that the reader's eye must retrace its route to catch the meaning.

In these ten well-crafted essays, Thomas offers the fruits of a lifetime of thinking about Canada, Canadians, and their history. His themes are well evolved. Thomas discovers little in Frederick Jackson Turner or the Turnerian cast(s) applicable to frontier Canada. In contrast to Turner's emphasis on the frontier as the site of equalitarianism, Thomas contends that the social structure of the Canadian West was orderly, well-defined, highly structured and stable, dominated not by the vagaries of the Turnerian "democrat," but by a series of privileged elites—the Hudson's Bay Company, the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, the Royal Mounted Police, and the ranches—all successive agents of settlement on the Canadian frontier. The cement of this social world was a term invented by Thomas—"social contiguity." Individuals established authority and order through effective communication. Institutions were defined by established values and above all a strong, unwavering belief in a conservative democracy. No rum and rebellion for these people, though they did not always scorn the former. No social levellers, no spirit of the round heads hovered over Thomas's frontier, but a society of conduits of customs and wealth that flowed unimpeded from eastern Canada and overseas.

While most readers will find these essays chewy in general, one that stimulated me in a singular way was the "Umbrella and the Mosaic." Thomas argues that the "mosaic" of western settlement owed its identity, its excitement, its diversity, and its preservation to the biculturalism of the French-English national presence and to liberal national land policies—"The Umbrella" that covered and protected the

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