

Frontier Nebraska: Stories of Hardship and Triumph from Boone County in the 1870s, compiled by Stephen K. Hutchinson. Lincoln, NE: Foundation Books, 1998. xii, 499 pp. Illustrations, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY DEBORAH FINK, AMES

This collection of stories and reports about westward migration and pioneer life draws on a cast of characters who settled in the incipient plains environment of Boone County in east central Nebraska. Beginning with a diary account of an 1871 trek across northern Iowa, it moves to such stock pioneer topics as sod-breaking, housekeeping, schools, grasshoppers, blizzards, prairie fires, and horse thieves. Copy from promotional tracts about Nebraska offers insight into motivations of the newcomers. Many names of Boone County settlers appear and are indexed, making the book readily usable by genealogists. There is a substantial amount of 1870s material on the Pawnee, who lived on a reservation in Nance County, just south of Boone County, as well as scattered references to Sioux.

A sprawling array of stories is most useful to researchers if it is carefully indexed; it is most useful to general readers if it is annotated and placed in a wider historical and geographical context. Unfortunately, this book has only a name index and no broader context. Students of Plains Indians may latch onto the book with the most enthusiasm. While the perspective is exclusively European-American, there is considerable information on encounters with Indians, including an account of an illegal foray into Lakota territory and various anecdotes about stealing wood from Pawnees.

Black Pioneers: Images of the Black Experience on the North American Frontier, by John W. Ravage. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1997. xxi, 224 pp. Illustrations, charts, bibliography, index. \$24.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY MICHAEL CASSITY, LARAMIE, WYOMING, AND MOUNT PROSPECT, ILLINOIS

Despite explicitly stating several times its intention to do otherwise, this study ultimately limits itself to demonstrating the existence of African Americans in the West by publishing approximately two hundred photographs of men and women, rural and urban, in a variety of occupations, in the North American West (including Hawaii and Alaska and Canada) of the nineteenth century (and into the twentieth). As a scrapbook of photographs, some quite striking, the book demonstrates considerable effort and digging.

As a contribution to the considerable literature on the subject, however, or even as a study aware of that literature, the book's limits are powerful and pervasive. The author largely ignores current scholarship on both the West and African-American history, chooses not to document his discussions of the subjects of the photos, and does not develop a conceptual framework for understanding either the particulars or the general context into which they might fit. His tendency toward historical generalizations unsupported by either evidence or allusion to scholarly examination even limits the work's utility as a reference. It is not essential, of course, that images relevant to Iowa be used in the collection, or that Iowa resources be explored, but without a larger analytical framework it is difficult to apply this study to Iowa.

American Railroads, by John F. Stover. Second edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. xviii, 306 pp. Illustrations, tables, maps, chronology, suggested readings, index. \$43.00 cloth, \$16.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY PETER H. JAYNES, KIRKWOOD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

In *American Railroads*, John Stover addresses the changing fortunes of American railroads from 1828 to the 1990s. However, he misses most of his opportunities to discuss the impact of the railroads on American life. Throughout the book he uses traditional, but essentially invalid, measures of railroad trackage as a basic indicator of railroad development. Even after he recognizes that these measures seriously understate the reality (182, 202), he does nothing to correct the previously used figures. Within one paragraph he contradicts himself when writing about "the all-time high" miles of trackage (202-3). In addition, he often refers to "operating ratio," but does not define it until page 162; and he speaks of "total investment" (36) and "capitalization" (64) without any frames of reference to give the figures meaning.

For the most part, the two additional chapters tacked onto the earlier edition (1961) are not integrated into the earlier material. Most of the tables and statistics stop about 1960 (204). Tables could have replaced many repetitious sentences, saving space in this brief work. Four pages devoted to portraits of nineteenth- and twentieth-century railroad leaders could have been used to flesh out the narrative, something it desperately needs. The few maps are essentially useless. Iowa is mentioned on 19 pages of the book, usually without saying very much about the state, its contributions to the railroads, or the railroads' contributions to Iowa. Exceptions are Iowa's role in the Granger movement (119-22) and in the development of air brakes (142).

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