

Feedlot Empire: Beef Cattle Feeding in Illinois and Iowa, 1840-1900, by James W. Whitaker. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1975.

Feedlot Empire is based on the author's doctoral dissertation which purports to trace the development and growth of the prime-beef industry in Illinois and Iowa between 1840-1900. The author describes how cattlemen in this region by 1850 ceased raising cattle to be driven east for fattening and sale and instead began their own feedlot operations. Whitaker suggests that all this was made possible by the rise of the urban market and the invention of the refrigerated railroad car. Iowa and Illinois remained important cattle raising centers through the transition years because of the ability of cattlemen to adapt to new feeding and marketing techniques. The new Iowa and Illinois feedlot operations, for example, placed cattle on the market at a much earlier age. This served to reduce the risk of loss and freed capital to expand existing feedlot operations. In addition the author suggests that Iowa and Illinois cattle raisers made good use of new information which was disseminated through such regional periodicals as the *Prairie Farmer* and federal publications emanating from the Department of Agriculture.

The substantive contribution of *Feedlot Empire* could have been adequately covered in an article-length treatment. Only three of the eleven chapters deal directly with the stated purpose of the book. Since a book of this nature has only scholarly appeal, it seems a waste of time to force readers through five chapters on such topics as topography, climate, settlement, and agriculture in nineteenth century Illinois and Iowa. In addition, there is a chapter on the history of the meat packing industry that offers little new information and is written largely from Pierce's history of Chicago.

Furthermore, Whitaker takes note of the influence of such external forces as the rise of the urban market and the development of the refrigerator car but does not treat them with the level of sophistication they deserve. The text is laced with such insights as "The introduction of effective means of refrigeration prevented the early spoilage of fresh meat . . ." or "The demands of the new urban market, created by the expansion of the railroad, gave rise to the dressed beef industry."

This manuscript could have benefitted greatly if Whitaker had related its data to the major themes of the era by utilizing the work of Thomas Cochran and Alfred Chandler. As it stands, *Feedlot Empire* is a padded book of questionable worth.

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Prairie Oasis: The Railroads, Steamboats and Resorts of Iowa's Spirit Lake Country, by Donovan L. Hofsommer. Des Moines: Waukon & Mississippi Press, 1975.

Prairie Oasis is a popular account of the development and growth of the resort industry along the shores of the Iowa Great Lakes. Since the impetus for transforming the lakes of Dickinson County, Iowa into a primer resort came from the railroads, this work logically focuses on the roles played by various lines. Two roads, the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul, and the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern, spearheaded development of the region in the 1880s. After building lines into the lake country, the companies constructed resort hotels and actively publicized the area. The summer resort business quickly boomed. And other railroads, too, became involved in the region. Moreover, eager entrepreneurs soon introduced lake steamers on Lake Okoboji and Spirit Lake; for years they symbolized the vitality of the "prairie oasis."

By the 1930s a major change was occurring at the resorts. The automobile steadily replaced the "steamcars" as the principal means of entry into the Spirit Lake country. Thus rail passenger service decreased; steamboats disappeared (boats were no longer needed to meet the trains); and the old wooden hotels gave way to tourist cabins and motor inns. Yet the resort industry flourished.

Prairie Oasis is an attractive book; the layout and graphics are both pleasing. The book, moreover, is obviously a labor of love. The author, a professional historian, is not only a former resident of northwest Iowa but a dedicated railfan as well. This work, however, is marred in several places. The footnote numbers have been inadvertently omitted; there are several major typographical

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