

Certainly, *Iowa: A History* tells few of our state's stories in their entirety. Elaboration in detail, careful analysis, additional research, and fuller interpretation are needed at a hundred places in our history. Wall's book whets our appetite to get on with the job. Academic historians and fiction writers could well share in the work. Many of the political movements and personality conflicts described in the book cry out for literary as well as historical interpretation. In fact, the book suggests that many authors writing about the state have gone astray whenever they have focused on nature as the antagonist in their stories. Instead, they might better have stressed the personal and institutional conflicts which have dominated Iowa's past. As the raw material of great literature, Iowa's essentially benevolent nature cannot hold a candle to political intrigue, farmers pushed to rebellion by depression, and Barclay Coppoc's anguished decision to replace his Quaker pacifism with violence in confronting the monstrous evil of slavery.

The book includes photographs, with especially fine portraits. Photographer Joe Munroe was handicapped by the editorial constraint that only contemporary photographs be used. A blending of current pictures with selected historic photographs would have caught more effectively Iowa's essence. In fact, it seems particularly strange that the editorial board opted for only contemporary photographs in what was to be, after all, a history book.

Another minor problem is the author's disproportionate concentration on Grinnell. We of course should write about what we know best, and Wall has spent years with the College and community of Grinnell, but there are places in the final chapters where one is tempted to retitile the book *How All Major Events in Iowa Happened in or around Grinnell*.

Despite these shortcomings, the book is an excellent short study of the state's history well worth anyone's time and attention. It is especially attractive for the intelligent layman who would like a solid grasp (short of becoming a full-time student) of the state's history. It is strongly recommended for personal purchase since it is handsome in format and high in quality, and one assumes all Iowa libraries and secondary schools will acquire *Iowa: A History*.

—Edgar V. Epperly
Luther College

Aspects of the American West: Three Essays, by Joe B. Frantz. College Station: Texas A&M Press. 1976. pp. 82. \$5.00.

Anything written by the ebullient Joe Frantz merits serious attention, for it will be rooted in sound research, spiced with wit, and larded with penetrating analysis. Frantz, who does not always conceal his modesty under the proverbial barrel, is a firm friend of this reviewer, and, as W. Eugene Hollon points out in his foreward to the essays, only friends can trade good-natured

barbs. Only in such fashion can we conceal both respect and affection for the Texan who, in this and numerous other outstanding contributions, brings new and refreshing insight into a profession which all too frequently seems dreary and dull.

Sponsored by the Elma Dill Russell Spencer Foundation, the essays published in this little book of less than a hundred pages were first delivered to various historical groups. Thus they are not entirely unknown to the author's professional colleagues. Two of the three were published in trade journals, but now they all appear together in a beautifully printed form. They deserve to be printed and bound side by side, for they not only reveal the mind (although Frantz might be surprised by the term) of an imaginative historian but also demonstrate that history can be well written as well as informative.

In the first essay, "Yellowstone National Park: Genesis of an Urban Solution," the author, with great skill and sly, critical acuteness, traces the area's discovery and the Congressional action which set Yellowstone apart as a public park or pleasuring ground. He writes that the area is America's favorite public park, adding that "no work of God can compete with man-made Disneyland East or West, evidently." Not until forty-five years after Yellowstone, the nation's first national park, was authorized was a system of managing it created. Once the National Park Service was operating, numerous other federal recreational areas followed—Acadia National Park in Maine, parks in the South, and, among others, Mesa Verde. Frantz draws quick vignettes of traffic jams; of crowds ruining parks; of wax museums, neon-lighted crosses and an every-evening reenactment of Calvary; of "greasy napkins, messy skeins of spilled mustard on the floor, the out-of-doors, spring-fresh smell of yesterday's fried grease." Frantz concludes on a serious note, saying that today Yellowstone "points the way for crowded mankind to take his elbow from between his neighbor's ribs. Even if only for a moment," he goes on, "man needs to know that somewhere, some time, he can now and then breathe."

Frantz's piquant prose continues in his "Western Impact on the Nation," but he shifts his theme to a rapid—but delightful—survey of the moving frontier, saying, for example, that "The West has been in man's consciousness ever since the first drunk turned outward instead of homeward at Jamestown." He writes of the Whiskey Rebellion, of the West of Jefferson's day, of incomparable expeditions, of Madison's War Hawks. He pokes fun at western humor and frontier violence. Billy the Kid, he says was a pathological paranoid punk. He forgets neither the railroad nor the Civil War. But best of all he weaves the past into the present and the present into the past. He shows some nostalgia, but avoids nostomania, for the days when western air was fresh and clean when residents of the Los Angeles area were not annoyed by severe eye irritation. Throwing a wider loop, he discusses the role of the West in international problems. "The West," he writes, "has given the nation a faith in unplanned progress. Despite the heady pleasure of an occasional bonanza, this impact is not an unmixed blessing."

No one seriously challenged either the content or point of view of the initial lectures, but the third brought anguished squawks and heart-wrenching groans, for he sunk the barb into the tender flesh and thumbed his scholarly nose at the virginal Clio, muse of history. Professor Frantz—for here he is the professor par excellence—hammers hard, even strikes down, the tradition that the West was that place of places—the lone area where men “stood alone,” battled the environment, and asked for no assistance from anyone, not even the government. Pure, unadulterated individualism, Frantz argues, was a myth-like concept, at least in part. The truth is that “the Federal government” was and is “the major stockholder and underwriter of the American West.” Then he turns the blade in the wound, affirming that even today portions of the West “which hum with economic excitement” still are nourished with federal funds. And that is a quid hard to chew.

The normal review, if written according to the hoyle of corseted critics, should not quote too much, but these lectures are as exceptional as their author. So here goes for one more Frantz flash:

The Westerner can rear up on his hindlegs—r’ar up on his hin’ laigs, to be more nearly precise—and shout that he and he alone wrested that land from the desert or wind or Indian or whatever possessed it. But the truth is that from start to finish he was subsidized from his brogans to his sombrero . . .”

And that’s that. Take it, western historians, or leave it. Smarting as if thrown from a rearing, unbroken stallion with a jar sufficient to split their jeans, cowboys of the profession generally took it. (Even cowgals in this day of equal rights.)

That portion of the public who, despite schooling, are interested in The West and can read will enjoy both the volume’s sturdy scholarship and literary presentation. It is hundred-proof stuff and not Indian whiskey. There are few books which are a joy to review, and this is among them.

—Philip D. Jordan
Burlington

Jews on the Frontier: An Account of Jewish Pioneers and Settlers in Early America, by Rabbi I. Harold Sharfman. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1977. pp. ix, 337. Illustrations, bibliography, and index. \$10.95.

Rabbi I. Harold Sharfman has succeeded in producing an anecdotal and rather affectionate chronicle of the movement westward of Jewish pioneers and settlers during the early days of the nation’s history, from the French and Indian Wars to the Alamo. But the book’s success, unfortunately, also proves to be the source of its ultimate failure: these often charming tales offer only a glimmer of insight into the larger question of the historical role of the Jew in American life.

Most histories of Jews in America focus primarily on the immigrant popu-

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