

Blacks in the West, by W. Sherman Savage. Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies, Number 23. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977. \$14.95.

Perhaps the most striking feature of this survey of the role of blacks in the settlement of the American West is what one might have to call a "documentation gap." Professor Savage has digested vast amounts of source material for this study, but often surviving public records and other documents lead only so far, and principal figures fade from sight. Certainly this is no fault of Professor Savage's scholarship, but rather an indication of the difficulty of learning exactly what did happen. In a good many instances, he is forced to confess that the outcome of episodes involving blacks in the West is simply not ascertainable.

Professor Savage organizes his study in a topical rather than a chronological fashion, so that each chapter provides an overview of one specific way in which blacks figured in America's westward expansion. Some topics surveyed include "Blacks in the Military," "Blacks in Principal Western Industries," "Politics," "Education," and "Social Life." Within each of these areas, Professor Savage arranges his material according to geographical regions. He suggests relationships between the achievements of blacks and the general progress of the westward movement during the period from around 1840, when significant numbers of blacks began to appear in the census figures of western states and territories, to 1890, the point at which the frontier is said to have closed.

Blacks in the West cannot be characterized as "revisionist" in attitude; Professor Savage makes no sustained effort to credit blacks for major responsibilities in the settlement of the West. Rather, his effort is to present an objective account of what blacks did in various capacities, to support the general thesis that "the West did offer blacks relatively more freedom" than did the eastern and southern states from which they migrated, both before and after the Civil War.

As Ray Allen Billington points out in his foreword to this volume, Professor Savage "lets facts speak for themselves" and, in general, avoids controversy in favor of objectivity. Nevertheless, there are some points at which the ironies of the black man's position in the white-dominated frontier society are inescapable, and Professor Savage notes these dispassionately. For example, he reports a case in California in 1852, in which slaves whom a court had ordered to be freed had to sign their master's name to the necessary documents because the white slave-holder could not write. During the 1870s in Texas, black cavalry troops sent to protect white settlers from Indian attack found that some whites would refuse aid if it came from black soldiers. "Thus," Professor Savage writes, "the black troops had to fight not only Indians but also the racism of those whom they were assigned to protect."

The role of blacks in Iowa history is treated in some detail at various

points in Professor Savage's study. He gives an account of the mining town of Buxton, Iowa, in which blacks constituted half of the town's population and assumed community leadership roles during Buxton's brief period of prosperity. Another prominent section of Savage's account deals with the political career of Alexander Clark, a black citizen of Muscatine who became widely known as the "Orator of the West" and was appointed consul general to Liberia by President Harrison in 1890. *Blacks in the West* is valuable primarily for its presentation of facts of this kind, which illustrate Professor Savage's concluding remarks. He reminds us that "the West has given blacks an opportunity to make a better life for themselves" and that "In return, they have given the West of themselves."

—Norman Hane
Drake University

Katy Northwest, The Story of a Branch Line Railroad, by Donovan L. Hof-sommer. Boulder, Colorado: Pruitt Publishing Company, 1976. pp. xxiii, 306. Maps, photographs, charts, footnotes, index. \$26.95.

Donovan Hof-sommer's *Katy Northwest* is an outstanding study of a regional railroad that faithfully served its area for over half a century. Two North Texas capitalists, Frank Kell and Joseph A. Kemp founded the line in 1906 as the Wichita Falls and Northwestern Railway to haul grain to their wheat and flour milling business in Wichita Falls. Economic interest and these two men's enterprising vision extended the line northward two hundred miles through western Oklahoma; its adjacent neighbour, the Beaver, Meade, and Englewood, to which the Northwestern was physically and corporately joined, added another one hundred miles of road by reaching Keyes in the Oklahoma Panhandle. The line's three hundred miles of road pulsed with life for over five decades, after which, enormous problems beset it, forcing abandonment of the major portion in 1973.

It is Hof-sommer's thesis that the railway filled a need in this recently settled land. Kemp and Kell never built beyond the frontier; instead, they preferred to construct in territory recently settled but not fully developed. The Wichita Falls and Northwestern completely fits this framework. In 1912 the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railway acquired the line, naming it the Northwestern Division. Just as the line became a part of the larger carrier, the Katy, so did its territory become a part of the national and even international social and economic community. For example, wheat, a major crop of this section and an important component of the railroad's business, found its way to the international wheat market at Houston by way of Northwestern and Katy rails. And there appears to be an especially close relationship between the road's arrival in the Oklahoma Panhandle and the rapid increase of wheat production in that windswept area.

This was no through-run railroad; practically every freight train was a

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.