

Prairie Dog Empire: A Saga of the Shortgrass Prairie, by Paul A. Johnsgard. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. xiii, 243. Maps, illustrations, tables, notes, appendix, index. \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewer Michael J. Brodhead is a historian with the Office of History, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers. He has written books and articles on naturalists in the nineteenth-century West.

The Great Plains, or shortgrass prairie, is America's least understood and least appreciated region. A common—and erroneous— notion of the Great Plains is that it is a vast area taking in the middle third of the United States. The author of this excellent work, a professor of biological sciences, knows better, having studied and written extensively about the region (which does not include Iowa). His central character is the black-tailed prairie dog, but many animals associated with it receive extensive treatment. These include other species of prairie dog, the bison, badger, bobcat, coyote, and raptors such as the golden eagle. An appendix provides "A Guide to National Grasslands, Reservations, and Nature Preserves on the High Plains."

Much of the engagingly written book details the shrinking of the territories of prairie dogs and their allies and predators and the sharp decline in their populations (the coyote being an exception). Of course, the principal cause is human settlement and exploitation of the region. Although never strident, Johnsgard makes it clear that most of the blame rests with ranching, mining, and timber interests, along with compliant state and federal agencies and lawmakers that have not provided adequate protection.

Many scientists and historians have written about the natural history of the Great Plains, but few so compellingly as Paul Johnsgard.

The New Town Square: Museums and Communities in Transition, by Robert R. Archibald. American Association for State and Local History Book Series. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004. viii, 224 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$69.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

Reviewer Terry A. Barnhart is associate professor of history at Eastern Illinois University, where he teaches courses in public history. He has also published articles about museum management.

A common theme in the practice of local history in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been one of anomie—a growing sense of alienation and estrangement from the places that collectively make up the American past and present. Robert R. Archibald forcibly addresses this phenomenon in the *New Town Square: Museums and Communities in Transition*. "The most profound dilemma of this new century, inher-

ited from the last, is a deepening crisis of place and the accompanying ennui of placelessness. Lack of attachment to place disembodies memory, sunders relationships, promotes prodigal resource consumption; it threatens democracy itself, which so much depends upon those 'mystic chords of memory' and habits that bind us to one another in a shared voluntary pursuit of the common good" (1). Place still matters in American life, but its claims to attention have been challenged on many fronts as Archibald so amply illustrates in *The New Town Square*.

An unrequited yearning for a renewed sense of shared community in the face of these changes occasionally takes on mythic proportions. The shibboleth of community is invoked in everything from our political discourse about the kind of nation we want to be to the basic individual-level decisions about where we choose to live and how. History museums can and should play an important role in promoting that national dialogue by becoming "the new town square"—centers of social interactions and civic culture. The public programs of museums and historical societies should reflect studies of the symbiotic relationship between people and the places in which they live: how people shaped those places and how those places shaped them. The power of place can be examined as something tangible that makes localities different without losing sight of what they also share with other American communities both near and far. Archibald's history is about values, both those of our own time and those of the past—those we wish to affirm as a nation and those we wish to eschew.

The author is well suited to discuss the relationship between museums and their communities. He has been president and CEO of the Missouri Historical Society at St. Louis since 1988. Previously, he was the director of the Montana Historical Society and of the Western Heritage Center in Billings and curator at the Albuquerque Museum in New Mexico. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees at Northern Michigan University in Marquette and a doctorate in history at the University New Mexico. He is also the author of *A Place to Remember: Using History to Build Community* (1999), which was also published by AltaMira Press. The present volume is in many senses a sequel to *A Place to Remember* and is just as personally poignant. Both books center on stories the author tells about the places in which he has lived and studied. Whether those stories are about his hometown of Ishpeming on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan (those who have heard him speak will hear the U.P. in the upward inflection of some of his sentences) or about his experiences in Billings or St. Louis, each one is related with passion and perspicacity.

But above all else this book is based on the author's conviction that in order for museums to connect with their communities in meaningful ways they must be inclusive in the stories they tell about a shared past, as well as in their internal policies and procedures. Archibald refers to this process of engagement as presenting "a shared story" — one that leaves no one out.

A shared story will define the common ground and mutual aspirations that are the basis for civic action and healthy democracy. Common ground will allow us to think and act as a community or region so that we can fix what ails us, we can figure out what to do about our schools and our health care and our environment, we can be economically competitive, we will accept responsibility for poverty. We cannot construct an inclusive conversation, or business or neighborhood or community or new town square, unless we jettison the practice and the baggage of exclusivity (73).

Relationships between museums and their communities in the new town square must rest on shared authority and an invitation for public audiences to become stakeholders in the telling of shared stories. The author speaks to this point with great credibility, for under his leadership the public programs of the Missouri Historical Society have become models of the kinds of inclusive storytelling that he so earnestly advocates.

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