

Book Reviews

had seemed convincing and rather sympathetic, becomes a riddle. The legal arguments and delays which precede his execution are not of sufficient intrinsic interest to carry the narrative without Joe, and so the novel tends to lose momentum. The re-introduction of Lund as the central character only partially corrects this difficulty.

Wallace Stegner has written numerous novels, volumes of stories, and essays. He is particularly interested in the experience of the American West, and of artists who grow up on the periphery of the artistic world. Stegner himself was born in Lake Mills, Iowa, and taught in Muscatine while earning his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Iowa. His first book was published in 1938 by Carroll Coleman's Prairie Press, of Muscatine. Although thirty years old, his novel *Joe Hill* remains as interesting a piece of fiction and as plausible a biographical speculation as it was on publication.

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Gold Dust, by Donald Dale Jackson. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980. pp. x, 361. Maps, illustrations, source notes, index. \$13.95.

The discovery of gold in California on John Sutter's land grant in December 1848 set in motion one of the greatest folk movements in American history, created a new state almost overnight, and hastened the occupation of western America. The gold rush also produced a vast literature consisting of over two hundred published diaries of forty-niners, and a stream of books about this great event. Considering the bulk of literature about the gold rush, it might be concluded that there has been no need for another book on the event. However, *Gold Dust* is the most complete account of the California gold rush as a human experience that has ever been written.

The author grew up in San Francisco and has written several books about western America. In this book he achieves his goal of presenting an historical experience that has the quality of well-written fiction, while never violating historical canons. Sources are given in the text rather than through footnotes and are listed chapter by chapter in source notes. His goal, he says, was to "tell the story of the gold rush through the experiences, feelings, and thoughts of the people who participated in it. I want to convey what it was like to be on the trail and in the diggings, what the forty-niners felt and feared and dreamed,

how they viewed themselves and their companions, and what they saw and heard and smelled. My goal is to put the reader inside the skins of those heroic, sad, and reckless men" (p. 5). In the fourteen chapters plus a prologue and epilogue, the story of the discovery is told—how the news spread throughout the world; the experiences on the trails in 1849 and 1850 around the Horn, across Panama and Mexico, up the Rio Grande, west from Ft. Smith, and the great overland trail; and the life in the mines and coastal cities. Using newspaper accounts, excerpts from dozens of diaries and letters written back home, and other sources, the author puts together a fascinating account that goes beyond a record of events. A reader can even follow the fears of a young man who had a sweetheart back home to whom he wrote soul-searching letters, the operations of a crook who organized a group to go up the Rio Grande, or the development of mining codes in lieu of law. The book is a skillful integration of the collective experiences of the gold rush. Some readers may learn more about the gold rush than they want to know, since the experiences on the trails and in the various mines are often similar if not identical. However, the quality of selection and of writing is always top-flight. This reviewer would take exception to the two occasions when the author speaks of mosquitoes being "damned thick" (p. 203) and of 43-year-old Alonzo Deland being "too damned old" (p. 192) for such a trek, and doubts if the language adds anything to his exposition.

There are other books that can give a reader a good account of the gold rush on the Central Overland Trail, published diaries such as Bruff's meticulous account that can give insights into the human side of the gold rush, and others, but this book will serve as the best treatment of the total gold rush experience for a long time.

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Journal of a Tamed Bureaucrat: Nils A. Olsen and the BAE, 1925-1935,
edited by Richard Lowitt. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1980.
pp. 245. Introduction, index. \$15.95.

Nils Olsen was director of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the Department of Agriculture from 1928 to 1935. In this position he was chief of the department's statistical and research programs and its efforts to aid farmers through better planning. Richard Lowitt has

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