

Book Reviews

The Kansas Beef Industry, by Charles L. Wood. Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1980. pp. xiii, 352. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$22.50.

The author, an assistant professor at Texas Tech University, declares his objective to be to trace the production and marketing of cattle into the twentieth century; he in fact focuses upon the years 1900 to 1940. He proposes to analyze the "forces of change confronting cattlemen" and their ability to adapt to new conditions. Further, he seeks to investigate the "shifting relationships among beef producers, industry and government." The organization is chronological and topical within two periods: 1900 to 1920 and 1920 to 1940. Topics include upbreeding, disease control, relations with railroads, packers, stockyards, and state and local governments. The activities of the Kansas Livestock Association with respect to all these topics supplies a unifying theme. The study is a thoroughly researched and balanced account of the beef industry. Several of the chapters include brief biographies of prominent cattlemen which enliven the narrative and inform the reader.

The book is rich in detail, perhaps its principal value, and while centering upon Kansas, does not lose sight of the national perspective. Woods finds that the modern beef industry in Kansas had matured by the beginning of the twentieth century, that the distribution of cattle at that time generally has persisted since. The upbreeding of the herds, disease control, and better management have made the industry efficient and business-like. Cattlemen early recognized the need to organize to deal effectively with the railroads and packers and have continued to pursue actively their interests in marketing and the development of government policy. Among the more provocative of its conclusions is that which observes that cattlemen actively sought and willingly accepted aid from the federal government, although it tarnished the preferred image of individualism and self reliance. It is not surprising that few of the general trends noted or the conclusions drawn from the study are, in themselves, unique. What is important is how these patterns were shaped in the Kansas milieu, and that is brought out well by Dr. Wood.

The deficiencies, if they can be so labeled, are few. There is little said about the routines and processes of ranching and how they changed over time, or consideration of such things as average herd size, the number and average size of ranches, and the differences in outlook and the conflicts between large and small operators. These concerns may have been considered outside the main thrust of the work. Also,

the lack of emphasis upon such matters may reflect the character of the sources; the more numerous small ranchers left fewer traces. The result, however, is an apparent bias toward the outlook of the large feeder or operator. As the author notes, the Kansas Livestock Association was dominated by such figures. That fact may explain in part the Association's opposition to direct sales and community sales barns when trucks began to provide alternatives to railroads and central markets. Notwithstanding these caveats, *The Kansas Beef Industry* establishes a standard and model for similar studies to follow.

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The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States, edited for the American Historical Association by Michael Kammen. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980. pp. 524. Index. \$19.95.

Our age is an age of history. Never before has the study of the past meant so much to so many. Every man and every woman, along with their children in school, sense that yesterday was different than today. Thus the only way to comprehend the fullness of our experience is to have a rendezvous with history. Genealogy and the quest for roots; local historical societies and museums; television series and popular magazines, antiques, and nostalgia; historic preservation; and a back-to-basics mood—these are all aspects of the past before us.

This series of essays sponsored by the American Historical Association does not take much note of this surge of popular interest in history. Instead, it turns to another aspect of our age of history, the vast enterprise of professional historians who write history according to scholarly canons. These are the members of the American Historical Association and this book is largely for them.

Superbly introduced and edited by Michael Kammen, *The Past Before Us* collects twenty essays on various periods, areas, and approaches to history. It is not comprehensive, nor is it systematic, but it does illustrate the present state of the profession. The situation, in a nutshell, is the partial triumph of social history. It has captured the contemporary historical imagination, but it has yet to produce a large synthesis of the past useful to society at large.

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