

THE ANNALS OF IOWA

Tending the Talking Wire: A Buck Soldier's View of Indian Country, 1863-1866, edited by William E. Unrau. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1979. pp. xvi, 382. Illustrations, maps, bibliography, indexes. \$20.00.

This book consists of the letters of "buck soldier" Hervey Johnson: they are a delight to read and the book is a work of particular value. It provides excellent articulation of the enlisted soldier's point of view during the Civil War period and on the military experience in general. The book also offers insight into happenings along the central (present Wyoming) section of the route of the Overland Telegraph Company and the Oregon Trail from 1863 to 1866.

Of Quaker origins, Johnson grew up in small-town Ohio in an "extended family" of the kind which in time scattered all over the West. After living in Iowa after the war for several years, he spent his last thirty-four years working for the Santa Fe Railroad in Wichita, Kansas. Johnson's Quakerism shows through in various ways but, significantly enough (perhaps reflective of the common experience of soldiers) it did not prevent him from developing almost bloodthirsty attitudes toward enemies including commissioned officers, Mormons, other troublesome emigrants, and especially Indians. Editor Unrau is perhaps more defensive than necessary regarding Johnson's prejudices, but note the passage on page 118: "Well an Indian village is not like a human village. . . ."

Johnson enlisted at age twenty-four in Company G, 11th Regiment, Ohio Volunteer Cavalry, wanting to go West instead of South where there was fighting. After an interlude vainly pursuing Confederate raiders in eastern Kansas, Johnson with his unit struck out along the trail for Fort Laramie where he was to be stationed (also at Deer Creek, Sweetwater, and Platte Bridge posts) until 1866. His sisters and other family members preserved more than one hundred letters detailing his experiences. It would be interesting to know more than Unrau was able to discover regarding Johnson's education and family. His vocabulary, intelligence, dedication to letter-writing, and general power of expression were unusually high. To judge only by the letters, one might have expected Johnson to conclude his career as an executive rather than as a flagman for the railroad.

Special efforts went into providing illustrations for this book; the most notable are four drawings by Charles Frederick Moellman, bugler in Johnson's company. One is reproduced in color, and all show the artist to have had a fine eye for detail. The editor's and publisher's efforts did not all work out so well, however; this book exhi-

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bits more errors than it should. The strangest, in my view, is in dividing the index into two parts. The second part is called "Index of Names," but should be called "Index of *Personal* Names" because it contains only the names of people. It is only four pages long, and the single entry on Hervey Johnson requires almost a quarter of it. The first part is entitled "Index of Subjects," also a misnomer because it consists chiefly of names, excluding only names of people. It is only ten pages long, and the "Index of *Personal* Names" could certainly have been incorporated into it to avoid confusion.

Another unusual and unfortunate publisher's decision was to print on the inside of the dust jacket the only complete map-diagram of the area where Johnson lived and wrote most of the letters. Two sections from this map are found in the book, but they do not encompass the whole area shown on the dust jacket. One government map (pp. 13-14) was so poorly reproduced that most of the river lines dropped out.

But these are mere cavils. The letters are interesting and important. They have been expertly edited and, for the most part, packaged in this book. They present insight into various facets of history that are not obtainable elsewhere.

John Porter Bloom
The National Archives
Washington, D.C.

Ten Years in the Saddle: The Memoir of William Woods Averell, edited by Edward K. Eckert and Nicholas J. Amato. San Rafael, California: Presidio, 1978. pp. xi, 443. Photographs, maps, bibliographical notes, index. \$16.95.

William Woods Averell was a Union cavalry general with considerable writing ability and a penchant for collecting and saving his own memorabilia. His memoir, *Ten Years in the Saddle*, reflects this. It is articulate, rich with detail, and painstakingly accurate.

Ten Years in the Saddle depicts three periods in Averell's life: his student life at West Point, his exploits as a cavalry officer in the New Mexico Territory, and his role in the Civil War. Throughout the book, Averell's prose rises above the level of mere reminiscence. The chapters written about his West Point days supply us with insight into the traditions and esprit de corps that are characteristic of the academy.

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