

THE ANNALS OF IOWA

entries under "Iowa" in the index. Kansas by contrast has six entries and a "see also 'cowtowns.'"

What then, to make of this book? Libraries will want a copy as a handy, although confusing, reference work. Few readers will buy it for themselves, but it would make a nice gift. If you get a copy, don't throw it out, enjoy it!

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The Great Platte River Road, by Merrill J. Mattes. Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1969; reprint ed., Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1979. pp. xxiv, 583. Maps, illustrations, bibliography, index. New preface added. \$8.95 paper.

The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860, by John D. Unruh, Jr. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979. pp. xviii, 565. Maps, illustrations, tables, bibliography, index. \$22.50.

Scholarship of the trans-Mississippi migration of the nineteenth century is flourishing, judging from these two books, coincidentally appearing in print in the same year. In the Mattes reprint and the original Unruh publication, we have the opportunity to compare these two works of exhaustive research and differing emphases. Mattes traces the development of the Platte River route from the Missouri River towns, the "jumping-off" points, to Fort Laramie in the period from 1849 to 1867. Unruh treats essentially the same span, 1840 to 1860, and extends the migration routes through to California, Oregon, and Washington, but he focuses on an analysis of the changing roles of the Indians, the federal government, private entrepreneurs, the Mormon "half-way" house in the Salt Lake Valley, and the emerging settlements on the West Coast.

Mattes defines the Platte River Road as the main trunk route along the Platte from Fort Kearny to Fort Laramie. It subsumed various route names which indicated destinations, such as the Oregon Trail or

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California Trail, and it was the common path of convergence for numerous roads from the "jumping-off" towns, such as the St. Joe Road, the Independence Road, and the Council Bluffs Road. Before examining each of these feeder routes and segments of the main road in a geographic progression, Mattes gives a short overview of the numbers of people who emigrated over this route, the distances they covered, and the life they experienced in transit. From the overlanders' diaries, contemporary newspapers, and fragmentary military reports, Mattes estimates that a total of 350,000 traveled along the main Platte route (a figure Unruh accepts). For those who did not "see the elephant" and turn back, the two thousand mile trip from the Missouri to California or Oregon might take four and one-half months, or an average of less than fifteen miles per day. If some combination of misfortune, accidents, illness, bad weather, or poor judgement occurred, the journey could be tragically prolonged. While life on the trail is amply illustrated from the travel diaries, it is the trail, and the "getting there" as a linear event, which occupy Mattes' attention.

For Unruh, the "getting there" was a combination of various dynamic forces and processes, a combination in which change through time can be analyzed. Contemporary opinion about overland emigration and the overlanders themselves changed from the 1840s to the 1850s. As ever larger numbers of people embarked on the westward trek, and as more reliable information about the journey and travel conditions became available, the popular view became less romantic, less fearful, and more objective. The experience became more and more routine, giving rise to a degree of certainty and predictability. The image of colonizing patriots disappeared after the Oregon boundary settlement with Britain, replaced by a more realistic view of those seeking better opportunities.

Unruh demonstrates the fallacy of some popular historical misconceptions. The idea of isolated overlanders on the trail gives way to the reality of relatively constant and close proximity, with wagons traveling several abreast in the wider road segments, traffic backing up at fords and ferries, and wagon companies camping close enough at night to post guards for mutual protection. The interaction and cooperation of the overlanders included sharing the services of emigrant physicians, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, and barbers. Emigrants joined together to recover livestock, bury the dead, socialize, trade livestock or provisions, and carry out acts of charity and compassion. They shared information and advice by means of the "roadside telegraphs" of messages and signs at trail forks and prominent landmarks. They sent letters and newspapers to those behind them on the trail

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(and their former homes) by the "go-backs" and other eastbound travelers.

Similarly, the notion that the Indians were initially hostile, and became increasingly more so, does not stand up. Unruh notes that there was a period of peaceful interaction between most tribes and the emigrants in the 1840s. Numerous examples from travel diaries and letters cite Indian aid in acting as guides over unfamiliar territory and as fording pilots at streams and rivers, or in trading for horses, food, or other items. Even as this peaceful interaction gave way gradually to less cordial and less frequent contact in the 1850s, Indian stealing was far more prevalent than attack. Demands for tribute for safe passage came most often from those tribes closest to the Missouri River who felt the greatest pressure from the emigration and who were the first to suffer from the depletion of buffalo and other game, grass, and timber. According to Unruh's sources, ninety percent of the emigrant casualties were killed west of South Pass, not on the Great Plains. He estimates that in the period of 1840 to 1860, only 362 emigrants and 406 Indians were killed in trailside violence.

It was the perceived threat of Indian violence that instigated involvement of the federal government in the emigration. Beginning with legislation in 1846, the U.S. government became committed to the deployment of troops and the establishment of a series of forts to protect the overlanders. Besides protection, the services available in the forts came to include supplying provisions, medical care, information, blacksmithing and wagon repairing facilities, administration of justice, surveys, exploration, and road building. What the government did not provide could be obtained from the private entrepreneurs. From 1840 to 1849, trading posts from the fur trading era, such as Fort Hall, Fort William, and Fort Platte, shifted to the business of supplying emigrants. Mormon ferries were established on the Platte and the Green, a move soon emulated by non-Mormon competitors. By 1852, the trails were dotted with privately owned "skinning posts" to take advantage of the lucrative emigrant trade. With this flowering of private entrepreneurship, the privately operated river-crossing, postal, and repair services came to be regarded as necessities rather than luxuries.

Unruh's examination of the role of the Mormon Salt Lake Valley as a half-way point of re-supply is carefully balanced in presenting the positions of the Mormon colonists and the non-Mormon overlanders, and it owes much to Arrington's *Great Basin Kingdom*. Discussion of the role of the West Coast communities in stimulating route improve-

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ments and in organizing relief expeditions for beleaguered emigrants is thorough and well documented.

The foundation of intensive research is constantly evident in these two books. Scholars of the westward emigration would have been indebted for the bibliographies alone. However, a word or two on style would not be remiss. Unruh's presentation is far more successful than is Mattes'. Unruh has more thematic headings under which to marshal a wealth of illustration, but he uses illustration with far greater restraint than does Mattes. With essentially one thematic concern, Mattes quickly and consistently engages in quotation overkill. Unruh can occasionally be faulted for over-argumentation. Taken together, however, these two historians have made richly significant contributions.

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The Devil Wagon in God's Country: The Automobile and Social Change in Rural America, 1893-1929, by Michael L. Berger. Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1979. pp. 269. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$17.50.

During the period covered by *The Devil Wagon in God's Country*, the automobile, in the eyes of rural Americans, evolved from a physical menace symbolizing the decadence of the city into a practical necessity providing a richer style of life. After first blocking its intrusion with restrictive laws, ruralists discarded their qualms and purchased nine million automobiles by 1930. Michael L. Berger has examined the automobile as an agent of social change in the countryside and in small towns. "The motor car," he writes, "transformed the very institutions that defined life outside urban areas" (p. 52).

Adoption of the automobile eroded the cohesiveness of rural families and shook the walls of local loyalties. Picking friends, choosing where to trade, affiliating with organizations—all became transactions based more on individual choice and less on physical proximity. Leisure activity changed from home gatherings and communal endeavors to escapist recreation, including band concerts, motion pictures, roadhouses, and tourism, all separate from home and work. Country churches and hospitals withered, but at the same time clergy-

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