

infantryman, the courageous German soldier with all of his prerogatives, weaknesses, and errors, experienced, endured, and in nameless sacrifice to the terror of a horrible regime, the terrible conflict of total war, and the interminable suffering of imprisonment, has carried it all patiently to the edge of personal doubt" (364).

The book is a remarkable expression of that experience. It is a story of survival and adaptation to uncertain and shifting conditions. The reader gains insight into the inner dynamics of a POW camp and the day-to-day concerns and topics of conversation among the POWs. These range from the mundane to the philosophical. Comradeship is valued. Prisoners confront despair—or the barbed wire sickness, as Hörner calls it—as they worry about their families and their future and as they struggle to maintain pride in being German and a soldier in the face of a growing awareness of Germany's eventual defeat. There is the psychological interplay between captor and captive and among the prisoners themselves. The reader learns of the power of rumor to raise or, more often, lower morale. Hörner is powerful in his character studies of his friends and fellow prisoners and in the philosophical musings and insights he presents on a variety of issues from war and politics to the meaning of life itself. However, the author's extensive use of recreated or fictionalized conversations is distracting, and it is not clear whether Hörner revised or added to any of the observations he made when he originally wrote the manuscript in 1950. These minor aspects aside, this work is clearly a valuable addition to the literature on the prisoner of war experience in World War II.

*History of Buena Vista College: Centennial Edition*, by William H. Cumberland. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1991. ix, 406 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, index. \$29.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY JOSEPH F. WALL, GRINNELL COLLEGE

To mark the centennial of the college he served well for thirty-three years, William Cumberland has brought out a considerably enlarged revised edition of his *History of Buena Vista College*, first published in 1966. A review of that earlier edition in the *Annals of Iowa* (Winter 1967) noted that "Dr. Cumberland's book is an encomium to the college and the many persons who have supported Buena Vista during the past seventy-five years." This updated version is also an encomium, but it is much more than that, for along with warm praise and deep affection for the institution and the men and women who built and nurtured it, there is also gentle but pointed criticism for those who failed it during the many recurring times of need and distress.

It is never easy for anyone as closely associated with an institution as Cumberland has been to write its history. He must perforce give some notice of his own role in adding distinction and giving direction to Buena Vista, but this is done in the appropriately discreet third-person voice and in a becoming, if unduly modest manner. One clearly senses how much this college has meant to Cumberland, but only by subtle inference does he reveal how much he has meant to the college.

Two dilemmas facing the in-house historian who knows so much about the institution under study are always what to put in and what to leave out. Cumberland is generally more successful in meeting the first challenge than the second. He does not flinch from portraying the blemishes as well as the beauty, the malefactors as well as the benefactors. Where he is unable to unearth the full story—as in the case of President Henry Olson, who saved the college from extinction in the 1930s only to be summarily dismissed by the church synod in 1953, thus preventing Olson from even finishing out the college year—Cumberland frankly admits that “the causes . . . remain vague after half-a-century” (155). Only rarely does the author omit those details upon which he might have expanded more fully, such as the tantalizing reference to a noted musician on the faculty “whose alleged failure in recruiting students cost him tenure” (200).

Indeed, Cumberland’s diligence for preserving the full record is manifested by his putting in the names of most trustees, administrators, faculty members, and students who might have a possible claim on the pages of this history. On occasions the general reader is told too much. Only the most devoted alumni will be able to sustain interest in reading the long list of those who have starred on the Beavers’ playing fields.

Much of this history, however, will strike a powerful, respondent note in anyone who has ever had an association with a small, church-related liberal arts college. There is “the shock of recognition”—to use Edmund Wilson’s felicitous phrase—when reading of the undue and often calamitous interference of the church governing board into the internal operations of the college, the frequent turnovers in the presidency, the perpetually frustrating quests for more dollars and more students, and the totally unexpected disasters of fires, wars, and economic depressions. If Buena Vista often seemed predestined for destruction, it was at the same time generously blessed throughout its history in having within the college community supporters of vision, courage, and faith who never gave up the struggle for existence.

Buena Vista’s past trials and tribulations may seem unusually exacerbated as compared with its sister colleges, but unlike most of

them, its story was to have an almost fairy-tale denouement. Coming to the rescue was an unlikely *deus ex machina* in the person of Harold Walter Siebens, a Storm Lake native who never finished high school but who struck it rich in the oil fields of Canada and gave to Buena Vista in the spring of 1980 a gift of eighteen million dollars, perhaps the largest single benefaction ever made to an Iowa college.

Cumberland, however, does not end his story with the traditional "they-lived-happily-ever-after" line. He is at his very best when he warns that the college's prosperity and its expansion into nine branches covering the state from Spencer to Clarinda and from Mason City to Ottumwa will create new and no less imperative demands on its leadership. The wise counsel offered in the final pages of his history will provide fascinating reading for all survivors who have guided his college through famine, but it must be required reading for those who will continue to lead it through feast in the decades ahead.

*Creating the West: Historical Interpretations, 1890-1990*, by Gerald D. Nash. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991. vii, 318 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth, \$15.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY PAULA M. NELSON, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-PLATTEVILLE

There is good news and bad news on the western history front. The good news is that more and more historians are at work in the field, adding strength and numbers to a field declared dying or dead just a few years ago. The bad news is that a significant faction of today's western historians are persistently negative about their subject and virtually solipsistic in their presentism. In *Creating the West*, Gerald D. Nash surveys the changing outlook of western historians over the past century, from the official closure of the frontier in 1890 to the present. His analytical approach is the notion of the historian's "ecology"—the historian's craft shaped by personal environment and worldview. Nash recognizes four separate, definable generations of western historians, whose interpretations reflected the experiences and cultural milieus of each generation. Nash also distinguishes four major perceptions of the West that have figured to some extent in all interpretations of the West: the West as frontier, as region, as urban civilization, and as mythical utopia. Each generation of historians has adapted these perceptions to their own generational experiences. The nature of the myth of the West for the earliest generation of frontier historians differs quite dramatically from the myth of the West for the most recent generation.

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