

Wild Animals and Settlers on the Great Plains, by Eugene D. Fleharty. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995. xvii, 316 pp. Illustrations, map, reference list, index. \$27.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY MICHAEL J. BRODHEAD, NATIONAL ARCHIVES—CENTRAL PLAINS REGION

Eugene Fleharty examines the relationship of the early white settlers of the Kansas portion of the Great Plains with the area's native fauna, focusing on the years from 1865 to 1879. For many writers the term *Great Plains* means the entire area between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains. With commendable precision, Fleharty usually confines his treatment of the Great Plains to the shortgrass lands west of the 98th meridian. In Kansas this embraces less than one-half of the state, and includes the Smoky Hills, Great Bend Prairie, Wellington Plain, Red Hills, and the High Plains.

Fleharty, a professor of zoology at Fort Hays State University, has spent years studying the biota of western Kansas. His research led him to this historical inquiry into settler/animal interaction there. Cultivation and grazing caused significant habitat alteration; so too did commercial and recreational hunting and fishing. In some cases this habitat alteration meant extermination or near extermination of species, most notably the bison, elk, and other large mammals. For many smaller mammals, however, environmental changes increased their numbers. In still other ways the record is mixed: "It is a story that illustrates wanton waste, but also curiosity, concern, and creativity" (xvi). The author does not restrict his study to mammals alone; he also treats birds, fish, amphibians, reptiles, and insects, although the last two are limited mostly to rattlesnakes and grasshoppers. Discussions of fish largely concern efforts to stock Kansas streams with introduced species, such as salmon and shad.

Most of the text is items reprinted verbatim from western Kansas newspapers. The author believes that the articles impart "the color and nuances of those times" (xiii). Many, perhaps most, readers will not care for this approach. Fleharty could have made his points more effectively and in less space by relying on his own prose; the most rewarding parts of the book are those in which he does just that. Printing the newspaper pieces in their entirety results in much extraneous matter, some duplication, and a multitude of "sics." Because there are no footnotes or endnotes, several persons, places, and events are not identified. Of the many individuals mentioned in the text, only a few appear in the index. Also reprinted verbatim, quite unnecessarily, are the state's game laws enacted in the period covered.

Although most of the material is from the newspapers of the region, some is from the eastern Kansas press. A few items concern developments beyond the Great Plains proper. In one astonishing instance, the *Hutchinson News* quotes Gilbert White's narrative of an encounter between chickens and a sparrow hawk. Many readers will assume that White was a nineteenth-century western Kansas farmer, not the eminent British author of *A Natural History of Selborne* (1789).

We are not told to what extent the author's conclusions apply to lands outside of the Great Plains, such as the tallgrass prairies of the Midwest. Perhaps, however, there has not been enough similar research on other regions to allow him to make comparisons.

In the epilogue Fleharty summarizes the major themes and reports on the present status of several creatures dealt with in the main body of the work. The last paragraph, on the too often unappreciated diversity of Great Plains wildlife, makes an especially worthwhile point.

Home on the Range: A Century on the High Plains, by James R. Dickenson. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995. 304 pp. Illustrations, index. \$24.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY PAMELA RINEY-KEHRBERG, ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

James R. Dickenson's *Home on the Range: A Century on the High Plains* is a personal look at the Great Plains and his home town, McDonald, Kansas (population 200 and falling). The text weaves together regional history and tales of McDonald's past, as well as discussions of the present and future of this small town and other places like it. Dickenson's story takes readers from the initial settlement of western Kansas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through its depopulation in the second half of the twentieth century. The book chronicles the effects on small towns of such modern innovations as tractors, automobiles, and multilane divided highways, as well as major historical events, such as the Great Depression and World War II.

The book is a collection of stories, interspersed with bits and pieces gleaned from histories of the region. Most historians and well-read laypersons will find the historical material to be fairly standard summations of the findings of scholars such as Walter Prescott Webb. It provides a nice backdrop to Dickenson's stories, but does not tell readers much that they do not already know. What is most interesting is the material not commonly available, such as the settlement's early history as told through the author's grandmother's eyes. The discussion of the trials and tribulations of living in a sod house is priceless, as are the descriptions of harvest, Halloween, and the Christmas

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