BOOK REVIEWS

All communications regarding book reviews and review copies of books should be sent to Book Review Editor, *South Dakota History,* 900 Governors Drive, Pierre, SD 57501-2217.

This Far-Off Wild Land: The Upper Missouri Letters of Andrew Dawson
Lesley Wischmann and Andrew Erskine Dawson. Western Frontiersmen Series. Norman, Okla.: Arthur H. Clark Co., 2013. 336pp. Illus. Maps. Notes. Biblio. Ind. Cloth, $39.95.

Few surviving narratives afford insight into the personal experiences and feelings of men who participated in the North American fur trade. This book is an exception. It provides a humanistic perspective on Andrew Dawson, a Scotsman who came to America at the age of twenty-four and had a successful career as a mid-level manager with the Upper Missouri Outfit, a subsidiary of Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Company. Also known as the American Fur Company, Chouteau's enterprise dominated the fur trade of the vast Upper Missouri River country for decades.

Lesley Wischmann, a historian, and Andrew Erskine Dawson, great-grandnephew of Andrew Dawson, have compiled thirty-seven letters the trader wrote to his mother and four siblings between 1844 and 1861. Two "lodge talks," which appear to be trappers' tales collected by Andrew Dawson for eventual publication, supplement the letters. Wischmann and her coauthor provide annotations for these primary documents, as well as an extended biographical sketch of Andrew Dawson.

A trained accountant whose relations with business associates and family members were strained, Dawson emigrated to the United States in 1844 and spent three years working as a bookkeeper in Saint Louis. Armed with letters of introduction to William Laidlaw and Kenneth McKenzie, two leading figures in the American Fur Company, Dawson found employment at its posts along the Upper Missouri River. At trading posts including Forts Berthold and Clark in present-day North Dakota, Dawson took on increasing management responsibilities and eventually became a junior partner in the firm. In 1854, he transferred to Fort Benton in present-day Montana, where he oversaw significant changes in the organization's business. Increasingly, the company engaged in transporting federal annuity payments to Indian tribes, outfitting miners in newly discovered gold fields, and wagon-freighting supplies to burgeoning frontier communities as American commerce stretched toward the Pacific Northwest.

Dawson's letters reflect not only his business and frontier experiences but also his personal feelings toward his family back in Scotland. Like many of his colleagues in the fur trade, he married an Indian wife and had children. Although Dawson wrote about his American family, loneliness and longing for his Scottish kin is the overriding theme of his correspondence. He managed to return to Scotland for an eight-month visit in 1858, the year before his mother died. After his return to the Upper Missouri, injuries sustained in an accidental fall increasingly disabled him. In 1864, Dawson left the Upper Missouri country for the last time and returned to Scotland. He lived his final years with a brother and died in 1872.

Authors Wischmann and Dawson have done a masterful job of reconstructing the

life and career of Andrew Dawson from his correspondence, family information, and a wealth of relevant fur-trade documents and studies. They have successfully illuminated a hitherto little-known figure who presided over the sunset of the Upper Missouri fur business and associated intimately with leading personages of that historic trade such as Kenneth McKenzie, Alexander Culbertson, Alexander Harvey, and Francis Chardon. Enthusiasts of western and fur-trade history will find much of interest in this volume.

THOMAS D. THIESSEN
Pleasant Dale, Nebr.

Creating the American West: Boundaries and Borderlands

Derek R. Everett. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014. 320pp. Illus. Maps. Notes. Biblio. Ind. Cloth, $29.95.

Creating the American West is not about how states got their shapes, but, rather, the historical, political, and cultural processes of how western spaces were partitioned and incorporated into the American federal republic. Everett's book is well researched and does a wonderful job of explaining the relevance of historical precedents of boundary formation during colonial times to the formation of territories, and, eventually, states in the American West. It is easy to forget that control of the area that now comprises the states of the American West was once contested by American Indians, foreign powers, and the United States government. The boundaries of new states became contentious issues in Congress and among local politicians who lobbied for statehood and created much public notoriety in the eastern press.

Everett's first two chapters examine the formation of borders during colonial times and the early American Republic—processes that would influence future policies. Many of the precedents for the drawing of nineteenth-century American boundaries stemmed from English colonial policy and the land ordinances enacted by the United States Congress. One lingering debate was whether to use geometric criteria (longitude and latitude) or physical geography to define boundaries. Those who argued for the physical approach thought that mountain ranges and rivers provided useful natural limits, while others insisted on geometric boundaries for their apparent simplicity. In most cases, geometric boundaries won out because of expediency and a lack of knowledge of the western physical landscape. Everett also reviews the multitude of plans Congress, politicians, and newspapers proposed for the division of the lands between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River, as well as the Louisiana Purchase.

The next six chapters comprise case studies of boundary formation in the American West. Moving somewhat chronologically, Everett focuses on six contentious cases: the western Arkansas border, the Missouri-Iowa boundary, the boundaries of Oregon and Washington, the California-Nevada border, the New Mexico-Colorado boundary, and the boundaries of North Dakota and South Dakota. The stories behind the creation of these states' boundaries are quite varied, and each is unique. Some, like Arkansas, involved competition with American Indians over border demarcation. Other boundary disputes, such as Missouri versus Iowa, Oregon versus Washington, and California versus Nevada, were mostly nonviolent conflicts featuring ill-funded militias and law officers. In most cases, the statements of territorial and state governors, local politicians, and local newspapers accentuated the turmoil. The New Mexico-Colorado border was drawn without concern for cultural boundaries, leaving many Hispanic communities split between the two states as a result. The last great territorial division covered in the book was between the two Dakotas.

Everett uses his research to urge academics to focus on what he terms "intranational borderlands" (p. 221), or marginal areas where two or more states come together.

Residents along these margins have "unique complications" (p. 221) in their political communities. Whether or not Everett's call for a new focus on intranational borderlands is heeded remains to be seen.

ROBERT H. WATREL
South Dakota State University
Brookings, S.Dak.

South Pass: Gateway to a Continent
Will Bagley. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014. 336pp. Illus. Maps. Notes. Biblio. Ind. Cloth, $29.95.

South Pass, a gently sloping plain that allowed a relatively easy wagon crossing of the continental divide in Wyoming, saw more than five hundred thousand people travel from the east to what would become the states of Oregon, California, and Utah from the 1840s through the 1860s. Today it stands remote, desolate, forlorn, largely forgotten, and forbidding to visitors even in June. Will Bagley, one of the most prolific and accomplished western historians of our time, makes an impassioned plea for the preservation of an important landscape and landmark in this engaging book overflowing with glittering and grotesque stories of the people who traversed South Pass.

Most of the book deals with the two or three decades in the mid-nineteenth century when South Pass experienced its greatest volume of overland travel. The narrative touches on events leading to the route's "discovery" by white fur traders (Indians had used it long before the traders showed up) and on the history of the pass since overland traffic declined (the last covered wagons passed through in 1912). Fur traders get three of the book's ten chapters. Missionaries, explorers, Mormons, gold rushers (to California and, later, to South Pass itself), United States mail service, and Indian conflicts all receive considerable attention for their links to South Pass. "Gateway to a Continent" aptly describes the feature. "Umbilical cord to the West" would also work, especially for those decades crucial to the westward expansion of the United States.

Bagley read widely in government reports and other documents as well as recent works of history. It is his deep research into the diaries and journals of people who traveled through South Pass, however, that brings the book to life. These sources tell vivid stories about swarms of vicious mosquitoes whose attacks swelled people's eyes shut. They allow the author to relate intimate details of overlanders celebrating their conquest of the continental divide—an event mentioned in virtually every diary and journal—by eating pound cake, planting an American flag, or having a dance. Many travelers suffered or died on the route, and readers will find their sad stories, too. The book adds to literature on overland travel by providing a deep history of a place critical to the most important trails.

Readers will appreciate Bagley's treatment of events central to the history of the American West. The prose moves briskly, but it relies too heavily on direct quotations, sometimes lengthy ones. Twenty-six illustrations enrich the text, none more vividly than the photograph of Charlotte Dansie's grave on page 161. Dansie's headstone stands just a few paces from wheel ruts that scar a landscape containing little other than scrub as far as the eye can see. It must have been a horrible place to die, yet the wheel tracks symbolize the path of hope that Dansie, her family, and hundreds of thousands of others followed to the promise of a better life. Bagley entertains, educates, and argues convincingly that South Pass deserves more attention and better preservation than it has received thus far.

TODD M. KERSTETTER
Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Tex.

Gloomy Terrors and Hidden Fires: The Mystery of John Colter and Yellowstone
Ronald M. Anglin and Larry E. Morris. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014. 244pp. Illus. Maps. Apps. Notes. Biblio. Ind. Cloth, $35.00.

When we think of the fabled mountain men who purportedly disdained early-nineteenth-century town life and chose the rough, solitary existence of fur trapper west of the Missouri River, John Colter often comes first to mind. The subject of many articles and two previous biographies, Colter is nearly always featured as one of the more colorful veterans of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Ronald Anglin and Larry Morris review what is known about Colter and explain the significance of his life story. The authors admit that "separating Colter the man from Colter the legend grows hazy and indistinct, so that much 'known' about him is not certain at all" (p. 6). True to that reality, Anglin and Morris discover the many ways Colter's persona and activities have become muddled in earlier accounts of his experiences in the American West.

The account of Colter's post-expedition career is particularly good in clarifying his relationships with Upper Missouri River fur traders such as Manuel Lisa. Readers learn how fur trade entrepreneurs managed a complex business involving native traders, aggressive opponents, and international competition. Nonetheless, Colter's own movements are difficult to pin down, and speculation often has to stand in for evidence. The book does, however, supply details of significant events and personalities in the European-American penetration of Indian country during the early nineteenth century. The authors include many well-known fur trade stories but also detail where traders went, who they encountered, and how their descriptions of the beaver-rich streams in the Rocky Mountains became incorporated into maps.

The "mystery" in the title refers to historians' attempts to reconstruct Colter's travels on the Yellowstone Plateau in 1807. Trying to find his path, as the authors write, "has become an integral part of Colter's story itself" (p. 81). In chapter eight, Anglin and Morris address Colter's trek as William Clark drew it on his 1810 map of the American West, as well as various theories of Colter's actual route. Modern digital enhancement of Clark's original map has disclosed a new alternative for Colter's route, but, as the authors note, quoting Merrill Mattes, establishing his exact course was an effort "to prove the unprovable" (p. 95). The notion of "Colter's Hell," a tagline that some have applied to the geysers of Yellowstone, has no basis in fact. Apparently, the label was first mentioned in Washington Irving's book *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville* (1837) and was repeated by others. In *Astoria* (1836), Irving also promoted the story of Colter's famous run from Blackfeet Indians near Three Forks, Montana, although that legend has nearly as many unanswered questions as the story of Colter in Yellowstone.

Anglin and Morris take us well beyond Irving and present Colter from oblique angles, thus justifying another consideration of the man and the myths surrounding him. This book offers a bonus for knowledgeable readers in the form of copious notes and appendices.

WILLIAM L. LANG
Portland State University
Portland, Oreg.

The Great Medicine Road, Part I: Narratives of the Oregon, California, and Mormon Trails, 1840–1848
Edited by Michael L. Tate with Will Bagley and Richard Rieck. American Trails Series. Norman, Okla.: Arthur H. Clark Co., 2014. 356pp. Illus. Maps. Notes. Biblio. Ind. Cloth, $39.95.

Making a propitious start to a new series that aims to reevaluate the early decades of European-American transcontinental

migration in the United States, Michael L. Tate and his colleagues take a fresh look at a plethora of personal missives and transcribed interviews that reveal both the hazards of voyaging across mid-nineteenth-century North America and the motivations that led migrants to do so. The book's stated purpose is to reinterpret trail narratives using cutting-edge scholarship on the subject. As principal editor, Tate expresses the firm conviction that his team's selections retain much value waiting for modern researchers to extract. The work's significance derives from its "threshold" status—it occupies the crossroads between generic and avant-garde methods of analyzing frontier history.

The narratives in this collection fall into two main camps. Some were written to prepare prospective migrants for the inevitable challenges of trail life, while others recount rare events that were unlikely to befall most travelers. Jesse Looney's advice regarding livestock and Amanda Rhoads's remedy for a toothache aim to instruct later travelers, while J. M. Harrison's report of a disastrous oxen stampede and John Borrowman's account of being swindled by a supposed friend serve as cautionary tales. Tate contextualizes each document with a biographical sketch of its author and supplies the information necessary to fill in gaps in the narratives. For example, Lilburn Boggs's piece offers no hint of his public life, but Tate identifies him as the Missouri governor who ordered the Mormons expelled from the state in 1838.

The variety of perspectives in the collection, which includes accounts from three women and two foreigners, is one of its strengths. The narratives of figures such as Lucy Bennett, whose group's decision to trust an unqualified leader had nearly fatal consequences, offer engaging departures from more conventional sagas. The enforcement of social mores within emigrant wagon parties takes center stage in Willard Rees's account of a youth whose recalcitrance resulted in several hours tied to a pole in a rainstorm. This theme merits more attention.

Overall, the collection fulfills its goal well by using the lens of recent research to shed new light on well-worn trails. Certain themes mentioned in the introduction could use clarification, but *The Great Medicine Road* is nonetheless a stirring reinterpretation of classic sources and a valuable tool for any historian of the nineteenth-century frontier.

HENRY A. BUSBY
University of Wyoming
Laramie, Wyo.

Before Custer: Surveying the Yellowstone, 1872

Edited by M. John Lubetkin. Frontier Military Series. Norman, Okla.: Arthur H. Clark Co., 2015. 328pp. Illus. Tables. Maps. Apps. Notes. Biblio. Ind. Cloth, $34.95.

M. John Lubetkin presents *Before Custer* as a companion to his 2013 edited work *Custer and the 1873 Yellowstone Survey*. Both of these volumes enrich readers' understandings of his 2014 monograph *Jay Cooke's Gamble: The Northern Pacific Railroad, the Sioux, and the Panic of 1873*. While Lubetkin provides a well-written introduction and occasional editorial comments, *Before Custer* is not meant to be a narrative. Rather, it is a collection of primary sources regarding the failed Northern Pacific Railway line survey of 1872 that includes personal letters, telegrams, newspaper accounts, journal and diary entries, reports of military officers, and corporate documents. While the work lacks a unifying thesis, it still captures the nation's anticipation and concern about efforts to complete a northern transcontinental railroad.

Lubetkin suggests that the 1871–1872 railroad surveys have "received only cursory treatment" from scholars. Largely because the surveys failed, historians have tended to treat them as little more than "a run-up to Custer" (p. 28). In 1872, the Northern Pacific ran from Duluth, Minnesota, to Bismarck, Dakota Territory, and the company planned to extend its line west to the Pacific. Like the settlement of the Great Plains, the route

survey proceeded from the east and the west simultaneously. Two survey parties and their military escorts were to meet at the confluence of the Powder and Yellowstone rivers near present-day Terry, Montana. Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho warriors wishing to keep railroads and American settlement out of their homelands harassed both groups. The eastern crew departed from Fort Rice, about thirty miles south of present-day Mandan, North Dakota, and accomplished its goal. The western survey began near Bozeman, Montana, but never arrived at the rendezvous point because it reportedly faced stiffer resistance and its escort was poorly commanded. This failure delayed completion of the Northern Pacific transcontinental line by a decade. According to Lubetkin, the Northern Pacific project drained the resources of financier Jay Cooke, causing the collapse of his banking firm, which in turn started the financial crisis known as the Panic of 1873.

Before Custer presents a frontier America that was not a particularly heroic place. The editor states that newspapers were "often factually inaccurate" and prone to gross exaggeration (p. 29), the country was full of "disreputable Indian agent[s]" (p. 22), cronyism and alcoholism were commonplace among army field commanders, poor business practices were the norm, and racism was part and parcel of daily activities. On the opposing side, famous Lakota leaders Gall and Sitting Bull also had human failings.

While American Indians are not the main subjects of this work, they certainly affected the railroad surveys' outcomes. Lubetkin clearly understands the interrelationships among various tribes and bands. He judiciously uses modern conventions when referring to various Indian groups involved, such as Lakota and Dakota instead of "Sioux." As the editor admittedly lacks Indian sources, he thoughtfully attempts to account for the movements of the Indians who confronted the two surveys.

Before Custer is a worthwhile volume. Lubetkin introduces and vets the sources ably. His introduction and editorial comments are well constructed, and his prose is pleasing. The work is a worthy addition to the libraries of railroad and western military historians alike and could serve as a good resource for undergraduate research papers.

KURT E. KINBACHER
Chadron State College
Chadron, Nebr.

Motoring West, Volume 1: Automobile Pioneers, 1900–1909

Edited and with an Introduction by Peter J. Blodgett. Norman, Okla.: Arthur H. Clark Co., 2015. 360pp. Illus. Figs. Maps. Ind. Cloth, $34.95.

Peter J. Blodgett brings together a broad range of sources detailing the rise of automobile culture in the trans-Mississippi West. The first of a planned series, this volume includes Blodgett's series introduction, which analyzes not only the increasing use of the automobile in the early decades of the 1900s but also the growth of businesses to meet "the needs of both car and driver" (p. 19). As the editor points out, "The resulting infrastructure of automotively oriented attractions and services had helped establish tourism as a crucial underpinning of the entire region's economy" (p. 19). Blodgett's introduction to this opening volume examines the proliferation of travel writing in the first decade of the 1900s, a development that further encouraged the growth of automobile tourism.

The materials in this work come from a variety of sources, including articles in magazines such as *Outing*, *Scientific American*, and *Harper's Weekly*. The editor's chronological arrangement of the sources gives readers a sense of the advances in automotive technology along with the evolution of the automobile and tourist service industries. Editorial introductions to each source provide pertinent background information and identify key themes.

The collection illustrates the spirit of adventure needed to undertake an automobile journey in the trans-Mississippi West during

the first decade of the twentieth century. Many areas lacked passable roads, and drivers needed everything from spare tires to a full toolbox and a block and tackle in order to traverse the vast spaces of the American West. Taking road conditions into consideration, several articles were dedicated solely to discussing the correct preparations for an automobile journey, telling readers what to pack and even how to pack it. A number of sources also recorded the reactions of both people and animals as they encountered automobiles for the first time. Most memorable, though, are the brilliant pictures the individual authors painted of the sights they saw and the people they met in their western journeys.

Several themes emerge as one advances through the volume. The ideas of independence, leisure, and adventure resonate throughout the collection, reminding the reader that the automobile gave motorists a heretofore unheard-of sense of independence in travel. They could travel at their leisure, stop where they pleased, and visit areas of the country where railroads did not run. This independence led to a sense of adventure, in that people could choose their own destinations and spend time on paths less traveled. The quest to discover ever-new and more-remote places opened up much of the trans-Mississippi West to tourism.

Taken together, Blodgett's sources create an intriguing firsthand account of early automobile travels and the development of the tourism industry in the trans-Mississippi West. This volume will appeal to readers interested in the history of automotive technology, tourism, and the West.

KELLY KIRK
Black Hills State University
Spearfish, S.Dak.

Charles M. Russell: Photographing the Legend

Larry Len Peterson. Foreword by Brian W. Dippie. Charles M. Russell Center Series on Art and Photography of the American West. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014. 328pp. Illus. Notes. Biblio. Ind. Cloth, $60.00.

No artist of the American West is more iconic than Charles M. ("Charlie") Russell, the beloved "Cowboy Painter" of Montana. In this gorgeous new book, Larry Len Peterson adds to the biographical scholarship on Russell by recounting the details of his life through photographs of the artist. Peterson's unique approach relies on these images and not Russell's own impressive body of work to tell the painter's life story. Few Russell paintings illustrate the text. Instead, Peterson includes studio portraits of Russell in cowboy garb, candid vacation snapshots taken by his wife Nancy Russell, and consciously posed photographs designed to help build the legend around the man.

Although some of these photographs have been reproduced elsewhere, such a comprehensive collection has never before been gathered. The images show Russell growing from boy to young cowboy and then maturing into an internationally known recorder of the western scene. Conversely, they reveal the artist fading rapidly as his health deteriorated towards the end of his life. The well-researched text weaves details of Russell's life together with the history of photography itself, paying special attention to the medium's importance in the developing West.

At times, reading *Photographing the Legend* feels like paging through an older relative's photograph album. With his straight bangs and sash, Russell is always an easy figure to pick out. The significance of each person shown with him, however, begins to blur as the book unfolds. Some key Russell associates, including author Frank Linderman, are introduced several times, which leads to an occasional feeling of redundancy.

These faults are unfortunate byproducts of the book's greatest strength, however. Peterson includes a daunting number of photographs indeed, but it is only through an exhaustive study that he is able to draw conclusions that would not be possible in a smaller-scale survey. He takes note of how often Russell was shown on horseback or working in his log cabin studio, as well as how often the artist sat for formal portraits when traveling. The author also considers images that readers might expect to see but that are not found in archives. For instance, there are no images showing Russell in any of the numerous art galleries he visited while promoting his work. Peterson suggests that this omission was likely a conscious choice by Nancy Russell, who knew that audiences preferred to think of Charlie Russell as an "untutored genius" at odds with the contemporary art world rather than a sophisticated world traveler (p. 115). While Peterson agrees with other scholars who believe that Nancy was the driving force in developing Russell's public persona, he argues uniquely that Charlie was a willing and sometimes equal participant.

Peterson relies upon the work of important Russell scholars, but his prose becomes slightly plodding when he tips a metaphorical hat in their direction. His style is also somewhat romantic, which is particularly striking in a book that examines the mythology surrounding the iconic Charlie Russell. Regardless, this wonderful addition to any Russell library is an important contribution to the study of western American art. This book is as rich for researchers as it is delightful for Charlie Russell fans.

KATE ELLIOTT
Luther College
Decorah, Iowa

Owen Wister and the West
Gary Scharnhorst. Oklahoma Western Biographies Series. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015. 280pp. Illus. Bibliographic essay. Ind. Cloth, $24.95.

Literary scholar Gary Scharnhorst's biography sheds new light on the novelist and short story writer Owen Wister, an eastern elitist who "paradoxically" helped create the cowboy folk hero (p. 6). The author's goal is to demonstrate that "the West was the crucible in which Wister imaginatively tested and expressed his political opinions" (p. 3). In other words, the Philadelphia-born Wister used his vision of the West to develop his own brand of social and political criticism. Wister's approval of Jim Crow in the South, support for the lynching of criminals, anti-feminism, hostility toward immigrants and non-Anglo-Saxons, and other views are in evidence throughout his famous portrayals of the West. During the 1894 Pullman strike, his initial sympathy for striking railway workers quickly soured when he was personally inconvenienced. The strike, Scharnhorst contends, focused Wister's own upper-class prejudices and strengthened his opposition to foreign immigration and organized labor. These attitudes heightened Wister's respect for Anglo-Saxon cowboys and led him to depict them as heroes. As he declared in an essay published in *Harper's Weekly*, "They work hard, they play hard, and they don't go on strikes" (p. 76).

Unlike previous biographers, Scharnhorst focuses on the connections between the tenderfoot Wister's experiences *in* and writings *about* the West. Wister kept a highly detailed journal of his observations that provided story ideas when he began writing about the region in the 1890s. Most of his tales are based at least in part on stories and anecdotes told to him by military officers, cowboys, local officials, and others he met throughout the West. Wister used the details he recorded from these encounters to fill his writings with vivid descriptions of the region's landscapes, towns, sounds, and even smells. He also drew

on journal material in his portrayals of events such as the Johnson County War in Wyoming. Some of his fictional characters, including the cowboy Lin McLean and the archetypal villain Trampas, were modeled on individuals Wister had either encountered or heard about. Dozens of colorful incidents made their way from his journal to his published stories. For example, the classic line, "When you call me that, *smile!*" from Wister's magnum opus *The Virginian* (1902) was adapted from a story he had heard from future Wyoming governor Amos W. Barber (p. 139).

Scharnhorst's research relied on valuable collections of Wister's papers held by the Library of Congress and the American Heritage Center at the University of Wyoming. The book includes a judicious bibliographic essay and a detailed chronology of Wister's western experiences and writings, but it lacks endnotes and has some other weaknesses. The account of the adaptation of *The Virginian* from a novel into a play seems lengthy and overly detailed, but the author inexplicably waits until the book's conclusion to explore Wister's "modern progressive" stance on environmentalism (p. 218) and his efforts to lure female readers to *The Virginian*. Both matters warrant attention earlier in the text. These points are minor, however. On the whole, Scharnhorst has made an important contribution to our understanding of the motives and methods of a key shaper of western and cowboy mythology.

DAVID A. SMITH
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Sask.

Laura Ingalls Wilder: American Writer on the Prairie

Sallie Ketcham. Routledge Historical Americans Series. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2015. 180pp. Notes. Biblio. Ind. Paper, $34.95.

This slim volume offers an accessible and accurate biography of Laura Ingalls Wilder (1867–1957) peppered with detailed historical and cultural context. It also provides a choice selection of original documents to supplement the narrative.

The first six chapters outline the story of Wilder's life, with a chapter for each of her first four decades. Ketcham's narrative constructs a portrait of life in rural Wisconsin during the 1860s, with attention to the origins of Wilder's parents, Caroline and Charles Ingalls. She also provides more detail about the Ingalls family's experiences in Missouri and Kansas. The 1870s chapter details the family's hardest times in Minnesota and Iowa and outlines their move to Dakota Territory.

The story of Wilder's teenage years, her marriage to Almanzo Wilder, and the early days of their life together as homesteaders takes up the 1880s, and the 1890s chapter charts the couple's final move to Missouri, where they settled. The fifth chapter rushes through the rest of Wilder's life and her transition from farmer's wife to recognized author, with attendant detail, while the last chapter reflects on the literary, historical, and cultural legacies of the *Little House* series of books. A selection of original documents ranging from a 1918 interview to a club speech given in 1936 supplements the biography and offers readers tantalizing glimpses of the "real" Laura in her own words, as well as insight into the mind of her daughter and literary collaborator Rose Wilder Lane.

The best feature of this book is the historical context Ketcham provides for Wilder's journeys. The discussion of the Ingalls family's year squatting on Osage Reserve land in Kansas, for example, offers detail about the Osage Indians and the politics of the period. Ketcham's analysis of the young Wilder family's move to Missouri in 1894 is grounded in the economics of the period, especially the Panic of 1893. Ketcham reveals numerous details about the Ingalls and Wilder families, sprinkling them through the text as appropriate—and this approach is all the more valuable because readers will not want to skim through the text lest they miss something.

Ketcham provides a thoughtful discussion about the legacies of the *Little House* series,

with allusions to the struggles contemporary scholars have with Wilder's treatment of American Indians and apparent support for Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis. She also discusses the entanglement of fact with fiction inherent in Wilder's legacy, immersed as it is today in television culture and tourism.

Wilder scholars and fans alike will enjoy the rich detail and selections from her original work in the text. Ketcham's skill as a children's writer shows in the beautifully descriptive detail she adds in addressing the contemporary pilgrimages made by fans of Wilder's work, and she makes an excellent final point: "The vestiges of Wilder's lost world still remain, but the people who come to see and experience them all have one thing in common—they come for the love of Laura" (p. 118).

AMY L. LAUTERS
Minnesota State University
Mankato, Minn.