

Varmints and Victims: Predator Control in the American West

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stand. Finally, two photos that Wetzel believes are actually of the same person are reprinted in his book. Readers can draw their own conclusions, but to me the two men do not look remotely like each other.

In the late nineteenth century, people could still disappear for months and even years. Despite the proliferation of newspapers and government records, there is often limited information for reconstructing biographies, with available sources often containing inaccuracies. Add to this deliberate disambiguation, as many people changed important details in their identities. Ambiguities in Schlatter's biography resemble those surrounding chiropractic's founder, Daniel David Palmer, whose life also presents a tantalizing but broken paper trail. In fact, several aspects of Schlatter's story resonate with the early chiropractic movement, where boosters of the profession interwove themes of health, commerce, and entertainment.

I enjoyed reading *The Vanishing Messiah*, for the narrative style is engaging. And, in fact, I enjoyed the interpretive questions presented by the task of reviewing it. Although he probably has not definitively solved the Schlatter mystery, David Wetzel effectively shares the joy of intellectual discovery.

Varmints and Victims: Predator Control in the American West, by Frank Van Nuys. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015. xiv, 338 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 hardcover.

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Iowans are not used to thinking of themselves in relation to wolves, bears, cougars, and even coyotes, but as author Frank Van Nuys explains in *Varmints and Victims: Predator Control in the American West*, the history of those animals' extirpation and their recent recovery reflects the process of western settlement, especially in the Midwest. Van Nuys's study, an update of Thomas R. Dunlap's *Saving America's Wildlife: Ecology and the American Mind*, provides a deep look at the transformation of wildlife management through predator control that is as "vital to the region's incorporation into the American mainstream of ideologies, economics, politics, and culture as any other phenomenon" (4).

Drawing on a wide array of source material, particularly the manuscript collections of key wildlife biologists, including Stokely J. Ligon, Olaus J. Murie, Sigurd Olson, and Stanley P. Young, and state and federal wildlife agency records, Van Nuys narrates the history of predator control in the region west of the Mississippi River in seven chapters that

predominately focus on the twentieth century. Local and state efforts in the nineteenth century to eradicate predators, specifically wolves, grizzly bears, cougars, and coyotes, that threatened the economic production of livestock, gave way to more effective systematic federally funded and federally managed cooperative efforts. Between 1915 and 1930, the era Van Nuys terms the “‘golden age’ of predator control,” the Bureau of Biological Survey policed predators as killers bereft of moral and economic value (52). So essential was the bureau’s work to the economic and environmental interests of early conservationists that even Aldo Leopold “strongly supported the federal government’s approach to robust predator control as a vital tool in realizing his goal of saving deer and other popular game animals” (57).

By the mid-twentieth century, however, the use of poisons such as strychnine, cyanide, and Compound 1080 generated increasing concern about the “biologically unsound and exceedingly dangerous” effects of total eradication (129). In addition, the emerging field of ecology improved scientists’ understanding of the trophic relationship predators had within ecosystems. New concepts such as Paul Errington’s “economy of nature” along with the Department of the Interior’s report on wildlife, known as the Leopold Report, highlighted the importance of predation within natural systems and sparked a reform movement that generated sweeping wildlife protections culminating in the Endangered Species Act of 1973. But, as with the rest of the environmental legislation passed in the 1970s, the Sagebrush Rebellion and subsequent Wise Use Movement during the Reagan Administration polarized predator control and wildlife restoration, especially wolf reintroduction, grizzly bear preservation, cougar expansion, and coyote tolerance.

Van Nuys reminds readers that although most Americans do not have to think about these predators, “passionate minorities, whether committed to ensuring that the ‘beast gods’ will always be around or wishing to do all in their power to visit destruction on the damned ‘varmints’” keep predator control at the forefront (256). His words are timely, considering that in the last decade, wolves, bears, cougars, and the ever-present coyote have been the subject of news stories throughout Iowa and the Midwest. Predator control continues to require our attention, and Van Nuys’s work is a timely reminder of the history of our relationship with these animals.

Farmers Helping Famers: The Rise of the Farm and Home Bureaus, 1914–1935, by Nancy K. Berlage. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016. ix, 308 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$48.00 hardcover.