

Prairie Republic: The Political Culture of Dakota Territory, 1879–1889

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Steele, Federal commander of the Little Rock Expedition, was a veteran of the Battle of Pea Ridge (155).

Civil War Arkansas 1863 is the first modern attempt at a monograph of operations in the Arkansas River valley. The book makes a significant contribution to Iowa Civil War historiography, as most of the Federal units that participated in the campaigns discussed are from the upper Midwest, mainly Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Missouri. Iowa troops played key roles in all of the major campaigns in Arkansas, but especially at Arkansas Post and Helena.

Prairie Republic: The Political Culture of Dakota Territory, 1879–1889, by Jon K. Lauck. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010. xx, 281 pp. Illustrations, map, notes, bibliographical note, index. \$32.95 cloth.

Reviewer David A. Walker is professor of history at the University of Northern Iowa and regularly teaches courses on the American West. He is a coauthor of the *Biographical Directory of American Territorial Governors* (1984).

The tone of early twenty-first-century partisan political action and commentary is frequently in the background of this study of late nineteenth-century political culture. Jon Lauck has a personal stake in the topic: raised on a farm near Madison, South Dakota, he left the state to earn a Ph.D. in history from the University of Iowa and a law degree from the University of Minnesota, and then returned to practice law and teach at South Dakota State University. Lauck is currently senior advisor to U.S. Senator John Thune (R-SD).

The author's clearly stated intention is to counter the new western history's focus "on episodes of terror and destruction and images of conquest and savagery" (5). A Turnerian, Lauck argues that there is a "collective need to take American democratic institutions more seriously" (xvi). He seeks to provide balance and complexity to the story and to gain recognition of a genuinely democratic movement in Dakota Territory. His settlers "vigorously embraced American democratic practices and centuries-old republican tradition . . . personal virtue . . . commonwealth over personal gain, . . . and the agrarian tradition" (5).

The central theme repeated through the book is that southern Dakota Territory east of the Missouri River (he uses the broader term Dakota Territory despite differences from the northern and western sections) was fundamentally an extension of the Midwest, the major source of Dakota immigrants. Dakota Territory's founders were agents of civic responsibility (republicanism) and Protestant Christianity influenced by the American Revolution and Civil War. Following the massive immigration of the Dakota Boom, fully under way by 1883,

residents grew increasingly unhappy with corruption among appointed territorial officials and minimal local control inherent in the territorial system.

Lauck writes, "The republican faith of these midwestern immigrants formed the bedrock of Dakota Territory's political culture" (9). This was visibly reflected in local institutions, cultural activities, and events leading to statehood. Public education emphasized civic virtue, American history and literature, the Constitution, and democratic traditions. Protestant Christianity, dominated by Congregationalists and Episcopalians, was another powerful influence on Dakota settlers. Patriotic parades and celebrations along with the influence of the Grand Army of the Republic contributed to the cultural environment.

Clearly, the most visible example of Dakota settlers' commitment to American democratic ideals was reflected in three constitutional conventions that met in Sioux Falls during September 1883, September 1885, and July 1889. With emphasis on the precedent-setting 1883 meeting, Lauck concludes that delegates did not pursue "revolutionary" policies, including the most contentious issues of prohibition and woman suffrage. Instead they emphasized limiting government power, denouncing the territorial system, ending corruption, promoting agrarian ideals based on small yeoman farmers, and recognizing the importance of Protestant Christianity.

Creation of two states resulted from passage of the Omnibus Bill of 1889. The primary stumbling block was congressional Democrats' fear of adding more Republican senators and representatives. Additional opposition came from the Northern Pacific Railroad Company, which dominated the northern reaches of the territory and whose leadership feared tighter regulation from a state legislature. Territorial Governor Nehemiah Ordway (1880–1884) often appeared as an agent of the Northern Pacific and thus opposed statehood. According to Lauck, Ordway epitomized the plunder and corruption of appointed officials and revealed contempt for republican ideals. Evidence of corruption led President Chester Arthur to replace Ordway with Gilbert Pierce (not Louis Church as Lauck indicates on page 107).

Lauck offers an alternative interpretation that challenges Howard Lamar's classic *Dakota Territory, 1861–1889: A Study of Frontier Politics* (1956). Lamar concluded that "an elite" controlled all three constitutional conventions and that delegates were dismissive of corporate and railroad regulations and failed to adopt "radical innovations." Lauck shows that rather than being controlled by an "oligarchy," the statehood process reflected economic and social diversity among convention delegates and widespread public support for the final docu-

ments. Territorial voters approved all three constitutions by margins that increased from 29 to 91 percent. Lauck counters Lamar's criticism of the delegates' rejection of reforms such as prohibition and woman suffrage, arguing that the action "was primarily based on cultural objections and pragmatism, not the economic self-interest of statehood advocates" (135).

Lauck readily admits support of early twenty-first-century conservative politics in his approach to scholarly interpretation. Thus it is difficult to fully accept his claim that "I organized the book based on my reaction to what I found" after "perusing the historical sources" (22). Yet this study is built on a thorough reading of primary as well as secondary sources: newspapers as well as governmental, organizational, and personal documents. The publisher provided an interesting set of contemporary photographs and maps. Unfortunately, several elements may confuse readers. Lauck implies that the Great Sioux Reservation was created in 1877 rather than in 1868. The map on page 12, labeled "the railroad network in Dakota Territory" in 1889, shows only eastern South Dakota, falsely implying that there were no railroads elsewhere in the territory. Despite these minor quibbles, this is a well-written, thoughtful analysis of the political culture in one of the largest U.S. territories.

The State We're In: Reflections on Minnesota History, edited by Annette Atkins and Deborah L. Miller. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2010. viii, 337 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$24.95 paper.

Reviewer Marvin Bergman has edited the *Annals of Iowa* since 1987. He is also the editor of the *Iowa History Reader* (1996, 2008) and a coeditor of *The Biographical Dictionary of Iowa* (2008).

The State We're In reflects the diverse approaches to state history that are possible in the present environment — from a close literary and historical analysis of some early accounts of hunting expeditions by Henry Hastings Sibley, later to become one of Minnesota's most influential citizens and its first governor (there's a similar analysis of prognostications of Minnesota's future by Sibley and two other prominent Minnesotans in the 1850s), to a memoir of a flood in Marshall in 1957. There is even a wonderful piece of short fiction that ends the volume, though it's not clear whether it is set in the past, and its setting vaguely somewhere in Minnesota is not important to the story's development. This diversity makes for an apt celebration of Minnesota's sesquicentennial — the volume originated in a conference held in 2008, the