

## Kansas, a History

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## THE ANNALS OF IOWA

(104-15), and the impact of each activity on the land and on the survey system, and vice-versa. She closes her second section with a discussion of the functional impact of the surveying system on the land and its people. Here she considers political boundary lines, especially the township and county, and state and the system of the sale of the public domain. The checkerboard image contrasted with the many irregularities that the author identifies and discusses, the woodlot, early agriculture, fencing, and roads, all reflected the first survey lines. A shorter section on land and water management in the twentieth century closes the book.

Johnson concludes that for the Upper Mississippi Hill Country, the "forty" was "an effective modular unit and a formative influence." (220) Given the uneven nature of the land, the effect was often awkward, but the survey lines remained on the land in the form of roads, fence lines, and towns. In the end, the rectangular survey provided an "orderly workable basis of allotment." (221)

The great contribution of this volume—aside from its multitude of references and detailed descriptions—is Johnson's reaffirmation of the importance of our eyes in making geographical and historical judgments. In an era of impersonal numbers and an exegesis of documentary materials, she reminds us that ordinances and legislation have modified the face of the land. She invites our examination of the world around us with a view to identifying and analyzing their modification. We would be well advised to follow her lead.

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*Kansas, A History*, by Kenneth S. Davis. New York: W. W. Norton, and Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1976. pp. xiii, 226. Illustrations, maps, notes, suggestions for further reading, index. \$9.95.

People who profess to know about such things will tell you that real state patriotism thrives today in only three states: Texas (of course), Alaska (understandably, because of its isolation) and Kansas. Why in the world Kansas, asks the non-Kansan; and in his "personal overture" to *Kansas; A Bicentennial History*, Kenneth Davis ponders this question as he relates anecdotes of expatriate Kansans returning with relief and even thanksgiving to their homeland.

## Book Reviews

Davis does not answer the question in this engrossing little book, and it may be just as well that he does not really make the attempt. The nature of such loyalty is probably too sublime to be properly treated in a general history of the state: Kansas patriotism will have to continue to be a mystery to Iowans and other foreigners.

Nevertheless, Davis's study is a welcome addition to existing Kansas historiography. It is one of the fifty volumes of the American Association of State and Local History's "The States and the Nation" publishing venture (one of the more substantial Bicentennial projects). The book nicely compliments rather than replaces the other two recent general histories of Kansas, Robert W. Richmond's *Kansas: Land of Contrasts* (1974) and William F. Zornow's *Kansas: A History of the Jayhawk State* (1957).

Davis is a writer, editor, historian, free-lance journalist, and native Kansan who has produced a personal interpretive essay rather than a conventional text. The reader interested in quickly locating specific names or dates, or in constructing a framework of facts and events, will continue to turn to Richmond and Zornow. What Davis has given us is an interpretation of Kansas by a man of liberal political sympathies. He deplores the fact that the Kansas-led Populist movement in the 1890s failed to fuse labor and rural discontent into a new political movement, one that would lead Kansas and the nation into the urban-industrial twentieth century in a way that would have ensured success to the "overall American enterprise of making men and women truly whole, truly free." (p. 154)

During the thirties Davis was a young Kansan, one who admired FDR and the New Deal and fretted because Kansas, far from being the spearhead of reform as it had been in the Populist and Progressive days of glory, was reluctantly backing into New Deal modernity while being led by men (like Governor Alf Landon) who accepted large parts of Roosevelt's program while pretending they were doing nothing of the sort. Kansas history is admirable to Davis when it embodies the "light strand of democratic ideas, sustained by the moral logic of the Golden Rule," (p. 21) and reprehensible when, as the Progressive surge falters after 1918, it seeks only blue law moral reforms epitomized by that perennial Kansas political hobbyhorse, the liquor issue.

The fact that the great majority of the book is concerned with the pre-1918 period, when Kansas was periodically exploding with new social and political passions, may reflect the author's own passion. Or, of course, it may merely reflect the fact that in the last sixty years the role of the states in the American political system has been largely transformed. What were rather autonomous components of a federal

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system consciously designed in the eighteenth century, are now chiefly administrative subdivisions of the federal government in a centralized system that, like Topsy, has "just growed," over the last half century or so. Or it may be that recent Kansas history is neither particularly interesting or particularly significant.

In the process of interpreting, Davis reinforces that strand of American historiography which traces much in the American character to the New England Puritans' determination to reform the world according to divinely ordained precepts. These precepts are praised here when they inspire a drive for the abolition of slavery or for pure food and drug laws, and deplored when they appear only to concern themselves with the citizen's right to buy liquor by the drink.

Now an ideological approach to a general history is not merely permissible; it is essential to have someone undertake it from time to time to give the writing of history some of the color and emotion that makes life past and present more than a simple chronology. To make good use of the book the reader need not subscribe to any or all of Davis's political proclivities; he need only be aware of them.

The book is written in a journalistic style which makes it lively reading without detracting from its serious purpose. There are, however, places where scholarly buttressing of an allegation would have been welcome. This reviewer, for example, would have liked to know why Davis knows that the small band of farmers doing verbal battle with William Allen White, the state's most famous journalist, "easily demolished his argument." (p. 165) And the book suffers from an inadequate index. To take only one example, E. Haldeman-Julius, a Kansas publisher of national importance who is discussed on pages 188-89, should be found in the index, but is not.

But whether the reader agrees with Davis's judgment that Kansans of recent vintage have too often become mired in "petty bourgeois mediocrity," or whether one believes (as many Kansans may) that what Davis disparages is, rather, the backbone of virtue sustaining the republic, the book will be of interest to anyone concerned with Kansas history in particular or with the part the Midwest in general has played in the evolution of the United States.

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