

## Garden City: Dreams in a Kansas Town

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tives. The citizens of Grand Junction eventually voted to build a municipal water system. In the process they turned their backs on the original town company and on the independent water company, which was founded as an intermediate solution to the supply problem. Underwood argues that the conflict over water illustrates the process of maturation and growing confidence in the future of Grand Junction. It also illustrates some of the joys and stresses of town life as residents argued about their future and the competing visions they held for their town.

*Town Building on the Colorado Frontier* is not about persons but rather about processes. As such it likely will not interest general readers who want to know the story of Grand Junction and what it was like to live there. For those who wish to know how Grand Junction fits into the growing literature on town development, however, the book has much to say. Underwood develops several themes that are similar to those developed by other historians who have analyzed communities like Jacksonville, Illinois; Grass Valley, California; Seattle; or Trempeleau County, Wisconsin. The similarities she has found, Underwood hopes, will help to create the substantial generalizations necessary "to broaden our understanding of urbanization in the late nineteenth century" (xix).

*Garden City: Dreams in a Kansas Town*, by Holly Hope. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988. xv, 175 pp. Illustrations, maps. \$15.95 cloth.

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"Leaving home" has left a deep cultural imprint on middle western society. Indeed, middle western literature of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries is almost preoccupied with the theme. Hamlin Garland, in *Main-Travelled Roads*, wrote of sons and daughters who left the farm only to return guilt-ridden, like Garland himself, to visit friends and relatives on their run-down farms. Central figures in Willa Cather's novels from Jim Burden to Claude Wheeler to Lucy Gayheart all leave home. Cather's characters reflected her own life. Living in Greenwich Village, she became wistfully nostalgic about a lost rural Nebraska world. Even Garrison Keillor, by forsaking his region, has transformed himself from the wry storyteller to the glib, urbane sophisticate.

Holly Hope's exploration of her lost dreams in Garden City, Kansas, renews the theme of exile and return. In part history, in part autobiography, in part journalistic inquiry of modern-day rural life, the

work is a curious combination of Hope's disillusionment with life in small-town America as a youth and an exploration of creative folks who have remained to etch out their niche in western Kansas. The first half of the book chronicles the growth of Garden City and Hope's coming of age there. The town's development, as its name suggests, involved—and continues to involve—the illusory attempt to make an eden out of a semiarid wilderness. Like the city in which she lived, Hope's relationship with the area is fraught with ambiguity. If the "personal and inexplicable" beauty of the region elicits a "longing" (22), she nonetheless has chosen to live elsewhere. That choice itself was informed by a sense of the social barrenness of adolescence that paralleled the environmental aridity of the small town. Amid the immense cultural change in the sixties, Hope's high school years were frustrated by the stultifying limitations of "attitude, expectation, ambition" (68) for young women in constrained circles. After high school, she fled.

That other creative people continue to live in the town, however, facilitated Hope's reconciliation with Garden City. In the second half of the book, she describes her return to visit those whose presence "sparked a sort of cultural renaissance" (81) in the area in the 1970s and 1980s. Vignettes portraying an ecologically informed young farmer, a creative dance teacher, a dedicated Chicano attorney, and a group of intrepid public radio advocates underscore the creativity that does exist in the small town. Hope implies that this renaissance was due in part to the economic growth of the region fueled by widespread irrigation—yet another quixotic attempt to make western Kansas into a garden. Yet since many of these people were former schoolmates and relatives, one wonders (and fails to get an answer) why high school was so monotonous for Hope to begin with. Did her trials of adolescence result from life in a small town or rather were they symptomatic of a typically troubling life stage, especially during the sixties?

These doubts notwithstanding, the book is successful because of its unusual combination of wistful reminiscence in the first part of the book and insightful exchange in the second. Despite Hope's discontent, readers will appreciate the evocative, nostalgic images of small-town life. Despite Hope's exile, her portrayals of those who stayed belie the common belief that the small town is a creative wasteland. As such, the book will appeal to those who continue to live in small towns and others, like myself, who live thousands of miles away, yet have a sense that the small town in which they grew up is still "home."

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