

New Mexico Historical Review

Volume 19 | Number 4

Article 7

10-1-1944

book Reviews

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr>

Recommended Citation

. "book Reviews." *New Mexico Historical Review* 19, 4 (1944). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol19/iss4/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in *New Mexico Historical Review* by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu, lsloane@salud.unm.edu, sarahrk@unm.edu.

BOOK REVIEWS

Diary and Letters of Josiah Gregg. Book II, Excursions in Mexico and California, 1847-1850. Edited by Maurice Garland Fulton with an Introduction by Paul Horgan. (University of Oklahoma Press, 1944. Copyright, pp. 396, with Appendix and Index. Illustrated. \$4.00.)

Volume I of the *Diary and Letters of Josiah Gregg*, published three years ago, gave details of Gregg's career from his retirement from the Santa Fé trade in 1840 to the eve of the Battle of Buena Vista in 1847. It was a sequel to Gregg's famous "Commerce of the Prairies" and formed the transition from the life intimately connected with Santa Fé, and the Santa Fé Trail to the broader scientific and exploratory career in Mexico and the Pacific Coast, ending in Gregg's tragic death from starvation and exhaustion after the discovery of Humboldt Bay.

Though somewhat disconnected, and interspersed with tedious data of meteorological and geographic observations of little interest at this day, the diary in the main continues exciting in its story of the war with Mexico, its observations on conditions in the neighboring republic, along the Pacific Coast during the days of the Gold Rush and its account of the primitive region north of San Francisco. In these years there were also revisits to the States as far as the National Capitol where he called on the president of whom he wrote: "I was so astonished at the evident weakness of Mr. Polk, that I then felt like I would not accept anything at his hands—and departed accordingly. It is remarkable that a man so short of intellect should have been placed in the executive chair! But, our surprise is diminished when we reflect that he was, virtually, not elected by the people, but by a caucus at Baltimore, who rather desire a 'creature' than talents, to serve designing politicians as a tool. Really, it savours illy for the stability of our institutions that a set of demagogues should point out to the people, for their president, a man never dreamed of before, and that these should so implicitly obey the will of the caucus, as to elect without discussion, the man they were bid to vote for!"

It is this querulousness, and criticism of high and low, which runs throughout the Diary increasing its interest and possibly arousing resentment such as even to this day is the reaction of those in the Spanish Southwest reading for the first time *Commerce of the Prairies*.

Paul Horgan, in a delightful biographical characterization of Gregg, which precedes the Diary in this second volume, takes a milder, and perhaps, juster view of Gregg's continual fault finding, and writes, for instance:

"Gregg had some just and sensible remarks to make on the subject of military reprisals against enemy nations. General Taylor had issued some particularly sharp orders, and Gregg could see, at the time, how cruel and unjust they were. He took justice and reason with him wherever he went, or tried to, despite the unreliability of his health and his resultant capacity for indignation, which was at times boundless. But if he became indignant on his own account more often than was quite dignified, he also spared no wrath upon those who persecuted others. In his accounts of the army in Mexico, and of people on the move generally, we get his ethical flavor at its best." As a matter of fact, savagery ascribed by Gregg to Texan and Missouri troops in Mexico is a blot upon their victorious invasion of the neighboring republic, excusable only because similar incidents were ascribed to the enemy.

"Observing the Battle of Buena Vista" is a detailed account of one of the notable victories of General Taylor's campaign in northern Mexico. One gets the impression that Gregg would have fought a better battle and won a greater victory had he been in command. He writes in his Diary: "The Mexican cavalry (Lancers) after approaching within about seventy yards halted; at which our cavalry all fired their carbines, but without killing a man—which emboldened the enemy to make the charge; otherwise they would probably have approached no nearer. This demonstrated what I had already thought—that volunteer cavalry should not be left to fight on horseback."

"With Doniphan's Missourians" continues criticisms of American troops and their commanders. He is certain that credit given and bestowed upon Doniphan belonged to others. He had a personal quarrel and encounter with General Wool which at the present day would probably have resulted in court martial.

A year in Saltillo, December 1847, to December 1848, practicing medicine, was the happiest in Gregg's career. In April, 1848, his practice amounted to "between four and five hundred dollars." In May he averaged more than \$20 per day. However, he asserts, that if he charged as did a neighboring doctor, his "practice would be worth over \$5,000 a month."

On a visit to Mexico City, he describes a fiesta and religious procession. "The spectacle (in the church) was at once appalling, amusing and ridiculous in the extreme," he writes. "The whole company (of the Matachinas) were in a kneeling posture, and engaged in saying their prayers, to all appearance most vehemently—accompanied with sobs, cries and even tears trickling down the cheeks of many—well we might add 'weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth'—crying with all the earnestness of a child. To add to the strange variety of the scene, there were many babes whose cries were mingled with those of the men and women, and reminded one of the mewling of cats." He continues: "Poor, miserable creatures! Nobody demonstrates more fidelity or rather fanaticism, in their religion than they! But what is it at last but idolatry?" Thus Gregg, despite his scientific and professional attainments, completely misunderstood the character and motives of others.

"Tour to California" and final portions of the diary are less vivid but continue querulous. Approaching San Francisco he writes "I had the misfortune to be seasick nearly the whole voyage. What most annoyed me perhaps of any other one thing was the incessant smoking of some of the passengers." Personally, Gregg "never drank, didn't like it, was temperate in both food and drink." Gregg was a lonely man, a dreamer, a wanderer, seeking new lands and engag-

ing in new enterprises. "A reproduction of a daguerreotype taken in New York about 1844, shows a handsome young man, of sensitive, melancholy but stubborn mien." Horgan points out that the fatal flaw in his character was the lack of a sense of humor; "nowhere was there a healing gust of laughter."

Maurice Garland Fulton of the New Mexico Military Institute at Roswell, who found the original journal in the possession of Claude Hardewicke (a descendant of Josiah Gregg's brother, John Gregg), has performed an admirable task in editing the diary. It is an important contribution not only to the history of the West but also of the times a century ago.—P.A.F.W.

The Boom of the Eighties in Southern California. By Glenn S. Dumke. (Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.; 1944. xi 313 pp., illus., end-map, bibliog., index. \$3.75.)

The author reports only two writers who have previously dealt with this subject: one, an excellent but unpublished manuscript at Occidental College; the other, a book-length description but "an uproarious lampooning of the antics of the boomers." Dr. Dumke calls his own work "an attempt to tell the full story, as depicted in public documents, in newspapers and other contemporary accounts, and in the mass of literature on the history of California." (p. ix) Although embarrassed by the plethora of source materials, he encountered some gaps in important phases of the study; nevertheless he has succeeded in producing a volume which will be of absorbing interest to numerous pioneers who had some part in bringing about the marvellous transformation of southern California as well as to countless others who, as visitors, have since roamed through those parts.

For a hundred years (from 1769), the economy of southern California remained chiefly pastoral. After the American Occupation and the gold rush of 1849, many sought to change over from livestock to agricultural pursuits: vineyards and citrus groves, wheat, barley and similar

crops, walnuts and almonds, apples, peaches, figs and other fruits. The olive industry also got a secure foothold in the south. Yet, "the immediate cause of the great boom is generally conceded to be the rate war between the Southern Pacific and the Santa Fé railroads, which occurred in March of 1887." (p. 17)

In this connection the author has perhaps relied on some early "prospectus" rather than facts, for the Santa Fé railroad did not reach Albuquerque in 1873 (p. 22),—the truth is that the rails did not enter New Mexico at Ratón Pass until late in 1878. Construction was completed to Albuquerque in April 1880, and to Deming on the Southern Pacific on March 10, 1881. Even then, for many years, the "connection" at Deming for through travelers was a euphemism; as late as 1910 the writer recalls being jolted in a bus for a long mile across town from one station to the other. By June 1881, the Santa Fé line did reach El Paso, but it was by a branch line down the Rio Grande from Rincón Junction.

But the Santa Fé line reached southern California more directly by absorbing the early "Atlantic & Pacific" (from Albuquerque westward) and two subsidiary lines in California. Los Angeles was entered as early as September 1885 "on tracks leased from the Southern Pacific but not until it obtained its own roadbed did the Santa Fé start the rate war which in turn began the boom." (p. 23) Some details of that fight seem incredible. The record shows that the Southern Pacific went as low as one dollar for tickets from Kansas City to Los Angeles—tricked by the Santa Fé line, which claimed to have sold none below \$8.00.

Such competition on passengers and freight, together with such high-pressure advertising as was used (Chapter IV) brought on inevitably the spectacular boom-conditions of the 1880's. The author develops his theme in chapters on "The Boom in Los Angeles" and "Speculation on the Shore"; then other suburban centers of the boom: "The San Gabriel Valley and Pasadena," "Glendale, Burbank, and the San Fernando Valley," "Pomona and the Irrigation

Settlements," and "The Santa Ana Valley." Somewhat farther afield, we have chapters on "The San Bernardino County Flurry," "The Boom in the San Diego Area," and "The Rural Boom in the North: Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties." The last chapters take up various ephemeral and permanent results of the boom: "Ghost Towns," "Men and Methods," "Irrigation Improvements," "Encouragement for Education," and "The End of the Boom."

One is tempted to quote and comment at many points. Two choice bits from promotional advertising must suffice: "The locality of Eden was lost to the world, until Carlson and Higgins discovered Ocean Beach." (p. 151) And once when San Diego had an actual population of about 50,000, a realty firm announced: "In fact, we may say that San Diego has a population of 150,000 people, only they are not all here yet." (p. 138) The numerous glimpses of well-known Californians is by no means the least fascinating quality of this book.

The press work is excellent, with one exception. In numerous cases the printing of the semi-colon and colon is so faint in comparison with that of the letters that one "reads over" such punctuation—and is exasperated by having to double back in order to recover the train of thought. This is an annoyance but it does not change the excellent work which Dr. Dumke has done.—L.B.B.