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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

The Indian Traders. By Frank McNitt. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962. Pp. xiv, 393. Illustration, maps, bibliography, index. \$5.95.

Students of New Mexico history are greatly indebted to Frank McNitt and the University of Oklahoma Press for this remarkable volume. Concentration upon the area of Northwest New Mexico and Northeast Arizona, entirely unexpected in view of the book's general title, must delight scholars of the Southwest as much as it will discourage many who have been led to expect an account of more general scope and significance. Yet not even a subtitle warns a prospective reader that the author's definition of Indian trade is so constituted that anyone who dealt with tribes elsewhere is eliminated as not really an Indian trader.

Except for an initial brief and unessential description of trade conducted in the area before 1868, the author confines his account to the post-Civil War period. The documentation is most commendable and is correctly located at the point of reference. Previous research is marshalled most effectively. The local press, magazine articles, historical monographs, have all been employed. But as the detailed bibliography and reading of the text reveal, great reliance is also placed upon intelligent use of interviews, a device which altogether too many students of relatively contemporary history ignore. An account, otherwise quite dull, is often brought to life by the personal touches of reminiscence. Particularly rewarding and most unusual are references based upon Indian Office records in the National Archives. This material adds so much to the volume that one can only urge that this superb treasure house of documents, extremely well indexed and preserved for the period covered, will be used more often by others.

The Indian Traders, though chaotically organized and unevenly written, should be of tremendous value to students

of Navajo history. Even they should find value in frequent reference to a map of the reservation area (pp. 8-9). The detail of post construction and surrounding topography, meaningless in large part for the non-specialist, should add significant material for specialists. The myriad names involved in tracing the frequently changing ownership of this post and of that will have importance locally through the minuteness of their recital. More value will be found by those less familiar with the region in the long portion devoted to individuals such as Lorenzo Hubbell and Thomas Keam and in general chapters on trading regulations, posts and contractors. From it all will emerge the contributions of many men, some of whom will come alive, to the progress of a remote region in the days before the automobile. How their families lived, the dangers they faced, the achievements they made, will become clear. Their story is worth telling.

Although, to be thorough in the face of varying types of material, the author found it necessary to abandon any overall consistency in chronological or analytical narrative, the result is greatly to be praised. Other areas of the United States will benefit, if individuals, however removed from the author's precise definition of Indian traders, receive similar treatment. From such studies may some day emerge a work on the significance of Indian trade and traders generally. If so, that author will owe much to this excellent trail-blazer.

Lycoming College

LORING B. PRIEST

ERRATA

Vol. 38, No. 1, p. 22, l. 14, should read: A. A. Jones of New Mexico. No. 1, p. 78, line 20, should read: Fray Silvestre Vélez de Escalante.