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Book Reviews

Jim Bridger. By J. Cecil Alter. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962. Pp. xi, 358. Bibliog., illus., map, and index. $5.95.

Few authors are invited to revise one of their books thirty-seven years after the original publication date; Mr. Alter was. Few men in their 80's can improve on what they did in the prime of their life; Mr. Alter has. In 1925 he published *James Bridger, Trapper, Frontiersman, Scout and Guide: A Historical Narrative;* a facsimile of it, with addenda, appeared in 1950; and now comes this revised, rewritten edition entitled *Jim Bridger.* The new version is 140 pages shorter than the original and this is all to the good. While a few thorough-going experts will still find the original useful for some of its details, the general public and almost all professional historians will prefer the 1962 book. In it Mr. Alter replaced quotations that were pages long with tightly-written, well-rounded condensations; eliminated a general account of the Mormon War in favor of telling just how the struggle affected Bridger; cut down on the details of other people's activities on the army expeditions he served as scout after the sale of Fort Bridger; and omitted the "tall tales" of what Bridger supposedly did but the evidence showed he actually didn't. Mr. Alter consulted the material which has been published since 1925, securing some different perspectives on his topic and in a few instances altering his conclusions in the light of new information. These two editions establish him as the authority on Bridger. His work is so well done, especially considering the scarcity of written evidence surviving about the frontiersman, that it is highly unlikely anybody will need to do the task again.

Bridger was the first white man to go over the continental divide at South Pass on what later became the Oregon-Mormon-California trail; was the first to taste the water of

Salt Lake; found a creek which downstream split into two forks emptying respectively into the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans; was the only man every to run the Big Horn River rapids on a raft; was almost the first to describe the phenomena of Yellowstone Park; and selected the route of the Union Pacific Railroad through the mountains of Wyoming. He thoroughly understood the Indian mind, held friendships with important red leaders, was thrice a squaw-man, retained almost all the geography of the Rocky Mountains in his extraordinary memory, used exceptional skill in hunting, trapping and frontier warfare and had uncanny luck too. He was generous in his sharing of his knowledge with settlers, explorers, soldiers and railroad surveyors. It is good that Mr. Alter has recorded the life of this remarkable American so effectively.

University of Idaho WILLIAM S. GREEVER

Life in the Saddle. By Frank Collinson. Edited and arranged by Mary Whatley Clarke. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963. Pp. xvi, 243. $2.00.

Leaving England, a boy of seventeen, Frank Collinson landed at Galveston, Texas, in September, 1872 and plunged headlong into a lifetime of adventure. From Galveston, he traveled to the Noonan ranch near Castroville where two negro hands taught him the fundamentals of cowpunching, hunting and camping. Thereafter, Collinson branched out. As a drover, he went to the Red Cloud Agency with a Lytle herd, staying awhile to issue beef to the Sioux. Then, back in Texas, Collinson became a buffalo hunter, witnessing and aiding in the slaughter of the great herd, fighting Indians and visiting Fort Griffin when that brilliant little den of iniquity was at its brightest and the vigilantes were active.

Back with cattle, Collinson worked for John Chisum of Jinglebob fame and saw some of the trouble in Lincoln County. He drove trail herds north, establishing a new route,

he aided in establishing ranches on the Staked Plains, he mustanged for awhile and he hunted wolves. There followed a period when Collinson ranched for himself and, too, he was one of the first to enter and explore the Big Bend country.

Unusual as it is, there is no reason to doubt Collinson's story. Where the experience was his, he says so; if his information was second hand, he labels it as such. The whole book rings true and Collinson's accounts and reminiscences have been accepted by such experts as J. Frank Dobie and J. Evetts Haley.

Collinson's writing is restrained, so much so that the reader often wishes the man had let himself go and displayed some of the flavor and color he undoubtably possessed. It may be that an editorial hand can be blamed for this lack for much of *Life in the Saddle* first appeared as articles in *Ranch Romances* and *The Cattleman.* Whatever the cause, the book would benefit if it contained more of the dramatic flare found in Abbot's *We Pointed Them North* and Andy Adam's *The Log of a Cowboy.*

As editor, Mary Whatley Clarke has acted more as a compiler and arranger. She furnishes neither footnotes nor bibliography believing, as she states in the introduction, that Collinson's running identification of well-known frontier characters was sufficient. However, as also stated in the introduction, Mrs. Clarke checked her material against other writings and did not find it wanting. The reviewer, too, made one brief check finding that Collinson's story of the killing of Bass Outlaw was entirely authenticated by Eugene Cunningham who gathered his material from other sources and told the tale in *Triggernometry.*

Life in the Saddle profits—as must any book concerning the Texas Panhandle—from the illustrations of Harold D. Bugbee. It is one of The Western Frontier Library series, issued by the University of Oklahoma Press, and it is attractively bound and printed.

Albuquerque, N. M. BENNETT FOSTER

Custer and the Great Controversy. By Robert M. Utley. Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1962. Pp. 184. $6.75

Here is a book that will delight all Custer buffs; though the author's evident and laudable striving for objectivity will possibly damn him in the camps of both the extreme Custerphiles and that of the rabid anti-Custer contingent. Mr. Utley, unlike so many writers on facets of Custer and Little Bighorn history, writes as an historian; not as a partisan. His analysis of how the Custer controversy began, was mushroomed and warped out of all proportion to its significance and known facts, and has since shown little evidence of subsiding, is clearly and deftly written. He does not attempt any final judgments as to Custer's culpability in the Little Bighorn tragedy, nor assess blame against Reno, Terry, and other major actors in the drama.

The section on the role played by the newspapers in stoking the controversial fires is very detailed and thoroughly presented; especially concerning General Terry's position in relation to his erratic subordinate, Custer. The "Legend of the Little Bighorn" chapter is very good in dealing with several Custer death myths, last survivor humbugs, and spurious Curley stories. The bibliographical survey is extremely well annotated, as to the significance and historical value of the publications the author discusses.

So many controversies and enigmas are associated with Little Bighorn history. During the five years that this reviewer served as Battlefield historian, he early decided to focus his efforts on ascertaining what was knowable, rather than on elements that must forever remain as multiple "X" factors in a complex equation without provable solution.

As the result of intensive field research, and the availability of more detailed statements by Trumpeter John Martin (Custer's last courier, sent back with a message to Captain Benteen), evidence now indicates that some part of Custer's immediate command did indeed approach very close to the east of the Little Bighorn River, down the course of Medicine

Tail Coulee to a point just across from the gigantic Indian encampment, in the opening phases of the Battle.

No, the last word is not in by a long shot on the Little Bighorn, but Mr. Utley's book on the ins and outs of how the pro and con Custer groups quickly solidified to the consistency of concrete, almost immediately after the Battle, should provide a source for this aspect of the subject for some time to come. Much remains to be researched and written in relation to what resulted from the Battle of the Little Bighorn; how it fits into the over-all history of American military and western developments. The army that went to Cuba and the Philippines was a different army from that which emerged from the Civil War in 1865, and the Little Bighorn was one of the major influences in promoting the changes that made the differences.

U. S. National Park Service, DON RICKEY, JR.
Omaha, Nebraska

The Fabulous Frontier; Twelve New Mexico Items. Revised and Enlarged Edition. By William A. Keleher. Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1962. Pp. 325. Bibliog., illust., index. $5.00.

Readers of New Mexicana will welcome this touched-up reprint of Keleher's best book, first published by the Rydal Press in 1945.

The prologue and first chapter admirably introduce the setting in Lincoln County of Territorial days. There was a time when that county covered 27,000 square miles of southeastern New Mexico, or about one-fourth of the area of this Territory. It was a tough frontier, which "developed a rugged type of New Mexico citizen, fully able to take care of himself and his property" (p. 55).

The story of that craggy, blue-skied, cattle and mining country then unfolds in the entrancing biographies of its leading citizens.

One can only marvel at the number of eminent Americans whose lives were firmly rooted in that fabulous frontier. In Keleher's order of presentation they include John S. Chisum, cattle king; Patrick Floyd Garrett, law man; Thomas Benton Catron, lawyer and politician; Eugene Manlove Rhodes, Emerson Hough, Nathan Howard Thorp, and John Wallace Crawford, noted authors; James John Hagerman, capitalist; Albert Bacon Fall and Albert J. Fountain, lawyers and politicians; Oliver Milton Lee, rancher; Charles Bishop Eddy, railroad promoter; and William Ashton Hawkins, corporation lawyer.

Keleher excells as a *raconteur;* yet sometimes it appears that if a tall tale was told he merely retells it. As sources he mentions contemporary newspapers and court opinions, and most of the remainder of the material seems to be derived from personal acquaintance with the participants and inquiry among their acquaintances. Such a procedure is sound; but lack of identification of sources makes it difficult for subsequent historians to run down fine points for verification or amplification. Yet since 1945 very few details in the book have been challenged. Consequently for most critics Keleher himself stands as adequate authority.

In his conclusion the author says, "Some day the people of New Mexico, sensing an obligation long past due, will build a monument dedicated to the memories of the pioneers of southeastern New Mexico, . . ." (p. 325). In this work, Keleher has erected that monument.

New Mexico Highland University LYNN I. PERRIGO

Desert Harvest. By E. I. Edwards. Los Angeles 41: Westernlore Press, 1962. Pp. 128. Illustrations, index. $7.50.

Six hunded copies of *Desert Harvest* were printed, but only 500 are for sale. They ought to sell fast because this is an unusual book. It is a bibliography, but it is neither an exhaus-

tive one nor a list of suggested readings—they are not even the author's favorite books.

The jacket blurb reads: "This book is the synthesis of twenty-five years of exploring and writing about the Southwest deserts [by] . . . a man who owns one of the largest private collections of Southwest desert books. . . ." The unique quality of the bibliography is that it lists twenty-five books that Mr. Edwards would retain if forced to dispose of his library.

The author explains in a page or so why he would retain each of the twenty-five books, but in doing so he introduces the reader to a much wider bibliography. His comments are interesting and penetrating. They do not demand acceptance. They are simply one man's judgment—and pleasing to read.

In order to give the reader a deeper insight into the selective process the author, in a few pages at the close of the book, uses Martha Summerhayes' *Vanished Arizona* for illustration.

Mr. Edwards transcends the scope of his book when he states that Father Pedro Font's diary "is perhaps the greatest diary in all western hemisphere literature" (p. 57). Otherwise he sticks to his last and speaks with authority.

F. D. R

History of the Americas. By John Francis Bannon. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 2nd edition, 1963. I, pp. 596. $7.50. II, pp. 617. $7.50.

Universities offering a course in "History of the Americas" will welcome this new, improved edition of a text first published in 1952. The author has consolidated, rearranged, and expanded several chapters and has eliminated peripheral parts of the story of the Spanish conquest which tended to obscure the main pattern of events. In the first volume, the histories of colonial British and French America to the mid-eighteenth century has been placed in direct sequence rather

than separated by chapters on Latin America as was the order of the first edition. The effect has been to make clearer the geographic position of the two rival powers just prior to the engagements which led to the ultimate defeat of the French.

It is regrettable, in this reviewer's opinion, that the author did not follow the same principle of consolidation in Volume II, for to preclude mention of Canada until the last third of the volume, as is done, while advancing the history of the other Americas to the 1920's, leaves the Dominion too far behind. In other improvements, Professor Bannon has consolidated and shortened treatment of the Spanish conquest in South America, has expanded his account of life in Colonial Latin America, and has carried events for the hemisphere to the present with two chapters treating the period since World War II. The treatment of the national period in Latin America has been improved by picking up the theme of the rising middle and lower classes of the twentieth century, although better advantage might have been taken of recent works dealing with those groups as well as with the role of the military. Typographicals appearing in the first edition have been eliminated and the bibliography at the end of each chapter has been brought up to date.

There yet remains, however, the basic defect in this edition as in the previous one, which is that common themes (methods of expansion, colonial revolts, Indian problems, etc.) are seldom clearly or consistently brought out in the narrative. This is partly due to the fact that the author has tied himself too rigidly to chronology within a certain colony, and that he details far too many events of secondary importance. In certain parts of the work, a tendency to account for the passing of time by the tenure of colonial governors as in Canada, or by the tenure of caudillos as in nineteenth-century Latin America, relegates the narrative to chronicle. The result is a disparateness which an occasional comparative comment fails to rectify. This is all the more unfortunate,

for the author's essays on the characteristics of American civilization (the opening chapters of each volume) stand in brilliant but isolated splendor, as does his treatment, easily the best part of the work, of the area which became the United States. Essays which precede major time periods of the work and which point up common themes would help correct the present deficiency, as would a thematic treatment of each colony or nation following the prefatory and unifying essay.

The volumes also are marred by a few inaccurate statements, some unintential obscurities, several omissions, and occasionally an unawareness of causal factors connected with certain events. The Portuguese fort of Colônia is incorrectly founded in the 1720's instead of in 1680 (I, 430), and the United States' treaty with Panama was signed in 1936, not in 1939 (II, 532). To say that Brazil throughout the colonial period was an agricultural rather than a precious-metals colony (I, 394) is to overlook the great Brazilian gold production of the eighteenth-century. The statement that praetorianism was hardly eliminated in Mexico during the Obregón period (II, 472) fails to take into account the professionalization of the army and its effects indicated by Lieuwen in *Arms and Politics in Latin America* (1961).

Moreover, the author's treatment of the French counterattack on St. Augustine in 1565 (I, 150) gives the misleading impression that the Spanish were eliminated from that strategic position. The role of the Jesuits as a factor in colonial resentment is omitted in covering Brazil's Beckmann revolt, and the Brazil Company is not accredited with any part in expelling the Dutch (I, 370-71). The expansion of Spanish civilization into western Colombia and of Portuguese civilization up the Amazon are not treated.

In a work of vast scope, however, the details mentioned are quite minor defects. Rather like the conquistadores and padres of whom he writes, Professor Bannon has dared to undertake the large task with courage, energy, and modesty.

He has indeed succeeded in keeping alive the idea that the Americas are the torchbearers of Western civilization. To him, then, much credit is due.

University of New Mexico TROY S. FLOYD

Kit Carson: A Portrait in Courage. By M. Morgan Estergreen. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962. Pp. 320. $5.95.

Kit Carson was a real person who lived and died (December 24, 1809—May 23, 1868) on the frontier of his day. He was born in Kentucky (some say North Carolina) and died in Colorado Territory when both were on the forward edge of the westward movement in America. Perhaps as much as any other man his name has become synonymous with the Great American West, with Mountain Men and fur trappers, with hunting and scouting, and soldiering. Furthermore, many topographical features and even a few towns of the western United States bear his name, thus giving substance to his flesh and blood existence. However, in his own day he became a legend nearly as large as John Bunyan and Buffalo Bill, and today, nearly a hundred years since his death, the legend looms even larger. The book before us does little to dispel this legend—in spite of the dust jacket blurb which says ". . . M. Morgan Estergreen's *Kit Carson* is the long awaited corrective to that picture." There are other areas in this book that invite criticism. The academic historian may cringe a little at the author's careless use and reference to what he calls "primary source material" in the form of Blanche Chloe Grant's notes. He will also wonder at the highly imaginative stories of Carson's childhood and the contrived dialogue used then and later during the great scout's fur hunting days. Particularly in the early portion of the book the writing is rambling, disconnected, and highly imaginative, as though it were written for juveniles to whom, in large numbers, it could very easily appeal. Even Hewett's Introduction sounds like a

rambling reminiscence told by a grandfather to his grandchildren and really adds little to the biography of Kit Carson.

All of this is not to say that this is not a good book, because it is, even with all its element of hero-worshipping. The author has a firm grasp and understanding of the life of Kit Carson. She has obviously consulted many, if not all, of the written materials on Carson's life and times. She has used official documents, interviews, journals and diaries and all of the biographies on the great scout's life. Furthermore, the author has a feel for the romance of the early West and a considerable knowledge of the history of that period and the part that Carson's contemporaries played. Because of the greater availability of material, the latter portion of the book, subsequent to the fur-trapping era, is superior both as to its historical accuracy and its literary qualities.

The book has the usual scholarly appendages, including a brief "Notes on Sources," a good bibliography and index, and a selection of excellent illustrations. The University of Oklahoma Press has done its usual competent job of bookmaking, clothing the volume with an attractive cover and jacket.

University of Utah Press A. R. MORTENSEN

The Last Days of the Sioux Nation. By Robert M. Utley. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963. Pp. xiv, 314. Bibliog., illus., index. $7.50.

Once in a very great while a book is written of which it may be said: Here the subject is covered. No one will care to pass this way again. It would seem almost impossible that such a book should include an account of an affair as controversial as that at Wounded Knee—but this is it.

Almost everything that has been written about the Sioux War of 1890-91 has attempted to justify the actions of the troops, to defend the Indian Bureau, or to commiserate with the unfortunate Sioux. Bob Utley, regional historian at Santa

Fe for the National Park Service, has centered his attention on finding out what happened. So far as can be, after 70 years, he has succeeded.

There is no lack of documentation. Almost everyone concerned had some explaining to do. A court of inquiry, investigations, reports, interviews make up a staggering mass of paper for the period. It is the sort of problem that is baffling to the pedantic historian who is satisfied when any statement he cares to make can be backed by a citation. Here there is no lack of quotable material to support any point of view desired—and too many who have written about this Sioux War have desired to present a point of view. Yet it is possible to pick a course among contradictory reports from both sides, separating what was seen from what was rumored, and accepting what seems reasonable after weighing all the evidence.

Other books have fairly well outlined the mistaken policies, the failure to ratify agreements, the attempts to starve the Sioux into civilization that drove them, in despair, to see as their only hope a mystic and fantastic new religion. A change of administration that brought to this crisis new agents who were political appointees with no knowledge at all of Indians certainly contributed greatly to the trouble.

The pursuit of Big Foot's band is of course the most controversial event. Both E. V. Sumner and James W. Forsyth blundered in the handling of Big Foot, yet both at times viewed the situation more realistically than their vindictive superior, Nelson A. Miles. It has been little doubted that an Indian's action started the shooting, or that both sides fired accidentally into their own people. It has been assumed that in the excitement of battle there was much indiscriminate shooting of women and children. Actually the instances were rare; and surprising efforts were made to spare them—even, as in one case, where a soldier complained, "she is shooting at us." Wounded Knee was not a massacre.

That there was no more killing than this was due to the

wisdom of Miles in handling the affair, yet at times he could be exasperatingly petty.

It was a war without a hero. Perhaps what has always worried us is our failure to determine who wore the white hats and who wore the black hats. Utley tells us what they did. It was not always admirable, yet not always reprehensible. A Carlisle graduate wantonly killed an officer to prove he was still Indian. A court acquitted him of murder on the ground that he had acted as a combatant during a state of war. Somehow that court's verdict seems the ultimate judgment on many occurrences of what proved to be the last days of the Sioux Nation.

Many of the interpretations in this book no doubt will be disputed, but it seems unlikely that much can be added to fact or narrative.

Elmhurst, Ill. DON RUSSELL