

REVIEWS

THE HERITAGE OF KANSAS: Selected Commentaries on Past Times. Edited by Everett Rich. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press. 1960. \$5.00.

Sometime, somewhere after Judgment Day there will be a Kansan who will carefully explain to the world how his native state reacted to the event. Traditionally gregarious, if not garrulous, Kansans like to talk about themselves, and here Everett Rich of Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, has gathered some choice samples of Jayhawk self-concern, along with reports of adventurous outsiders who visited the state during its first half century of development.

Often problem child of the states, Kansas blustered or wheedled her way into the national limelight in two glorious epochs--the pre-Civil War era and the period of prairie ferment in the 1890s which embraced Populism, prohibition, and the Social Gospel. Sadly we must turn to the past for the flavor of Kansas' gaudy hell-raising days, for today the state has settled all too comfortably into its isolated pocket of midwestern culture.

Inevitably, the virulent Kansas strain of soul-searching--tinged with apology or inflated with egoism--rushes to the fore once again in this Centennial year. The forty-four selections presented in this book range from a description of "America's Don Quixote"--Spanish explorer Coronado--to historian Carl Becker's all-too-familiar and eulogistic interpretation, "Kansas," published in 1910.

Here are the frontier Babylons of cattle drive terminals, the tragic struggle over slavery which made Kansas a crucible for the nation, the immigrants who came to bust sod and remained to baptize babies. Here are the familiar Kansas scourges--floods, drouths, prairie fires, grasshoppers, blizzards--which have battered sun-burned Kansans until their colloquial version of "You're welcome" has become "You bet," as if life itself were a desperate gamble.

Well-known writers are represented in a selection from Francis Parkman's The Oregon Trail; a description of the Pony Express by Mark Twain; Ralph Waldo Emerson's eloquent plea for free state forces; E. W. Howe's

reminiscences about establishing a country newspaper, and a few pages from William Allen White's The Real Issue.

Arts and letters have been slighted, however, and one finds not even passing nods to such men as John Steuart Curry, Kenneth S. Davis, Paul I. Wellman, Joseph Stanley Pennell, and William Inge.

One misses the impassioned words of back-thumping "Sockless Jerry" Simpson, iron-lunged Mary Elizabeth Lease, and irascible John J. Ingalls--giants of the Populist era who fought each other with good-natured frenzy. Yet such minor figures as Charles B. Driscoll are awarded precious space.

There are technical faults. A book about Kansas cries for illustrations; the typography is dull, and the editor's introductions staid to the point of quaintness. But for all this, here is an entertaining and rewarding selection which merits its title and is worth its modest price.

University of Virginia

Jerry W. Knudson

KANSAS FOLKLORE. Ed. by S. J. Sackett and William E. Koch. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. 1961. \$5.00.

This volume is a welcome addition to a small but important group of books which offer "broad, representative" surveys of traditional materials current in specific regions or states. Unfortunately "state collections" in the past have been mostly publications of folksongs, or gobs of miscellaneous stuff worked up during the '30's under the auspices of the W. P. A. Federal Writer's Project, or, most recently, the folksy "treasuries" of Dr. Botkin. The present volume, however, contains twelve "studies" (perhaps "contributions" would have been a more exact term) of relatively fresh, largely authentic material in the areas of the folktale, legend, proverb and riddle, dialect, "folk verse," folksongs and ballads, customs, dances and games, and (largely overlooked in American folklore collections, but quite standard in Europe) traditional recipes. The contributions "are strong evidence that Kansas is fertile in material both interesting in itself and of potential value for future comparative studies." Kansas Folklore contains "specimens from a large body of materials, mostly primary sources, either collected in the field or first hand accounts." This reviewer was impressed by the general usefulness of the book as a guide for future collectors interested in Kansas traditions and as a textbook for the fairly numerous folklore courses taught in the schools around the state. In general, the book fulfills its aims admirably.

Several items, however, require special mention. The folktale and legend sections rely heavily on reprinted newspaper yarns which obviously lack the authenticity and sparse style of the too-few field texts reported. The editors disarmingly deny that so-called "fakelore" has any traditional validity, yet they print newspaper items which have no demonstrated oral exist-

ence in Kansas. The motif index for the folktale and legend section (in an appendix) does serve to corroborate the traditional "flavor" of the newspaper items, yet actual oral existence remains to be demonstrated. Secondly, the lack of comparative headnotes in the folktale section--to guide the reader to similar American texts--is distressing. Headnotes for all the material might have followed the pattern set in the folksong section which, by citing other American texts of a song, is most helpful in placing the material in its proper context. Finally, of special interest, the "customs" section of the book treats (in part) the traditions of the national groups which have settled Kansas: Swedes, Danes, Germans, Russian-Germans, Bohemians, and French-Canadians. It's a pity, perhaps, that other contributions (with the exception of recipes) could not have treated the folklore of these immigrant groups more intensely.

Despite the qualifications mentioned above, the book is a worthwhile and interesting survey of folk materials alive in Kansas. It should admirably serve as a basis for further studies in the state, and as a ready-reference handbook of materials already collected.

University of Florida

Butler Waugh