
Books

PRAIRIE CITY: The Story of an American Community, by Angie Debo. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. \$3.00.

Using as her locale the northern Oklahoma town of Marshall and borrowing on the social lore of other cities in the region, Angie Debo, '18ba, '33ph.d, has written the fictionalized history of a typical community from the original run into Oklahoma Territory down to the present. In the process she has managed to work in a sizeable amount of reminiscence and research to the general glorification of the pioneer and his descendants.

Prairie City passes through all the important phases the mythical city of this kind should undergo. Beginning with the hardbitten years following fast on the initial enthusiasm of the run, Prairie City inexorably founds its government, finances its railroads, fights its war, flounders through its depression, and forges through its Pearl Harbor on into a future sufficiently uncertain as to make even Miss Debo wonder. Between these cataclysmic historical landmarks, Miss Debo manages to fill out the story of the typical plains town by inserting material designed to show how the people lived. The community's religious, economic, and cultural characteristics are retold to advantage and their inclusion succeeds in creating a certain cross-section atmosphere indispensable to this type of historical writing.

The "typical citizen" of Prairie City and his issue have undergone some expansion, as far as their complement of virtue is concerned, at the hands of the author, herself a child of the frontier. This is perhaps inevitable but none the less unfortunate. It appears extremely difficult for the descendants of the West to evaluate their forbears objectively. Almost invariably western virtues are magnified while western aberrations are excused or found humorous.

Everyone knows that the frontier people were hardy, possessed a great adventurous spirit, and lived lives characterized by deprivation and reversals financial to climatic. What many mid-twentieth century students do not know is that this hardihood and courage was produced by the surroundings in which these people found themselves. It is shattering to know that these qualities are not traceable to any superior innate adaptability which differentiated the westerner from residents of rock-bound Maine or tide-water Virginia.

There are included some 18 photographs, some rather important, showing scenes of two runs, various public gatherings and the like. The book is sufficiently readable.

—TED HEFLEY

IMAGE IS NOT AVAILABLE ONLINE DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS.

A paper copy of this issue is available at call number LH 1 .06S6 in Bizzell Memorial Library.