
B O O K N O T E S

The Big Divide: A Travel Guide to Historic and Civil War Sites in the Missouri–Kansas Border Region. By Diane Eickhoff and Aaron Barnhart. (Kansas City, Kans.: Quindaro Press, 2013, x + 249 pages, paper \$17.95.)

Historian Diane Eickhoff and journalist Aaron Barnhart wrote the *Big Divide* in order to help Kansans and Missourians gain a deeper understanding of their shared and often contentious history. Unlike a typical travel guide, the *Big Divide* is organized thematically rather than geographically. The themes of the nine chapters cover a vast chronology from “First People” to “Trails West” to “Guerrilla War.” Each chapter begins with a narrative that places its sites in broad historical context and is followed by site descriptions and reviews. Sites range from Kansas City’s famous Nelson Atkins Museum of Art to the obscure Wildcat Glades of Joplin, Missouri. Even locals may be surprised at the significant history just around the corner.

Kansas County Seat Conflicts: The Elections, the Feuds, and the Wars. By Robert Collins. (Andover, Kans.: self-published, 2013, 199 pages, paper \$12.50.)

Reflecting the frenzied state of affairs that dominated Kansas’s post–Civil War settlement process and the tenuousness of newly established frontier towns, promoters sought any advantage to insure or at least enhance their town’s chances for long-term survival and success. Thus, as Andover, Kansas, author Robert Collins makes clear, rival communities in more than half of the state’s 105 counties contested and in some cases did battle for the political prize that almost guaranteed survival if not economic prosperity: the county seat designation. Collins, the author of many books of fiction and non-fiction, including Kansas history, chronicles this story—the often told phenomenon of the “county seat war”—as it unfolded during the Sunflower State’s (and territory’s) first four decades, from Leavenworth and Linn Counties in the east to Stevens and Logan Counties in the west.

Columns of Vengeance: Soldiers, Sioux, and the Punitive Expeditions, 1863–1864. By Paul N. Beck. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, xiv + 314 pages, cloth \$34.95.)

The brutal Dakota War of 1862, which left hundreds of the white settlers of Minnesota and the northern plains dead, caused the federal government to launch a series of punitive expeditions against the Sioux. Paul Beck adds new layers to our understanding of the Punitive Expeditions by examining them in the broader context of the Civil War. Using the diaries and manuscript collections of common soldiers, *Columns of Vengeance* is peppered with fascinating accounts of battles, military life, and glimpses into the participants’ innermost thoughts. Providing Sioux perspectives as well, Beck details the destructive social and political effects that the Dakota War and the Punitive Expeditions had on the Santees, Lakota, and Yanktonais.

The Best Specimen of a Tyrant: The Ambitious Dr. Abraham Van Norstrand and the Wisconsin Insane Hospital. By Thomas Doherty. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013, xii + 331 pages, paper \$20.00.)

First published in 2007 and the winner of the 2008 Wisconsin Historical Society’s Book Award of Merit, *The Best Specimen of a Tyrant* is the well-written and thoroughly researched history of one midwestern state’s mid-nineteenth-century experience with the so-called “Hospital Movement,” which had a pervasive influence on the treatment of the mentally ill in the United States. It seems that in most places, including Kansas, where the state’s original constitution provided for the establishment of an institution “for the benefit of the insane,” the history of these large institutions was checked at best. Launched during a wave of reform zeal, time after time these hospitals were ultimately discredited with tales of neglect and abuse. This “rise and fall” story, which focuses on the Wisconsin Insane Hospital’s director, Dr. Abraham Van Norstrand, “typifies the clash between great expectations and hard choices that have bedeviled public mental hospitals from the beginning” (back cover).

Dead Towns of Central and Western Kansas: A Collection of Stories from The Hutchison News. By Amy Bickel. (Newton, Kans.: Mennonite Press, 2012, 96 pages, paper \$14.95.)

Dead Towns is a compilation of journalist Amy Bickel’s weekly investigational series of the same name, which first appeared in the *Hutchison News* in 2010. Crisscrossing through twenty-four counties, the volume reveals “stories about treachery, desperation, strength, and hope” (p. 3). Bickel investigates the locations, beginnings, and decline of sixty-one once booming Kansas towns. Many of these cities failed due to the harsh reality of the western Kansas environment or overly competitive economies; others are in various stages of decline and contain only very small populations residing in weather-beaten farm homes. Although many of the towns discussed are now noticeable only by their remaining limestone foundations, Bickel provides turn-by-turn directions so that weekend adventurers and lost-town researchers can locate them easily.

Milk Money: Cash, Cows, and the Death of the American Dairy Farm. By Kirk Kardashian. (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2012, 253 pages, cloth \$27.95.)

Milk Money is an economic and geographic study of the dairy industry, the people behind it, and the cows that provide the product. Kirk Kardashian investigates the changing tide of milk production in Vermont and the nation as a whole, finding that the industry no longer backs small, family operations and instead underwrites a system of corporate-owned megafarms in the American southwest. Because the number of family-owned dairies in the past sixty years has dropped by 88 percent while annual per-cow milk yield has increased 700 percent, the industry is now ruthlessly geared toward efficiency and away from animal welfare. Although the book centers on the daily struggles small dairy operations face, it also examines the industry as a whole and explains the economics of overproduction, federal price stabilization measures, and the USDA’s effort to standardize the product.