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# BOOK NOTES

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*Rows of Memory: Journeys of a Migrant Sugar-Beet Worker.* By Saúl Sánchez. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014, xxx + 210 pages, paper \$21.00.)

As explained in the introduction by Omar Valerio-Jiménez, “*Rows of Memory* offers a revealing look at the life of a Mexican American migrant worker from childhood to young adulthood as he traveled with his extended family from their home in Texas to various sites in the Midwest” (p. xi). But by drawing on the “collective memory” of older family members, Sánchez, who was born in California in 1943, situates his experiences in a much broader context that goes back to the early twentieth century and the increasingly significant migration and recruitment of Mexican laborers throughout the Midwest and Great Plains in the 1920s. Although the family seems not to have worked beets in Kansas, readers of *Kansas History* will find the story nevertheless relevant. “The significance of Saúl Sánchez’s memoir lies not only in his detailed descriptions of farmworkers’ experiences,” writes Valerio-Jiménez, “but also in his documentation of his family’s persistence as migrant workers over five decades, his own eventual educational attainment, and his analytical insights into migrant life” (p. xi).

*The Tallgrass Prairie Reader.* Edited by John T. Price. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014, xxxi + 352 pages, paper \$25.00.)

This elegiac study excerpts writings on the tallgrass prairie spanning three centuries and more than three dozen writers, many of them household names. What Walt Whitman called “North America’s characteristic landscape” (p. 67), the tallgrass prairie once dominated Indiana, Iowa, southern Minnesota, northern Missouri, and the eastern parts of the line of states from North Dakota to Texas, but today it is “the most decimated ecosystem in continental North America” (p. xii), and at best three percent of it survives. Early non-Indian observers tended to agree with Charles Dickens’s assertion that the prairie was not “to remember with much pleasure, or to covet the looking-on again, in after-life” (p. 34), but appreciation for it grew after its decimation. Among many evocative passages in this delightful volume, Minnesotan Bill Holm laments that “Americans don’t like prairies as scenery for national parks and preserves because they require patience and effort” (p. 205). He insists, “Trust a prairie to find beauty and understate it truthfully, no matter how violent the apparent exaggeration” (p. 207).

*Greyhound Commander: Confederate General John G. Walker’s History of the Civil War West of the Mississippi.* Edited by Richard Lowe. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013, xi + 135 pages, cloth \$36.00.)

Despite ever-expanding Civil War scholarship, firsthand officer accounts from the Trans-Mississippi Department remain a rarity. By *Greyhound Commander* editor Richard Lowe’s count, only one other published full-length chronicle exists: the memoir of General Richard Taylor. John G. Walker served under Taylor, leading an infantry division made up entirely of Texans in the Vicksburg and Red River campaigns. His men earned their titular nickname in the latter by marching more than nine hundred miles in seventy days. General Walker’s history offers an overview of major battles in the Trans-Mississippi Theater with an officer’s critical eye. Dictated to his daughter just a few short years after the end of the war, when Walker and his family fled to England for fear of prosecution, Walker’s account includes pointed criticism of superior officers, particularly Kirby Smith. Lowe’s footnotes guide the reader throughout, adding valuable context to Walker’s narrative, especially by comparing his interpretations of events to other officers’.

*Quite Contrary: The Litigious Life of Mary Bennett Love.* By David J. Langum Sr. (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2014, xviii + 212 pages, cloth \$34.99.)

The life of Mary Bennett Love, an acquisitive landowner and entrepreneur who made her mark near Santa Clara, California, was the stuff of tall tales. Love herself was “almost a giantess” (p. 23), standing at almost six feet tall and three hundred pounds, but in the context of the nineteenth century, it was her actions that stood out most. Love defied gender norms in every way: she was loud, large, and profane; she started and ended marriages on her own terms; and she engaged in aggressive litigation and land acquisition, at times twisting coverture’s constraints on married women’s property rights into a legal advantage. *Quite Contrary* speaks to working-class culture in pre-Gold Rush California and the centrality of the law to Americans of the mid-nineteenth century. Beyond its value as a study in gender, class, the law, and the American West, this compact history is also a fascinating biography of a woman who stopped at nothing to make a better life for herself and her children.

*History of Nebraska*, 4th ed. By Ronald Naugle, John J. Montag, and James C. Olson. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014, xiv + 549 pages, paper \$35.00.)

Since its first publication by James C. Olson in 1955, *History of Nebraska* has become a key resource for historians and students interested in major issues in the state’s past. In the fourth edition, co-authors Ronald Naugle and John J. Montag have updated this now-classic work by enlarging its scope. Beginning with Paleo-Indians and Native people’s contact with Europeans, the authors carry the state’s history into the new millennium, examining current debates about water usage and ongoing concerns about depopulation. They emphasize significant themes in Nebraska history including people’s confrontation with the environment and the viability of agriculture on the Great Plains. Ultimately, we are reminded that just as Nebraska’s earliest inhabitants “depended on creative adaptation to the land” to survive, so too will its future residents need to rely on their “adaptable, creative spirit” (pp. 5, 452).

*Engineering America: The Rise of the American Professional Class, 1838–1920.* Edited and Annotated by Edward Rhodes. (Washington, D.C.: Westphalia Press, 2014, 142 pages, paper \$9.95.)

In this slim volume, Professor Edward Rhodes ably historicizes the life and career of railroad engineer Daniel Harker Rhodes (1838–1920). Edward Rhodes’s interest in Daniel Rhodes is not explained, and one is left wondering what prompted it. Regardless, the volume begins with a thoughtful introduction to Daniel Rhodes’s America, a time when technological changes in transportation and communications dramatically reworked America’s economy, culture, and society. Daniel Rhodes left an autobiography that details his career during those transformative times. It is this autobiography that Professor Rhodes edited and annotates, and he also provides copious footnotes explaining the people and places his namesake encountered during his long life. After a youth in rural New Jersey and New York, Daniel Rhodes graduated from the University of Michigan in 1869. From there he worked for a number of railroad companies in the Midwest and West, and probably of greatest interest to readers of this journal were his years spent in Kansas and Colorado with the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad Company. Rhodes’s memoir provides a fairly blunt look at his wayfaring life, one apparently bereft of close personal relationships until he married at the age of fifty-one.