BOOK NOTES


Thomas R. Buecker’s last work is this incisive description of the army posts, Indian agencies, Indians, and the landscape of the Great Plains of northern Nebraska and South Dakota during the tumultuous years of the 1870s. Buecker takes the reader on a visual trip through this world via a photograph collection possessed by Peter Buckley, who worked at Fort Robinson, Nebraska. A former curator at the Fort Robinson Museum, Buecker is an ideal guide to this photographic collection. He sets the stage by providing a historical overview of the White River agencies of Spotted Tail and Red Cloud followed by a chapter devoted to Camp Robinson and Sheridan. The reproduction of these photographs is first rate, and the images include scenes of Lakota and Arapaho life, fort life, army field campaigns, beef issues, and early town development of Deadwood, South Dakota.


George Frazier describes wild places as “undisturbed remnants of ancient ecosystems, habitats for rare or threatened species, pristine stretches of river, unusual geologic features, exclamations of topography.”2 Wild places, he says, “aren’t merely beautiful landscapes; they possess a totemic lure, a power or presence that attracts people, sometimes across generational and cultural chasms spanning centuries” (pp. ix–x). Kansas is often derisively referred to as “flyover country,” but Frazier reveals a land where ancient pecan trees grow, where flying squirrels hide in oak-hickory forests, and where streams are renegade. He also delves into the complexities of modern land use and accessibility. Readers will come away with a better understanding of the wild places of Kansas and appreciation for them.

Fast-Food Sonnets. By Dennis Etzel Jr. (Lawrence, KS: Coal City Review Press, 2016, ix + 63 pages, paper $10.00.)

An astounding one in eight Americans will work at McDonald’s at some point in their lives. Dennis Etzel Jr. is one of those who once wore the polyester McDonald’s uniform and flipped burgers in the kitchen or stood behind the counter asking, “Do you want fries with that?” In this collection of poems, Etzel explores the range of indignities suffered by the minimum-wage fast-food workforce. There is the female employee who is told by her manager to “wear her hair up, be ready to serve” (p. 7). Even as a manager, Etzel acknowledges living on the edge of poverty: “Even as I earned a couple of dollars over minimum wage, days sometimes meant going cold hungry” (p. 25). Etzel also examines the resiliency of this workforce, how these men and women keep working, keep striving, maintaining their humanity by laughing and dancing together in the restaurant’s parking lot and stealing time with their children in the indoor play area. This collection is touching and entertaining even as it takes on the issues of workers’ rights and the politics of big business.

To Leave a Shadow. By Michael D. Graves. (Emporia, KS: Meadowlark Books, 2015, 204 pages, paper $12.00.)

In a style reminiscent of 1940s film noir and the popular television series Dragnet, Emporia State University instructor and local writer Michael Graves gives readers To Leave a Shadow, an entertaining mystery novel. Set in Wichita during the Great Depression, the book follows Detective Pete Stone, a diary-delivery businessman turned private eye. In Stone, Graves creates a character with admirable street smarts and an unflinching commitment to the case. The quick pace, exciting drama, and simple language make the novel one readers will not want to put down.


Famed nineteenth-century writer and Native American advocate Helen Hunt Jackson has been the subject of numerous books and articles since her death in 1885. A Call for Reform, however, edited by Valerie Sherer Mathes and Phil Brigandi, represents the first time that seven of her most important articles appear in one volume. They vividly document the difficulties faced by southern California Indians while also serving as a testament to Jackson’s personal determination to get reservations set aside for these tribes. The monograph’s strength does not lie solely with Jackson’s writing, as Mathes and Brigandi provide readers with a lengthy and informative introduction that sheds light on Jackson’s personal life in addition to her professional career as journalist, novelist, and scholar. Well researched with good illustrations, A Call for Reform is a fascinating read about an incredible woman who defied the period’s gender norms in her quest to aid indigenous peoples.


First published in 1880 with illustrations by photographer John George Hyde, Our Indian Summer in the Far West carries a subtitle that, like those of many nineteenth-century publications, pretty much describes the book’s purpose and content. The author and the illustrator traveled from London to America in 1879, beginning their wonderfully illustrated travel log on board the SS Queen and following up with some observations of New York, Niagara Falls, and Chicago before embarking on their journey across the “Far West” in Kansas, a “fine state” that was “a favourite of ours” (p. 40). Townsend and Hyde crossed this “splendidly rich” but not “beautiful” state on the Santa Fe Railroad to Dodge City, then continued their journey west to the front range of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado and New Mexico, with extended side trips south by two-horse coach into the Texas panhandle and by rail and spring wagon from Emporia to Houston, Austin, San Antonio, and Galveston.