
BOOK NOTES

The Future of Family Farms: Practical Farmers' Legacy Letter Project. Edited by Teresa Opheim. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2016, xii + 140 pages, paper \$24.95.)

One of the most difficult decisions any farm family makes is how their farmland is transferred. Teresa Opheim is well versed in the topic of farmland transfers as she was the executive director of Practical Farmers of Iowa from 2006 to 2016. For this volume, she interviewed farmers about the issues surrounding the transfer of farmland. Opheim's goal is to edit these stories to shed light on "farmland—how families acquired it, what they treasure most about it, and their hopes for its future" (p. 2). Most of the farm families interviewed are Iowans. The French family, however, is from Partridge, Kansas. Jim and Mary French explained how they came to own their farmland, how they manage it, and what they hope its future will be. As Mary put it, "My number one goal . . . is to conserve and improve the soil, increase biodiversity, improve water quality. . . . My goals are also to provide my heirs with financial stability to provide a farm for a family to farm" (p. 118). As Opheim's collection of stories reveals, these are goals not easily achieved in the world of modern farming.

Twenty-Five Years among the Indians and Buffalo: A Frontier Memoir. By William D. Street. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015, 584 pages, cloth \$29.95.)

Toward the end of his life, William Daniel Street began work on his memoir with the intention of focusing on his involvement in skirmishes with Northern Cheyenne Indians who raided northwestern Kansas in 1878. The final product, however, as outlined by Street's descendent and the editor of this volume, Warren R. Street, is far more extensive. *Twenty-Five Years among the Indians and Buffalo* is a detail-rich personal account depicting the dramatic shift of the American West in the immediate decades following the Civil War. Beginning in 1861 with his service in the Nineteenth Kansas Volunteers—recruited to fight Native Americans on the Kansas frontier—Street's narrative follows his experiences with buffalo hunting, wagon driving, scouting, and cowboying, successfully blending memories, journal entries, and historical research. Although "infused with adventure and high drama," Street's storytelling also includes descriptive sections, such as proper techniques for hunting and killing buffalo (p. xxvii). Overall, readers will find *Twenty-Five Years among the Indians and Buffalo* an exciting narrative of frontier Kansas.

A Cow for College and Other Stories of 1950s Farm Life. By James Kenyon. (Emporia, KS: Meadowlark Books, 2017, iv + 151 pages, paper \$55.00.)

The author, an Iowa veterinarian for the past thirty-five years, grew up during the 1950s on a stock farm near Bogue in Graham County, Kansas, and offers here "all true stories from my life growing up in rural America" during a time he characterizes as "an age of innocence on the farm" (pp. iii–iv). Twenty-five delightful short essays follow—beginning with "A Cow for College" and including other titles such as "The Farm Dog," "Playing Baseball," and "Farm Boy's First Kiss." These stories will ring quite true and nostalgic to anyone who grew up in rural Kansas during the same era, but this delightful little volume should appeal to those of other generations as well.

A Life after Quantrill: Kate King, a Biography. By Virgil Hoftiezer. (N.p.: Orderly Pack Rat, 2017, 430 pages, paper, \$20.00.)

A Life after Quantrill is an information-packed (more than half of the volume is devoted to endnotes, appendixes, a bibliography, and the like), self-published biography of Sarah Catherine "Kate" King—alias Kate Clarke and Sarah Head, among others—of Blue Springs, Missouri, who purportedly was the notorious William Clarke Quantrill's teenaged "consort" from 1861 until his death in 1865. She subsequently became a "St. Louis madam" and then moved around the country for much of the next six decades before returning to Blue Springs and dying at the Jackson County poor farm in 1930. "This account of Kate's life," wrote author Virgil Hoftiezer, "attempts to reveal her as accurately and comprehensively as possible . . . and to debunk myths and misconceptions that have been perpetuated far too long" (p. 21).

Beautifully Grotesque Fish of the American West. By Mark Spitzer. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Outdoor Lives Series, 2017, 223 pages, cloth \$24.95.)

In *Beautifully Grotesque Fish of the American West*, Mark Spitzer, associate professor of writing at the University of Central Arkansas and an avid fisherman, combines "science, folklore, history, ecology, and imagery . . . with first-hand experiences that come from pursuing underwater underdogs" (p. 5). Spitzer offers profiles of eleven different species of fish that call the American West their home, from paddlefish in Missouri to trotline- and electro-fished American eels in Arkansas to flying Asian carp in Kansas. Spitzer focuses on the fish "with faces that only a mother could love" in an effort to take them out of the shadows and cast them in another light, so that they could be appreciated" (p. 5). The result is a highly entertaining, informative account of the environmental destruction facing the American West, its fish, and, by extension, all of us.

Great Plains Bison. By Dan O'Brien. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Discover the Great Plains Series, 2017, xiii + 111 pages, paper \$14.95.)

In 2016, the bison became the national mammal of the United States. In this short volume, Dan O'Brien offers a concise history of the animal so intimately bound up with the spirit of America. O'Brien, a wildlife biologist and nonfiction writer, has managed his own ethically run bison ranch since 1997. His narrative begins with the arrival of the bison in North America from Europe and Asia. For most of the animal's history, O'Brien finds, it was revered by the Plains Indians, who "relied on the buffalo for almost everything that made life possible" (p. 1). More recent history, however, has not been so kind. O'Brien recounts challenge after challenge faced by the bison, from overhunting in the 1800s to barbed wire later in the century, DDT, and the current depletion of the Ogallala Aquifer. O'Brien ends his account with a frank discussion of the role bison now hold in the American psyche as a symbol of wildness and a lesson in the need for environmental balance and preservation. And yet, today's bison are no longer wild, and the vast majority end their days in feed lots. *Great Plains Bison* is an inspiring call to action for America to do better by the species it calls its spirit animal.