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Book Review: Windmill Tales: Stories from the American Wind Power Center

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Windmill Tales: Stories from the American Wind Power Center. Photographs by Wyman Meinzer. Edited by Coy Harris. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2004. 160 pp. Photographs. \$37.50.

In the 1850s a Connecticut mechanic named Daniel Halladay invented a windmill that could pump water from the ground without constant human attention. As the breeze changed direction, the Halladay Standard Windmill turned to face the wind and automatically regulated its speed of operation. His invention and the refined mills that followed were literally the wheels to Euro-American settlement on the Great Plains. By pumping groundwater, they allowed people to live in areas without running streams and springs.

While not a field guide or history, *Windmill Tales* deftly presents these mechanical wonders as western icons. This coffee-table book displays more than eighty color photographs of windmills today and shares stories and lore from settlers, their children, and grandchildren. Wyman Meinzer's images, each executed with precision and thoughtful perspective, range from grand, silhouetted landscapes to nuanced details. Every picture invites the reader to investigate further, to explore the contraption's engineering and rustic beauty. Whether derelict or refurbished, standing as a homestead centerpiece or a lone prairie sentinel, the windmills in these images give insights into their places and the people who made and tended them. Though most of the photographs appear to have been taken in Texas, few have captions to tell the reader exactly where.

Presenting its stories as short blocks of text, *Windmill Tales* can be read comfortably at one sitting, or slowly, a page or two at a time. The stories, collected from visitors to the American Wind Power Center in Lubbock, Texas, share a sense of humor and reflect the difficult lives of prairie settlers. Mostly anonymous, these tales recall the windmills' clanking rhythms, tall derricks, and cantankerous natures. There is the story of the man who repaired his windmill at night because he was afraid of heights; of another man who made holes in his pump rod with a .30-.30 rifle; of boys turning a windmill's vanes by hand to water cattle during a period of still air; and of windmills that told time and tended babies.

The book's design is clean, and appropriate images are placed next to relevant stories. One disappointment, however, is that this handsome volume lacks page numbers for easy reference.

Proceeds from this volume will benefit the American Wind Power Center, home to a comprehensive collection of historical windmills.

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