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1988

## Review of Hunting and Trading on the Great Plains, 1859-1875

Glen E. Lich

*Baylor University*

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Lich, Glen E., "Review of Hunting and Trading on the Great Plains, 1859-1875" (1988). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 434.

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*Hunting and Trading on the Great Plains, 1859–1875.* By James R. Mead, edited by Schuyler Jones and introduction by Ignace Mead Jones. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986. Photographs, maps, bibliography, index. xx + 276 pp. \$22.95

Combining James R. Mead's published and unpublished materials, *Hunting and Trading on the Great Plains* is a carefully edited memoir from the Kansas prairie in the 1870s–1890s. Mead (1836–1910) ventured west with young friends who planned to look and return; he stayed. And as his life turned from the outdoors to business and politics, Mead saw a wide spectrum of the frontier. He met Jesse Chisholm and Kit Carson, learned to value Indian civilization, and lived long enough to record his memories of these experiences.

Filtered through a life that stretched from Vermont across the Midwest and every other major region of the United States except the South, Mead's memories assure breadth and perspective, even if they are—as the editor shows—occasionally flawed by minor inaccuracy of details. Apart from a journal from 1859, his wide-ranging writings fall within the period from 1883–1908. The composite, pieced together by the editor, is remarkable not only for what Mead says but also for his style. An entrepreneur in business, he was also a self-made storyteller; his tale, whether viewed from the perspective of its parts or from the vantage of the cycle, is original and penetrating, yet always suspenseful and entertaining. The editor remains sensitive to the rhetorical

aspects suggested by Mead's writings and ethos.

As he aged, Mead remembered events in different ways. Ambitions and aspirations, once achieved, no longer seemed as significant as his participation in irretrievable parts of frontiering. A parallax not only of age but also of values and shifting perceptions of self, these sometimes nostalgic and sometimes critical episodes tell today's reader what literature has always told: that ancient verities are the stuff of history and society, that the real self wins out in the end, and that understanding outlives belief. Yet somehow Mead makes what seems a saga of stasis, fatalism, and retrenchment seem dynamic and fresh and youthful. That style, that personality that rebounded from numerous business failures, distinguishes these memoirs from a host of other classics in homeliness.

GLEN E. LICH  
Regional Studies Program  
Baylor University