

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

1991

Review of Shaping Educational Change: The First Century of the University of Northern Colorado at Greeley

Maxine Benson
Denver, Colorado

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Benson, Maxine, "Review of Shaping Educational Change: The First Century of the University of Northern Colorado at Greeley" (1991). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 598.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/598>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Shaping Educational Change: The First Century of the University of Northern Colorado at Greeley. By Robert W. Larson. Foreword by James A. Michener. Introduction by Robert C. Dickenson. Boulder: Colorado Associated University Press, 1989. Illustrations, bibliographical essay, appendices, index. xviii + 486 pp. \$39.95.

In 1936, when a young instructor named James Michener was offered a position at the Colorado State College of Education in Greeley, his faculty mentors at the Ohio State University summer school warned him not to accept the job: "The sands of the desert are white with the bones of promising young men who went West and perished trying to get back East" (ix). Undeterred, Michener did go to Greeley, where he taught at the school's College High until 1941. He also acquired a master's degree as well as the historical background that he incorporated into his 1974 novel, *Centennial*.

During Michener's tenure, and for some years before and after, Colorado State College was indeed in the forefront of "shaping educational change," as Robert Larson's book amply demonstrates. Led by charismatic president George Frasier from 1924 to 1948, the college stressed

both teaching and research and publication on the part of the faculty; indeed, the Greeley school was often called the "Columbia of the West."

Placing the story of the institution, now known as the University of Northern Colorado (UNC), within the larger context of the history of higher education, Larson begins by recounting the history of the Union Colony, which established the town of Greeley in 1870. Larson points out that while that communitarian experiment did not endure, "the high educational level of this atypical frontier community resulted in its most distinctive contribution to American society: a college that would be as experimental as Greeley's idealistic town founder" (8).

Larson goes on to describe the evolution of the institution from normal school to teachers college to state college of education to university. His approach is both chronological and topical, with chapters dealing with presidential eras interspersed with those describing campus life. Although he received unstinting university support, Larson was free to report on all aspects of the record; thus, two chapters, "The Normal Row" and "The Battle of the Standards," detail past conflicts.

A long-time UNC professor of history noted for his books on Rocky Mountain populism, Larson is well qualified to undertake the preparation of such a work, and he brings to the task both an insider's perspective and an historian's objectivity. The result is a fully annotated, well-written volume, handsomely produced by the Colorado Associated University Press. While some of the details of the later years will be of value primarily to members of the Greeley "family," the work can be read with profit and enjoyment by all those interested in the history of higher education.

MAXINE BENSON
Denver, Colorado