

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

1991

Review of Buffalo Bill and His Wild West: A Pictorial Biography.

Richard W. Ethulain

University of New Mexico

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



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

Ethulain, Richard W., "Review of Buffalo Bill and His Wild West: A Pictorial Biography." (1991). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 599.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/599>

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.

Buffalo Bill and His Wild West: A Pictorial Biography. By Joseph G. Rosa and Robin May. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989. Illustrations, bibliography, index. x + 243 pp. \$29.00 cloth, \$16.45 paper.

Novels and histories of the American West have always attracted a large, varied audience. Some readers, preferring stirring adventure narratives of the Old West, have bought Louis L'Amour Westerns by the hundreds of thousands, collected Frederic Remington and Charlie Russell prints, and mourned the apparent demise

of TV and cinematic Westerns. Others, drawn to a regional West, have devoured Walter Prescott Webb's histories, the historical fiction of Willa Cather, A. B. Guthrie, and Wallace Stegner, and the regional paintings of Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, and John Steuart Curry. Still others, viewing the West as a significant global subregion, are attracted to the novels of Nathanael West, Joan Didion, and numerous ethnic writers, the histories of Donald Worster and Patricia Nelson Limerick, and the works of a panoply of experimental, expressionistic painters.

The volume under review falls clearly into the first category. The authors, two Englishmen, endeavor to provide a pictorial biography of Buffalo Bill Cody and his Wild West show with an accompanying readable, straightforward text. Gathering many previously unpublished photographs of Cody and his entertainers but drawing their text primarily from standard published sources on Buffalo Bill, the authors supply a useful summary of their intended topic, with particular emphasis on the Wild West show in England.

Others readers, wanting more, will be disappointed that this volume adds so little new material. The authors assert that they will center on "Cody the man," but their emphases are on Cody's outward life—what he did and where he went. In pursuing these lively exteriors, Rosa and May may be overlooking even more significant questions: what were Cody's thoughts, what ideas did he hold, what is the meaning of Buffalo Bill? The section on the Wild West show in England illustrates these strengths and limitations, supplying numerous interesting facts but lacking analysis and evaluation.

Aficionados of the Old West are less likely to raise these points, however. Undoubtedly they will be satisfied with the authors' modest goal of supplying a pictorial biography of a man they claim "did more than anyone [else] to promote the myths and reality of the frontier West" (vii).

RICHARD W. ETULAIN
Department of History
University of New Mexico