

1991

Review of The Quartzite Border: Surveying and Marking the North Dakota-South Dakota Boundary, 1891- 1892

Ronald E. Grim
Library of Congress

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



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

Grim, Ronald E., "Review of The Quartzite Border: Surveying and Marking the North Dakota-South Dakota Boundary, 1891- 1892" (1991). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 642.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/642>

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.

The Quartzite Border: Surveying and Marking the North Dakota-South Dakota Boundary, 1891-1892. By Gordon L. Iseminger. Sioux Falls, South Dakota: The Center for Western Studies, Augustana College, 1988. Photographs, maps, tables, bibliographical essay, index. xvii + 123 pp. \$10.95.

The definition, surveying, and particularly the marking, with quartzite monuments, of the state boundary between North and South Dakota provide the major themes for this study. It is obvious that the author, who was born and raised in South Dakota and now teaches history in North Dakota, has a special fondness for these monuments. While the study will be of primary interest to North and South Dakota state and local history enthusiasts, the book will also interest political geographers and historians (as a case study in the establishment of two states and their boundary) and cartographic historians (as an example of the surveying and mapping process associated with the establishment of a state boundary).

Iseminger's story begins in the 1870s with a discussion of the movement for statehood. When

the twin states of North and South Dakota were admitted to the Union in 1889, the boundary between the two states was set at a line near the 46th degree of north latitude, the 7th Standard Parallel of the 5th Principal Meridian, utilized by the U.S. General Land Office in its survey of townships within the territory. Iseminger reviews the township survey system then focuses on the monuments, which were cut from a particularly durable and distinctive quartzite quarried near Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Iseminger devotes the next three chapters to the boundary's survey by Charles H. Bates and its examination by George G. Beardsley. In addition to covering the essential elements of the story, such as Bates's competition for the contract and the hardships encountered in running a boundary line and setting 720 monuments through 360 miles of open prairie, Iseminger places the survey in context with numerous references to events and people in the towns near the boundary. In the final chapter, the author inventories the monuments and pleads for their preservation.

Although no footnotes accompany the text, the bibliographical essay, the numerous illustrations, and the constant references to local history demonstrate that this study was well researched. Bates's original survey notes and plats, preserved in the South Dakota Historical Society, and copies of the correspondence (including contracts, instructions, and bonds) between Bates, Beardsley, and the General Land Office, in the National Archives in Washington, D.C., are the most important sources. Iseminger also used contemporary newspapers, historical photographs, and local histories, interviewed local residents, and searched for the location of all the original monuments.

I must, however, mention one source not included in the bibliographic essay: another copy of Bates's field notes and survey plats, located in the Cartographic and Architectural Branch of the National Archives. Although these sources will probably not add any new insights to this story, they do underscore one aspect of the General Land Office's surveying process, the creation of manuscript copies of field notes

and plats for both state and national officials. Such details are obviously of more interest to researchers such as myself, who are interested in the creation and preservation of cartographic records, than to researchers such as Iseminger, who find the monuments that marked the boundary of primary importance.

RONALD E. GRIM
Geography and Map Division
Library of Congress