

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

1992

Review of The Custer Album: A Pictorial Biography of General George

Sherry L. Smith

University of Texas, El Paso

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



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

Smith, Sherry L., "Review of The Custer Album: A Pictorial Biography of General George" (1992). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 735.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/735>

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 Custer Album: A Pictorial Biography of General George A. Custer. By Lawrence A. Frost. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990. Photographs, bibliography, index. 192 pp. \$14.95.

This pictorial biography of General George A. Custer was first published in 1964. Now, the University of Oklahoma Press has brought it out in paperback. Its attractive cover plus the plethora of photographs, which constitute the bulk of the book, bode well for the book's popularity.

The volume begins with a number of lithographs and paintings of the Battle of the Little Big Horn, followed by views of Custer's parents, childhood homes, and Custer himself from his West Point days through the Civil War. Frost

also selected photographs of Custer's officer-colleagues and drawings of his most famous engagements during the Civil War.

The majority of the book's pages, however, are devoted to Custer's days with the Seventh Cavalry on the Great Plains. Besides family photographs, Frost also included photographs of Indians (including scouts who worked with Custer on various campaigns), of slaughtered buffalo, of social activities at frontier army posts, and of the disheveled bones scattered on the Little Big Horn battlefield.

The book's primary purpose is to present photographs. Yet, Frost, who lived in Custer's Michigan "hometown" of Monroe, offers considerable commentary about Custer. Here the book is clearly dated. Although Frost acknowledges the debate about Custer, he is celebratory in his presentation of this controversial man. Soldiers are the heroes, Indians are the "predators." Moreover, the buffalo slaughter is treated in a light-hearted fashion. During the last twenty-five years, since the book's original publication, Indian and environmental historians have made major revisions in the way historians now understand these issues. All of this is not to criticize Frost for not having had 1990s sensibilities in the 1960s. But it does suggest that the press might have done a greater service to Frost and to the readers by including a foreword or introduction to discuss *changes* in interpretation since 1964. Untutored readers, of whom this book will attract many, will read Frost's book lacking sufficient background to realize its interpretations are debatable at best.

The omission of a new introduction is particularly unfortunate in this kind of book, which is likely to attract a wide (and perhaps young) readership. The publisher missed an opportunity to bring to a wider audience the insights of more recent scholarship.

SHERRY L. SMITH
Department of History
University of Texas, El Paso