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Review of Victorian West: Class and Culture in Kansas Cattle Towns

Frederick C. Luebke

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, fredluebke@comcast.net

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BOOK REVIEWS

Victorian West: Class and Culture in Kansas Cattle Towns. By C. Robert Haywood. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991. Illustrations, tables, figures, preface, afterword, notes, bibliography, index. xiv + 325 pp. \$29.95.

Since Robert Haywood retired from the academic administration of Washburn University some years ago, he has become a major historian of the Great Plains region. Although he has been interested chiefly in Kansas history, he has produced books of general interest. His latest, *Victorian West: Class and Culture in Kansas Cattle Towns*, may also be his best.

Haywood chose a title that encapsulates the book's content and suggests his thesis. He examines the social composition and cultural characteristics of three representative towns—Wichita, Dodge City, and Caldwell—during the Victorian era, which means the heyday of the Texas cattle trade, mostly the 1870s and '80s. He organizes much of his analysis in terms of conflicts and accommodations between two contending populations, each with its own class structure.

On one side was the "rough or uncivilized element": Texas cattlemen, cowboys, peace officers, gunfighters, and the operators of saloons, gambling establishments, and dance halls; the category encompasses actors and musicians, plus providers of personal services, including prostitutes. All have been made famous by American mythologists from the dime novelists to movie and television writers and producers. Arrayed on the other side were the prosaic "solid citizens": the merchants, stockmen, bankers, professionals, craftsmen, clerks, "the poor but respectable folk," and other persons, male and female, who were interested in permanence,

stability, and the transfer of Victorian values to the Great Plains frontier.

Haywood offers fascinating analyses of differing or opposing attitudes and behaviors of people in these two cultures and their contrasting life styles, but mostly he demonstrates that the majority embraced eastern or Victorian standards. He describes the growth of churches, schools, literary societies, and libraries and entertainments both private and public; he discusses births, deaths, marriages, and families, as well as fads and fancies; and after an illuminating investigation of public benevolence, ceremonies, and voluntary organizations such as the lodges with their "unctuous honorifics," Haywood ends with a chapter on Victorian women in Kansas cattle towns.

Although Haywood does not dispute the idea that the Great Plains environment modified class and culture in the Kansas cattle towns, he stresses the continuity of culture. He concludes that life in the cattle towns "could hardly be distinguished from other eastern or Middle Border trading centers of comparable size" (p. xiii).

Haywood's history is founded on wide-ranging and exhaustive research in every imaginable source. His analyses are grounded in intelligent reading of relevant secondary sources and effectively related to the context of American social and cultural history. His publisher has enhanced his scholarship with an attractive design. Above all, Haywood writes beautifully. He has a lively imagination that seems capable of producing on call a memorable phrase graced with wit and elegance.

FREDERICK C. LUEBKE
Department of History
University of Nebraska-Lincoln