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Review of Encyclopedia of Frontier Biography. 3 vols

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Encyclopedia of Frontier Biography. 3 vols. By Dan L. Thrapp. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991. Introduction, index. xvi + 1698 pp. \$60.00.

There are almost 4500 entries in this *Encyclopedia of Frontier Biography*. Candidates were chosen by the editor for the "significance of their deeds" and for the intrinsic "interest" of their role in the frontier process (vii). They are mostly men, mainly Euro-American but also Native American, though clearly some effort has been made to include frontier women. Among them are explorers, scientists, outlaws, missionaries, settlers, and soldiers. Twentieth-century frontier historians like Athearn and Billington are also included, as long as they, like all the other featured people, are deceased. Strangely, prospectors are excluded on the implausible grounds that the literature of the mining frontier is "too vast" to handle—but not the literature of the fur trade?

For the most part, the editor has done his job well. If the entries most familiar to this reviewer are any measure, then the encyclopedia is accurate, which is, of course its primary requirement. The writing is laudably objective, though thankfully enlivened by Thrapp's enthusiasm for the subject matter. The sources used for the information are standards—Hafen's *Mountain Men* series, for example—and a well-developed index guides the reader not only to entries but also to other men and women who participated in the frontier drama but did not merit a paragraph.

Still, there are drawbacks that detract from the overall merit of the work. There is no system of cross-referencing to link the individual entries, and the bibliographic references at the end of each entry are few and often outdated. The

"new western history" seems not to have penetrated this redoubt. There also seems to be a regional bias favoring the southwest, the setting of Thrapp's previous books. But in a most disarming way Thrapp has anticipated potential objections in his introduction: he "extends apologies" in advance if readers are not impressed by his references and he solicits better ones, and he provides an address for the submission of information on new prospective entries. He hopes that such information will be used in a future, expanded version of the encyclopedia, and one can only wish him well because he has made a good start.

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