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Review of Kansas Governors

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Oyos, Lynwood E., "Review of Kansas Governors" (1992). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 797.
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Kansas Governors. By Homer E. Socolofsky.
Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990.
Preface, maps, photographs, tables, notes,
bibliography, index. xiv + 225 pp. \$22.50.

Kansas Governors began more than a decade ago when Homer Socolofsky provided the information on Kansas governors for the *Biographical Directory of the Governors of the United States* and the *Biographical Directory of American Territorial Governors*. In the current volume, he brings together a much more complete treatment of both the territorial and state governors of Kansas. A long-time Kansas historian, Socolofsky was well qualified to enter into this

project. In addition to examining primary source material within Kansas, he used relevant resources found in the Newberry Library and the Library of Congress.

Kansas Governors provides two- to eight-page sketches of the governors and acting governors of the Territory of Kansas and the State of Kansas. Each profile includes genealogical data, photograph, and autograph of the governor. All of the sketches have the same format: a brief description of the election campaign and mention of the future governor's political opponent, voting data, pre-political background, and a review of the key events of the particular governor's administration.

The profiles of the territorial governors are particularly interesting. Between 1854 and 1861, ten men attempted to govern at a time when the residents of "Bleeding Kansas" were trying to decide whether they would be slave or free upon admission to statehood. Of these ten Democrats, five were fired, one removed, three resigned, and the last man's position ended with statehood. Territorial governors were appointed for four years, but Wilson Shannon served the longest continuous term, more than nine and one-half months. He was governor in May 1856, during the proslave raid on Lawrence and John Brown's retaliatory attack along Pottawatomie Creek.

Although *Kansas Governors* will be of particular interest to residents of the Jayhawker State, non-Kansans will recognize the names of several of the twentieth century governors who achieved national status—Arthur Capper, Harry Woodring, Alfred Landon, and George Docking, whose son Robert occupied the governor's chair from 1967 to 1975, and whose grandson, Tom, was lieutenant governor from 1982 to 1986. George Docking was the first non-Republican to have a second term as governor. In the twentieth century, Democratic candidates in Kansas have fared better in the gubernatorial races than in contests for the state legislature, their victories paralleling the state's growing urbanization. Many of these Democratic governors, including the two Dockings, professed to

be fiscal conservatives. Following Robert Docking's four terms as governor, political pundits argued that Kansas had become a two-party state.

A thirty-page essay, "Governors and Acting Governors of Kansas," preceding the sketches of the governors, provides a considerable amount of statistical data plus information on the various governors' places of origin, their physiques, average ages, occupations, whether they were clean shaven or not, and other minutiae that could have been eliminated and replaced with additional analysis and interpretation of the several chief executives in the context of the time in which they held office. Although he was never governor, William Allen White's role in Kansas politics for over four decades deserves further attention. Socolofsky, nevertheless, provides readers with an excellent introduction to Kansas politics and a model for works of this type.

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