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1995

**Review of *Great Lakes Lumber on the Great Plains: The Laird, Norton Lumber Company in South Dakota* By John N. Vogel**

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Miller, John E., "Review of *Great Lakes Lumber on the Great Plains: The Laird, Norton Lumber Company in South Dakota* By John N. Vogel" (1995). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1062.

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*Great Lakes Lumber on the Great Plains: The Laird, Norton Lumber Company in South Dakota.* By John N. Vogel. Foreword by Wayne Franklin. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992. Foreword, preface, maps, black and white photographs, notes, bibliography, index. xx + 195 pp. \$27.95.

The publication in 1991 of William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* established a useful model for blending economic and environmental history. The book focused on three commodities—grain, lumber, and meat—as they were harvested, transported and channeled through

Chicago, processed, and marketed to consumers in the hinterlands. Looking at a different locale, Vogel takes the second of these commodities and shows how it was transformed from the abundant white pine stands of Wisconsin's Chippewa Valley to sawed boards ready for sale in lumber yards along the railroad in a dozen-and-a-half towns in Dakota Territory that sprang up overnight during the Great Dakota Boom of 1878 to 1886.

Though smaller in scope, both geographically and chronologically, than Cronon's tale, Vogel's is an intriguing and significant one, told clearly and economically. The Mississippi River town of Winona, Minnesota, lies at the center of this story. Here, beginning in the 1850s, Youmans Brothers and Hodgins, the Empire Lumber Company, the Winona Lumber Company, and Laird, Norton and Company set up their lumber mills and began sawing lumber rafted down the Mississippi, shipping it out by rail to towns in Minnesota and eastern Dakota Territory. The author devotes most of his attention to the last of the above-named companies because its papers have been preserved in fairly good order and in sufficient quantity to establish how it located and operated its line yards.

After a prefatory chapter introducing its major themes, the book devotes chapters to the settlement of eastern Dakota Territory; the Chippewa Valley lumber industry; Laird, Norton's policy in locating its line yards and in supplying lumber to independent dealers; the physical layout of lumberyard and towns; the business practices of the company and its agents; and the decline of the Winona-based mills during the 1890s.

Vogel has mined the Laird, Norton Papers at the Minnesota Historical Society, secondary accounts, local newspapers, and other primary sources to tell his story. He shows how the industry worked, indicates how the settlement process demanded large quantities of sawed lumber, and brings to life the routines of the line yards along the railroad. The available sources unfortunately are not very revealing about exactly how decisions were made in

the Winona office or about the profitability of the firm's operations and its internal decision-making process. Nevertheless, Vogel's book is useful and will be of interest to all students of the frontier and the upper Great Plains region.

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