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Review of *Flat Water: A History of Nebraska and Its Water* Edited by Robert Kuzelka, Charles Flowerday, Robert Manley, Bradley Rundquist, and Sally Herrin

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Flat Water: A History of Nebraska and Its Water. Edited by Robert Kuzelka, Charles Flowerday, Robert Manley, Bradley Rundquist, and Sally Herrin. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Conservation and Survey Division, 1993. Introduction, illustrations, photographs, maps, table, chronology, epilogue, author biographies, index. vi + 291 pp. \$20 paper.

Read this volume if you want to know anything, nearly everything, about the history of water development in Nebraska. Robert Manley first began this book as a centennial history of the Nebraska State Irrigation Association, but he persuaded the editors of the need for a more inclusive treatment of Nebraska, which incidentally is an Omaha or Oto word meaning "Broad, Flat Water." Over thirty contributors would write the articles, draw the maps, make the charts, and take the photographs that comprise this hefty undertaking. The production staff should take pride in everyone's efforts.

The contents are far ranging, nearing eclipsing the formation of the Nebraska State Irrigation Association in 1893. Under the initial leadership of I. A. Fort, the association preached the doctrine of agricultural salvation through irrigation. The membership lobbied the state and national governments for

supportive legislation, and in Nebraska the result over the last one hundred years is telling. In 1890 irrigators flooded 9000 acres with surface-water diversions. A decade later the number of acres had leaped to 150,000, including 1000 irrigated with groundwater. In 1990 farmers had 8 million acres under irrigation, 7 million of those acres watered by groundwater.

The authors begin the volume by treating the history of American Indian peoples and their uses of water, and they end with a section devoted to the modern high-tech farmer. They discuss many individuals, among whom are William Smythe, founder of the "Irrigation Crusade," center-pivot inventor Frank Zymbach, and Maurice Kremer, a state legislator from 1963 through 1982, who won many Nebraskans' admiration in his efforts to blend environmental protection with economic development. Some specific contributors deserve mention. Ann Bleed, the State Hydrologist, makes sense of the climate and water resources found in the state. Sally J. Herrin and Charles Flowerday squarely confront and elaborate on the contemporary environmental problems facing Nebraskans. They provide a fair assessment of the serious issues involving nitrates, siltation, soil erosion, loss of wildlife habitat, biodiversity, and sustainable agriculture. They also explore the social forces often pitting urban environmentalists against irrigators.

If one can find any criticism of this book, it might lie in the editors trying to do too much. At times the sidebars and vignettes interspersed in the articles can be distracting to one's train of thought. But this may simply be my own idiosyncrasy, because the layout fits the trends found in many textbooks done by major corporate publishing houses. Overall, this is a fine production and will well serve the interests of anyone who is interested in water development in the West.

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