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Review of *Nebraska: An Illustrated History* By Frederick C. Luebke

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Nebraska: An Illustrated History. By Frederick C. Luebke. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995. Photographs, preface, bibliography, index. xxiv + 405 pp. \$35.00.

In this first comprehensive history of Nebraska since the second edition of James C. Olson's *Nebraska History* of 1966, Frederick Luebke begins with the question, "What is unique about the history of Nebraska?" His answer, artfully developed through more than three hundred black and white photographs and a gracefully written text, is that the state's uniqueness is in the way its people have responded through time to the challenges presented by the Great Plains environment and to the events that have shaped its history and culture.

The book's five major parts—"Before Statehood: A Place on the Way to Somewhere Else"; "A Fledgling State: Nebraska's First Quarter Century"; "The Emergence of Modern Nebraska, 1890-1930"; "Drought, Depression, War, and Recovery, 1930-1970"; and "Change in Contemporary Nebraska, 1970-1995"—are divided into fifty-eight topical chapters, usually two to three pages in length. Photographs, illustrations, and maps are accompanied by lengthy captions providing valuable additional information about the development of Nebraska. Although extremely diverse, the chapters are bound together by common themes.

Throughout, Luebke stresses the importance of environmental and geographic factors, especially the location of the Platte River, in shaping Nebraska's history. Another focus is the impact of transportation systems—including steamships, railroads, the Lincoln Highway, and Interstate 80—on settlement patterns and the state's economic development. The author also points out how technology, particularly since World War II, has transformed agriculture, revolutionized communications, ended rural isolation, and made Nebraska's people and culture more homogeneous. Finally, Luebke emphasizes that beginning with the first white travellers who passed through the region, Nebraska has always been

viewed as a transit area—an area to go through to get somewhere else. That view, he concludes, still prevails in the minds of many who pass through the state.

This is a thoroughly engaging book that should be required reading for any student of Nebraska history. Its text, though brief, is well written and offers readers enough information to develop a sophisticated understanding of the complexities of the state's history. Luebke covers traditional topics, such as the history and mistreatment of Native Americans, the fur trade, migration along the overland trails, statehood, the building of the transcontinental railroad, town building, immigration patterns, politics, and the development of agriculture, ranching, and industry. He also attends to developments in higher education, identifies distinctive architectural patterns and achievements, and discusses the roles that women, African Americans, and other minorities have played throughout the state's past.

Masterfully highlighting the contribution that individuals such as William Jennings Bryan, George Norris, and Norbert Tiemann have made to the state, Luebke is able at the same time to relate Nebraska's history to national and international developments. He also provides a sure account of the state's history during the past fifty years. The concluding essay, "Change in Contemporary Nebraska, 1970-1995," is especially helpful in understanding recent changes in population trends, agriculture, the economy, and Nebraska's relationship to the rest of the world. With the assistance of the staff of the Nebraska State Historical Society, to whom the book is dedicated, Luebke has done an outstanding job of selecting photographs that illustrate the richness and complexity of Nebraska's past.

This book is an important contribution to our understanding of Nebraska history.

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