

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

2009

Review of *William F. Cody's Wyoming Empire: The Buffalo Bill Nobody Knows*. By Robert E. Bonner

Jack R. Preston

Farm and Ranch Museum, Gering, Nebraska

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Preston, Jack R., "Review of *William F. Cody's Wyoming Empire: The Buffalo Bill Nobody Knows*. By Robert E. Bonner" (2009). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1192.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1192>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Cody aptly illustrates that even in the business world William Cody was still the showman promoter.

The book is very well documented, based on an abundance of correspondence found in the files of the participants of the Shoshone project. It tells how Cody, always the man in charge, badgered, cajoled, and saw things through rose-colored glasses. He used his power and "vision" on his friends and business associates to invest in projects, thus fulfilling his dream of irrigating the arid land around Cody to promote the town of Cody.

The dream Cody envisioned was not thoroughly grounded in reality. Although he had the ability through actions and financial support to force his associates to further his agenda, he wasn't able to force farmers to subscribe to his project. Was the project a product of the mania of irrigation development in the West, or was it Cody trying to make a fast buck from the farmers?

Bonner doesn't cover how Cody's irrigation company compared with other private projects in the Great Plains being built at the same time. A comparison between similar projects and the Shoshone would have placed it in the context of what was going on in the rest of Wyoming and the West. Was this project entirely a product of Cody's mind, or was it copied from other enterprises that had less famous promoters?

These questions aside, Bonner skillfully charts the successes and failures of Cody's Shoshone Land and Irrigation Company and its successors. The voluminous amount of correspondence relating to this company is an amazing asset he skillfully mines and interprets. The book illustrates the problems of starting, building, and operating a private irrigation system for the benefit of others. It definitely illustrates that a person with Cody's power can move mountains against nearly insurmountable odds, and that even with that power one cannot always force a positive result.

JACK R. PRESTON

Library/Archives

Farm and Ranch Museum, Gering, Nebraska

William F. Cody's Wyoming Empire: The Buffalo Bill Nobody Knows. By Robert E. Bonner. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007. xxii + 318 pp. Maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$32.95.

Robert Bonner's book provides wonderful insight into Cody's promotional activities outside of Madison Square Garden. The tale of his sponsorship of the Shoshone irrigation projects and the formation of the town of