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Review of *Cowtown Wichita and the Wild, Wicked West*. By Stan Hoig

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Cowtown Wichita and the Wild, Wicked West. By Stan Hoig. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007. xiv + 210 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$19.95 paper.

Stan Hoig traces the development of Wichita, Kansas, from a nexus of Native American trading and hunting to a fledgling frontier town, to a crossroads of both the cattle and railroad industries, to an emerging modern city at the close of the nineteenth century. Poised at the confluence of the Arkansas and Little Arkansas Rivers, Wichita's location, Hoig notes, made it ideal for trade and interaction among Indians, military, and cattlemen, and immigrant, African American, and Anglo settlers, all of whom contributed to the city's history.

In his introduction, Hoig states his intention is not to place his narrative into the larger sociological context that other scholars, such as Richard Dystra and Craig Miner, have already done. Instead he wants to impart "the colorful events of Wichita's history and characters, letting [readers] vivaciously share . . . in the experience of her Wild West days." Using a combination of newspaper and personal accounts, Hoig weaves together biographies of local heroes, such as Indian agent Jesse Leavenworth, German-immigrant trader and "Father of Wichita" William "Dutch Bill" Greiffenstein, and local lawman Mike Meagher, with men, such as Jesse Chisholm and Wyatt Earp, who spent time in Wichita, only later acquiring national prestige. Together these individuals helped transform Wichita from a frontier outpost into a thriving western city. According to Hoig, however, they also contributed to Wichita's reputation as a rough and lawless community, which he showcases in accounts of shootouts, Indian fights, cattle drives, bar brawls, and prostitution in what is now downtown Wichita. The combination of biographical sketches and animated stories situates Wichita among other western communities, while exposing how its unique location and innovative leaders combined to create a prosperous city on the Plains.

Though Hoig lures readers in with lively accounts of Wichita's "Wild West" days, by not contextualizing his narrative with the more quotidian activities and people involved in frontier settlement, he leaves his readers wondering why his narrative matters. These tales of wilder days hold a place in the annals of the American West, but without even a minimum of context, they read more like twice-told tales of conquest and progress instead of revealing their potential as moments of contest and interchange in the nineteenth-century Great Plains. Hoig hints at a rich and diverse Wichita that scholars have overlooked and oversimplified. By focusing narrowly on "wild" Wichita, however, he upholds the mythology of the American West, leaving it to future scholars to try to connect his contributions to larger historiographical debates.

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