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Review of *Jim Lane: Scoundrel, Statesman, Kansan* By Robert Collins

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Jim Lane: Scoundrel, Statesman, Kansan. By Robert Collins. Gretna, LA.: Pelican Publishing Company, 2007. 320 pp. Map. photo graphs, bibliography, index. \$29.95.

No one who ever sat down in a room with James H. Lane or heard him on the platform could doubt that he was a dramatic, mesmerizing personality. Any historian of Bleeding Kansas can testify to his importance. Indeed, he was doubtless *the* key figure in the affair. Journalists at the time and biographers since have tried to create accounts worthy of Lane himself, but, as Lloyd Lewis pointed out many years ago, he has largely eluded them. Lane remains a "shadowy figure," with many of his instincts and motivations subject to speculation.

A major problem is sources. Robert Collins does miss a few of them. There are the *Congressional Globe* and the *U.S. Congressional Serial Set* for Lane's role as Senator from Kansas in such issues as the Pacific railroad debate. There are Lane letters in the Sidney Clarke papers at the University of Oklahoma. And, maybe most significantly, Lane shows up a great deal in the national press, while Collins relies exclusively on Kansas newspapers. Searchable electronic databases now make the national press accessible to the biographer.

Still, Collins does well with the secondary sources and employs most of the primary ones. But the material is thin for interpreting such a complex man. Mysteriously, there are very few Lane letters in the major surviving collections of people to whom one would think Lane would have written often. The contemporary explanation that Lane was illiterate does not hold up. We therefore have great contemporary observers, like John Ingalls, commenting about Lane, and some verbatim newspaper accounts of his speeches, complete with description of gestures, but very little of Lane's personal correspondence.

Some of the best quotations have been published before, but the sources are not easily available. Also, as Collins points out in his thorough discussions of the secondary literature on Lane,

much of the writing about him has been biased. It is tempting to use Lane as a Mephistophelean figure, emphasizing the color and missing the sources of his power, respect, and influence. Collins does much to balance the picture and portray Lane as a sensible, if radical, politician rather than an amoral madman. Understandably, sometimes Lane himself gets lost in the more general discussion of his times, but readers interested in those times will be glad to have so much of what can be known about the "Grim Chieftain" conveniently available.

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