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## Review of *True Tales of the Prairies and Plains* By David Dary

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*Homestead National Monument of America*

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*True Tales of the Prairies and Plains.* By David Dary. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007. xii + 248 pp. Map, illustrations, notes, index. \$24.95.

The cover of *True Tales of the Prairies and Plains* notes that author David Dary is a past winner of the Cowboy Hall of Fame Award and the Western Writers of America Spur Award. One must assume that his previous books made better contributions to the scholarship of the American West than does this one. Fine for a casual reader or one interested in entertaining vignettes about the West, this work has little to offer the serious scholar.

The book is broken into several sections with such titles as "Over the Trails and Rails," "Buried Treasure Legends" (so much for *True Tales*), "The Lawless, Lawmen, and Justice," "Buffalo, Horses, and Other Creatures," and "The Famous and the Obscure." Within each section are a number of relevant short entries. Geographically, Dary presents stories from throughout the Great Plains. Texas, Kansas, Oklahoma, the Dakotas, Nebraska, and other Plains states receive much attention. Two of the strongest entries come from the "Famous and the Obscure" section, and both concern future presidents and their lives on the Plains. The story of young Dwight D. Eisenhower's solicitation of an appointment to West Point or Annapolis is recounted in "Two Letters from Abilene." (Interestingly, Eisenhower hoped for the Naval Academy but had to settle for West Point because he was too old for Annapolis.) "The Badlands Rancher Who Became President"

explores Theodore Roosevelt's ranching experiences in North Dakota in the 1880s.

One criticism of Dary's work is that he offers little source material for his so-called "true tales." There are no footnotes in the body of the book. Rather, at the conclusion is a "Notes" section listing the sources for each entry. A number of them list just one source, which is often a newspaper clipping or an entry from someone's recollections published years after the events in question. There is little corroborating evidence for many of the entries.

Academic historians will likely have little use for this book. However, those unconcerned about the sources for the entries and interested in tales of cowboys and Indians, wagon trains, buried treasure, frontier justice and murder mysteries, buffalo herds, and more may find Dary's book an entertaining read.

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