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Review of *Voices of the American West, Volume 1: The Indian Interviews of Eli. S. Ricker, 1903-1919* By Eli Ricker & *Voices of the American West, Volume 2: The Settler and Soldier Interviews of Eli. S. Ricker, 1903-1919* By Eli Ricker

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Voices of the American West, Volume 1: The Indian Interviews of Eli. S. Ricker, 1903-1919. By Eli Ricker. Edited and with an introduction by Richard E. Jensen. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. xxvii + 495 pp Map, illustrations, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$55.00.

Voices of the American West, Volume 2: The Settler and Soldier Interviews of Eli. S. Ricker, 1903-1919. By Eli Ricker. Edited and with an introduction by Richard E. Jensen. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. xi + 470 pp. Map, illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$55.00.

The ending decades of the nineteenth century brought many Americans to the realization that the people who had witnessed the creation of a new country were passing on. Historical societies, newspapers, and enthusiastic individuals began recording their own experiences and collecting biographical information and reminiscences of others. Some of these were published, others archived for posterity. The interviews conducted by Eli S. Ricker are a classic example of the process.

Ricker moved to Chadron, Nebraska, in 1885. He had various careers, but it was probably his editorship of the *Chadron Times* that developed his interest in Indians. By 1903 he was visiting Pine Ridge Reservation, recording interviews, and writing articles more representative of a Native perspective than most. In 1910 the family moved to Washington, D.C., where Ricker worked for the Office of Indian Affairs in a menial position that allowed him time to conduct additional research. In 1912 he and his wife went to live with their son in Grand Junction, Colorado. At that time his library held more than 2,000 books, untold pages of interviews, documents, and copies of documents. Ricker worked on a book manuscript but never finished it, and following his death in 1926 most of the collection was sold. The notebooks containing the records of his interviews were given to the Nebraska Historical Society where they formed an

important archive for researchers. Now these materials are more readily available to all.

Richard E. Jensen has organized the interviews into two volumes. The Native American one consists of long and short descriptions of military encounters, especially Wounded Knee, comments on agency issues, the Ghost Dance, treaties, families, and various other subjects. With few exceptions the respondents were men descended from non-Indian fathers and Lakota mothers. Ricker undoubtedly had themes in mind when he conducted his interviews, but the finished reports are often disjointed because he did not direct the respondents or record their exact words. Despite the problems, the interviews are a gold mine of information, and researchers will be rewarded for digging through them. Jensen has helped a great deal by organizing the book into three main chapters subdivided by respondent and topic. The detailed index further assists in getting to the topics. Jensen's footnotes also help to fill out the interviews.

The second volume deals with military and other issues as described by non-Indian men. The only woman interviewed apart from her husband was Mabel Dawson who had taught school at Pine Ridge, but whose interview consists of copies of letters concerning her teaching at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. The interviews are organized into seven chapters: "Wounded Knee," "Agents and Agencies," "Little Bighorn," "Lightning Creek Incident," "Biographical Sketches," and "Old West." Ricker was interested in Wounded Knee because he believed that the soldiers had attacked unnecessarily; his interviews therefore tend toward that perspective. He also planned to write about the education system at Pine Ridge, and references to this are found in both this book and the first volume. The final chapter contains interviews with fur traders as well as references to other military events, treaties, and other tribes.

Ricker left Nebraska and the West an important source of information, and Jensen has made this more user-friendly by his organization and commentary. Neither volume is conducive to reading from first page to last,

but should be regarded as a source book on events and people at Pine Ridge Reservation in the early 1900s. Although Ricker was most interested in military issues, the references to reservation life and glimpses of reservation culture may be of more interest to present-day readers. The materials in these two books will undoubtedly trigger new research as well.

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