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## Review of *Deadwood: The Golden Years* By Watson Parker

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bibliography, index. xiv + 302 pp. \$24.00 cloth. \$10.95 paper.

Watson Parker has devoted most of his professional career to writing the history of the Black Hills of South Dakota, and those interested in that history are richer for it. In this, his latest effort, he has focused on Deadwood, the mining town of fame and fable, and examines what he calls its "golden years" of 1875 to 1920. Parker states in his preface that he has tried "to present Deadwood as a whole, a compound of people, business, technology, society, whoopee, and promotion, all intermixed and interacting to produce a small but prosperous city which to this day remains a monument to the vitality and endurance of the mining West." He has succeeded in this objective and in producing a delightfully entertaining piece of historical literature at the same time.

The story of Deadwood that Parker relates bears similarities to the early years of most frontier communities with its speculative fevers, promotional hooplas, and excesses of various kinds. But to Parker the key to understanding the uniqueness of Deadwood is to realize its nearly total dependence upon the mines and miners that surrounded it. Deadwood developed through a succession of booms beginning with the gold rush of 1876 that created it, through the hardrock boom of the 1890s, and ending with the cyanide boom of the early 1900s. Between the booms the town struggled to survive.

Deadwood's "golden age" was closely tied to the gold mines, but this is not just a mining history. Parker also probes the inner workings of the town and its people. It is a colorful history and Parker makes the most of it by his skillful use of the material and his writing style. His language is as colorful as Deadwood's history. He looks at the cold facts and the fanciful tales and does justice to both. Indeed, Parker feels that in many instances "the lively lies and misconceptions . . . were more important in shaping Deadwood's history than truer and more sober truths would have been."

While most frontier towns possessed a lower-

*Deadwood: The Golden Years.* By Watson Parker. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981. Maps, illustrations, notes,

class element that thrived on the opportunities of the free-wheeling atmosphere at the outset of settlement, Parker finds that this element was larger and tolerated longer in Deadwood. Indeed, the Badlands section of the town with its shenanigans and colorful characters became an important part of the lore and mystique that modern-day Deadwood seeks to perpetuate. When gold mining could no longer support Deadwood in the manner to which it had become accustomed, the city fathers turned from promoting mining to attract investors to promoting the color and lore of its mining heritage to attract tourists. As Parker puts it, Deadwood's memories are "pleasureable and profitable assets which are carefully cultivated and preserved."

Aside from the price of the hardback edition, there will be few complaints about this book, for its general quality is good. Thirty-six pages of notes and bibliography indicate the solid foundation of this study and provide readers with a thorough guide to sources on the history of the Black Hills generally and Deadwood in particular. Four sections of photographs and appropriate maps further enhance the volume. Its major shortcoming is the unevenness of coverage of the "golden age" from 1875 to 1920. Far more space is given to the decades prior to 1900 than to the period after the turn of the century. Still, one doubts that the story of Deadwood in its early decades will ever be told with greater balance, insight, and wit.

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