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Review of *The Gate City: A History of Omaha* By Lawrence H. Larsen and Barbara J. Cottrell

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The Gate City: A History of Omaha. By Lawrence H. Larsen and Barbara J. Cottrell. Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company, 1982. Photographs, illustrations, maps, bibliographic essay, and index. xiii + 325 pp. \$16.50.

This work, the fourth volume in Pruett Publishing Company's Western Urban History Series, is a survey of the history of Omaha from its founding in 1853-1854 to 1980. It is the third general history of Omaha to be published since 1980 and is the first to give any relatively significant treatment to the city's history in the post-World War II era.

Larsen and Cottrell divide their narrative into ten chapters that cover five periods, each from twenty to thirty years. The narrative of fewer than three hundred pages, including a large number of photos, is synoptic and fast-paced, and extensive details are used only to illustrate essential points about Omaha's development. The emphasis is upon economic and social trends in each of the five periods. For the most part, politics and politicians do not loom large in *The Gate City*, although ample space is given to "Boss" Tom Dennison and his era in the early twentieth century. This is as it should be, for local political figures normally

have not been primarily responsible for the most critical decisions in Omaha's history. Persons, particularly business leaders, who were crucial in shaping the development of Omaha, or whose lives illustrate an important facet of the city's past, receive due attention.

One of the best features of this book is that it carefully relates the economic history of Omaha to economic conditions in Nebraska. Aside from seeking to interpret the life of the city in the context of its trade area, the authors have shown the impact of other external forces, such as the federal government, in molding the community. Anyone familiar with the history of Omaha will find little new information in *The Gate City*, yet the integration of local history with broader currents enhances its potential readership.

The authors make extensive use of unpublished as well as published materials and their bibliographical essays for each chapter are excellent. Although the book is well illustrated, the quality of reproduction of many of the photographs could be better. Moreover, the inclusion of some maps showing Omaha's growth and its economic and ethnic concentrations would have enhanced the volume. There are some factual errors, but these are generally minor and do not seriously detract from this fine study.

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