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Review of *The Great Kansas Bond Scandal* By Robert Smith Bader

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The Great Kansas Bond Scandal. By Robert Smith Bader. Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1982. Map, photographs, illustrations, notes, index. xiv + 392 pp. \$25.00.

In 1933 Kansas was mired in the Great Depression, ravaged by the Dust Bowl, and afflicted by human cupidity. The biggest public scandal in Kansas history is the subject of this thorough and well-written monograph.

Ronald and Warren Finney, son and father, were the principal malefactors in the bond scandal. The state reverberated from the exposure of the "freewheeling, charismatic" Ronald's forging and deposit of bonds in the state treasury, brokerage houses, and banks to finance high living and business ventures. Even more disquieting was the knowledge of the culpability of his father, a respected, civic-spirited, influential businessman and banker of Emporia, and a friend of William

Allen White and Governor Alfred Mossman Landon.

The integrity of state government was questioned when the public learned of the scandal's repercussions on state finances and that a few high office holders abetted the Finney machinations through negligence and complicity. Acting decisively and "without fear or favor," Governor Landon sustained confidence in his administration through the vigorous prosecution of the offenders, including his friend and the state treasurer. This was, the author asserts, the prerequisite to Landon's reelection and the 1936 Republican presidential nomination.

The disposition of the culprits receives substantial attention, and some interesting chapters are included on the impeachment and trials of the attorney general and auditor (both were acquitted), and the protracted and complicated criminal proceedings against the principals, which ended in convictions and three of the longest prison sentences in state history. Warren Finney committed suicide before imprisonment.

The final chapters focus on the reform of Ronald Finney, his release from prison, and his life as a responsible citizen. A model prisoner at Lansing, Finney developed his literary aptitude, with the assistance of Kathrine and William L. White, and earned a modest income. The active intercession of the White family helped Finney obtain a parole, and his last years were spent with his second wife as a writer for trade journals.

A strong secondary theme of the book involves the study in conflict between friendship and principle. Because the Whites were close friends of the Finneys, their position was especially poignant. They refused either to abandon friends or to compromise principles, and the author shows the strain and occasional impossibility of reconciling the two.

Inured to malfeasance and chicanery, this generation will find Bader's book instructive on the effect of public corruption on an earlier and less sophisticated society shocked "to the depths of its puritanical soul." The author concludes that "the total financial, political,

psychological, and personal cost of the tragic affairs became almost impossible to calculate," but he has convincingly probed human wreckage and public despair from cover to cover.

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