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Summer 1984

Review of *Wichita: The Early Years, 1865-1880* By H. Craig Miner

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Schneider, John C., "Review of *Wichita: The Early Years, 1865-1880* By H. Craig Miner" (1984). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1797.

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men of property and standing. City "biography" was very much just that—a collective biography of the men who made the city what it was. As the discipline of urban history has matured, the view that tied each community's development to the unique personalities of its leaders has given way to an interest in the *process* of urbanization and the examination of cities as *case studies*, important primarily because of what they say about the larger urban experience.

Craig Miner's *Wichita* is a throwback to the old city biography, not only in its delight in the particular but also in its thesis that Wichita's elite was the key ingredient in the town's development. Miner contends, for instance, that Wichita's brief but profitable involvement in the cattle trade was due less to the town's fortuitous location than to the alertness and aggressiveness of its businessmen. Taking issue with Robert Dykstra and others who have emphasized the divisions among Wichita's business leaders, Miner finds a broad consensus in the urge to promote Wichita as a place to make money.

The argument has merit and comports with the view of a few historians who in recent years have taken an idiosyncratic approach to urban history by reasserting the importance of every city's own character and personality. Unfortunately, Miner's is a weak effort. Wichita's business community and political leaders, except for a few notables, are not identified or described in any detail, nor are they compared to those of other Kansas towns. Miner can not demonstrate that Wichita's businessmen were any more farsighted or aggressive than other entrepreneurs on this urban frontier. Miner asserts his thesis rather offhandedly, for to elaborate would interrupt the narrative. The book lacks conceptual sophistication.

Miner accepts at the outset Dykstra's assessment that Wichita and other cattle towns were not the "shoot 'em up" places of fictionalized accounts, but he follows this up with an unsystematic, mostly anecdotal account of crime and corruption. Although Miner makes some interesting observations about the connection between the law-and-order problem and the cattle

Wichita: The Early Years, 1865-1880. By H. Craig Miner. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982. Photographs, maps, notes, and index. xi + 201 pp. \$17.50.

City histories written in the late nineteenth century by amateurs were panegyrics to local

trade, he does not try to answer significant questions about crime and disorder in early settlements on the Great Plains.

In a summary chapter Miner reveals that he does after all have a grasp of historiography and the relationship between important historical issues and his study of Wichita, but it is too little too late and only makes more exasperating the book's deficiencies. Persons interested in the colorful details of Wichita's earliest years will enjoy this highly readable and often witty book. Those interested in the process of urbanization on the Great Plains, however, will find it unenlightening.

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