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Review of *Sod and Stubble: The Unabridged and Annotated Edition* By John Ise

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Sod and Stubble: The Unabridged and Annotated Edition. By John Ise. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index. xix + 446 pp. \$35 cloth, \$12.95 paper.

Sod and Stubble is a classic of Kansas and western history. It ranks with *Giants in the Earth* and *O Pioneers!* in readability and memorability, but has the added feature of being an only slightly fictionalized version of the reality of the lives of the author's parents in Osborne County, Kansas. Filled with striking stories, it is only a question of whether one is moved most by the baby dying after Rosie scalds her nipples, the drama of the grasshopper invasion, Henry's slow death by cancer and Rosie's tender goodbye, her farewell to the farm and to childbearing, or the awful death of the teenage Nebraska Stevens. What emerges as certain, as strongly as in less balanced accounts like *Wisconsin Death Trip*, is that there was a dark side to pioneering, and a definite heroism in the quotidian rhythms of it. One might criticize the account for being sentimental were it not so clearly true. The crippled boy of chapter 8, for example, is the author, who eventually earned a Ph.D. from Harvard.

Rosie and Henry Ise, the major protagonists, are deeply and realistically developed. John Ise (Joe in the book) talked with his mother and read many notes from her during the composition of the account that made her

locally famous. This is great local history—familiar and rich in detail. The documentation is family by family and month by month, with a sure sense of the human drama throughout. Rosie's voice is particularly authentic, as shown in a note to her son: "Awfully lonely after Albert died, for a while, but one gets used to anything."

This edition adds extensive notes by Von Rothenberger, whose documentation and expansion of nearly every story from local newspapers and records is a tribute to his diligence and Ise's memory. There are also added chapters originally cut by Ise and accounts of the writing of the manuscript and of the fate of the family after the events of the book.

It is remarkable that when first published in 1936 *Sod and Stubble* was a commercial failure. This new edition should remain a fixture of western "Realism" and a model family history for a very long time.

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