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Great Plains Studies, Center for

Winter 1998

Review of *Cherokee Outlet Cowboy: Recollections of Laban S. Records* By Laban S. Records

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Wunder, John R., "Review of *Cherokee Outlet Cowboy: Recollections of Laban S. Records* By Laban S. Records" (1998). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 2105.

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Cherokee Outlet Cowboy: Recollections of Laban S. Records. By Laban S. Records. Edited by Ellen Jayne Maris Wheeler. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995. Preface, acknowledgments, chronology, photographs, maps, notes, bibliography, index, epilogue. xx + 370 pp. \$24.95 cloth, \$15.95 paper.

Cowboy memoirs are not all that rare nor are they all that common. Thus, the reflections of Laban S. Records about his life working on the cattle trails and ranches of south central Kansas and northern Oklahoma during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century are of some inherent value. He worked as a freighter, a cowpuncher, a line rider, and a foreman. The book begins in the 1870s with

memories of freighting on the Santa Fe Trail and concludes with Records converting to "the Gospel of Christ in its fullness" at a Methodist revival meeting in Kansas. It also chronicles his introduction to Dora Belle Barker and marrying her a year later, and then settling down in 1892 on a homestead in the Cheyenne-Arapaho Run in Oklahoma.

This book includes some thirty-one chapters. There are many places and people mentioned, and the author spins many a short vignette. While generally chronological, the recollections are not well organized, and it requires some close attention to follow them. They represent the very specific memories of a young man written in his twilight years. There is not much help from the editor. There are minimal clarifications or references to significant historiography. The editor, granddaughter of Records and not a trained historian but a professor of voice, should be congratulated for not tampering with some of the less savory aspects of the memoirs.

Because there is not much of a historical grounding in this work, basic errors occur in the editing and illustration selections and in the memoirs themselves. The Cheyennes, for example, do not reside on a southwest Montana reservation today (photo caption opposite p. 61). It would have been tough to have "crossed the Missouri at Hannibal" (p. 5). As well, including a map of the Chisholm Trail in the chapter on cowpunching in Dodge City (p. 51) makes little sense since this was not the cattle trail that went to Dodge City.

More importantly, Saban Records provides new insight into cowboy culture and particularly about race relations within that culture. For instance, much of the historiography of the American West suggests that African American cowboys were significant in number, from 20% to 25% of all cowboys, and were treated well and received equal pay. The only discrimination came from their lack of being able to advance to foreman in any appreciable numbers if at all. In his reflections, Records seems to offer a different view, although the editor did not recognize this his-

torical difference. Black cowboys were not allowed to carry guns, were not allowed to speak unless it was about horses or mules, and were forced to bow and curtsy. They were addressed as "boy," and Records describes them as "the most ragged, dirty human beings I ever saw." Records has some sympathy for individual Indian tribes, notably the Osage whom he and his family knew well, but not for the Cheyennes or for black cowboys. If you wish to document this important information, however, you will have to look very carefully. Not all references to African Americans in the book are included in the index. They are generally not listed by name, and you will find no listing for "African American" or "black cowboy." Instead, look under "Negroes."

Thus, this memoir is of value for tracing the history of the cowboy. Read it carefully and critically.

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