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Review of *Traces on the Landscape* By Kent Midgett

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Traces on the Landscape. By Kent Midgett. Edited by Douglas Midgett. Parkersburg, IA: Mid-Prairie Books, 1998. Maps, photographs. xxiii + 165 pp. \$15.00 paper.

Kent Midgett arrived with his family in Hibbard, on the wind-swept Plains of eastern Montana, late in 1914. His father, a physician, packed up and moved to Bridger in 1924. Here is one man's account of growing up during the homestead boom and bust on the Northern Plains in the early twentieth century. All of the standard elements of the agricultural tragedy are here—the fulsome promotional campaigns; the bumper crops and commodity prices of wartime; drought and other disasters after 1917; the fading of hope. Today, the town of Sumatra (where the family of six moved in 1917) has disappeared; the vast Rosebud County is statistically unsettled at under two people per square mile and still losing population, and family farms are now corporate ranches. This is the history of a bygone era.

What sets Midgett's memoir apart (and justifies its publication) are its individual experi-

ences and insights. The elder Midgett was caught up in the agrarian dream; he tried to be a farmer and a physician and a pharmacist. The family valued education; the author's account of the growth of the public school system as well as its adoption of a basketball schedule is noteworthy. Kent Midgett comprised one-third of the graduating class of Sumatra High in 1920; he attended Montana Wesleyan College in Helena, a school that has gone the way of Sumatra. Improvements in transportation and their adverse impact on small towns are assessed here. The transition to a dairying economy mitigated total agricultural disaster.

Kent Midgett wrote this autobiography while in his seventies; his son Douglas has provided an excellent introduction, placing the experience in its historical context. Memoirs like this are the necessary building blocks for regional history.

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