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Review of *Assault on the Deadwood Stage: Road Agents and Shotgun Messengers* by Robert K. DeArment

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Assault on the Deadwood Stage: Road Agents and Shotgun Messengers. By Robert K. DeArment. Foreword by Joseph G. Rosa. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011. xiii + 279 pp. Map, photographs, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95.

Robert DeArment, a prolific historian depicting outlaws, gamblers, and lawmen throughout the American West, focuses on individuals associated with the stagecoach network centered in the boomtown of Deadwood, Dakota Territory. This network stretched across the Northern Plains from present-day Bismarck, North Dakota, to Cheyenne, Wyoming, and on to Sidney, Nebraska, and in each case was linked to a transcontinental railroad.

DeArment introduces his readers to the Texas Gang, the Hat Creek Gang, the Joel Collins Gang, and the Tom Price Gang, as well as to a wide variety of characters with such colorful nicknames as “Big Nose George” Parrott, “Laughing Sam” Hartman, and Cornelius “Lame Johnny” Donahue. Most of the highwaymen migrated from the Midwest and had previously worked a variety of jobs, including hunting, cowpunching, and railroad construction. Many proved to be inept road agents. For example, a passenger stuffed currency down the bore of an outdated shotgun; teased by the robbers for owning such a worthless weapon, they tossed it away. The next day the passenger returned for his gun and money.

Road agents challenged dedicated lawmen. Among the most effective and persistent were Seth Bullock, Scott “Quick-Shot” Davis, and Boone May, “the most hated and feared” shotgun messenger. Wyoming county sheriffs Thomas Carr (Laramie) and John Dykins (Sweetwater) effectively used the telegraph to track down their quarry.

Stage company managers went to unusual lengths to protect their cargo, especially when transporting gold bullion from the Black Hills. Luke Voorhees ordered a steel-lined “salamander safe” that the manufacturer promised would take six days to open. He

then purchased a coach lined with steel plates dubbed the “Iron Clad” or the “Monitor.” The strongbox quickly failed to live up to its advertised safety, however, and companies returned to reliance on tough, well-armed shotgun messengers. Within a few years, assaults on Deadwood stages ceased to be a problem. Thereafter, an “Attack on the Deadwood Stage” only happened in Cody’s Wild West for American and European audiences.

An excellent map along with dozens of photos and illustrations enhance a story line based on appropriate secondary sources. The main primary source is newspapers. This may account for the extremely heavy emphasis on nearly encyclopedic lists of stage owners; coach stops; number of horses, mules, coaches purchased; and company employees—all of which detract from a flowing narrative.

Despite stylistic concerns, the book should attract readers interested in this phase of northern Great Plains history, western violence, and little-known individuals on both sides of the law.

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