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Review of *Ghost Towns of the Montana Prairie*, by Don Baker.

James R. Shortridge
University of Kansas

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containing over eighty photographs. After short sketches of early railroads, the homesteading process, ethnicity, politics, and initial failures, the bulk of the text is devoted to sixty-six entries on individual towns, each averaging a page in length.

Most of the Montana Plains was settled rapidly in the decade of the 1910s. A few of the towns were products of mines, a few of cross-border trade with Canada. Most were related to railroads, however, and to the agricultural lands they promoted. The Milwaukee Road, the last of three transcontinental lines across the region and the only one without a land grant, was the biggest promoter. As such, its territory has since yielded the largest number of ghost towns.

Baker provides no rationale for his selection of communities and includes no bibliography or notes describing his procedures. The book is apparently the outgrowth of a hobby that has involved the author in photographing remaining buildings, reading old newspapers, and interviewing former residents. This procedure is logical enough, but the book has an unpleasant feel of information half-assimilated and poorly presented. Time and again Baker assumes that his readers already know basic information on town location, rival communities, and railroad strategies. A map or two would have filled a desperate need. Context might have been provided in the introductory chapters, but these are almost complete failures. The ethnic one, for example, is essentially limited to a two-page quotation from a single Mennonite family.

The town entries, although regular sources of interesting nuggets, are highly idiosyncratic in tone and poorly edited. One description, "Lustre and Volt," from pages 53-54, is repeated on page 80. Another is on Marmarth, a community in North Dakota. The most valuable parts of the book are several long quotations from interview tapes, though Baker often fails to provide speakers' names. Also useful is his reprinting of an early promotional booklet from the town of Ismay.

Ghost Towns of the Montana Prairie. By Don Baker. Boulder: Fred Pruett Books, 1997. Illustrations, appendices. 88 pp. \$16.00 paper.

Unfulfilled aspirations, a condition common to all human beings, are nowhere more tangible than in an abandoned town. They are the siren call of such places and why guides to ghost towns have become popular items on bookstore shelves, forming a highly varied genre both in quality and intended audience. Don Baker positions his entry on the far side of informality, which is fine, and of carelessness, which is not. The author, a Billings resident bringing enthusiasm to his subject, has produced a visually pleasing, large-format book