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Review of *From Fort Laramie to Wounded Knee: In the West that Was* by Charles W. Allen

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From Fort Laramie to Wounded Knee: In the West that Was, Charles W. Allen. Edited by Richard E. Jensen. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997. 286 pp. Photos, references, index. \$40.00 cloth (ISBN 0-8032-1045-0).

Charles Wesley Allen witnessed episodes of late nineteenth-century western American history through the eyes of a "soldier, freighter, rancher, clerk, blacksmith, contractor, editor, war correspondent, Pine Ridge postmaster, philosopher, and poet" (p. viii). Allen's good friend, Addison E. Sheldon, wrote this description of Allen's career in his foreword to the unpublished 1938 manuscript of Allen's reminiscences located at Nebraska State Historical Society. Richard E. Jensen, the Senior Research Anthropologist at the Society has produced an edited version of the manuscript, making it available to a wider audience for the first time. The book, as an edited volume, presents the reader with two layers of material to consider—Allen's narrative and Jensen's annotations.

Allen crisscrossed the central Plains from Fort Laramie in 1872 to Wounded Knee in 1890 and various points of interest in between. Allen drove cattle from Wichita, Kansas, to Fort Laramie in 1872 where he married Emma Hawkins, the daughter of a mixed-blood Lakota woman and a white trader in 1873. Allen temporarily settled on a nearby homestead and, when not cutting hay and gardening, freighted provisions and supplies from Cheyenne to the Red Cloud Agency and the booming mining town of Deadwood. In 1879, Allen and his family settled at Pine Ridge and contributed to the construction of the new Reservation's infrastructure. Allen stayed at Pine Ridge until 1883 when the arrival of the railroad attracted him to the new town of Valentine, Nebraska. There he worked first as a government clerk and then as a blacksmith before embarking on a new career as editor of the *Valentine Reporter*. When the paper moved to Chadron and renamed itself the *Chadron Democrat*, Allen moved with it and in this capacity he reported his eyewitness account of the Wounded Knee massacre in 1890.

Allen's anecdotal style makes for enjoyable reading but his first-hand accounts entice the interested scholar to consider how his experiences are woven into the larger fabric of western American history. One glimpses the spectrums of community building on Great Plains through Allen's perspective. The clustering of settlements around military forts and Indian Reservations demonstrated the early economic dependence on the federal government. Of course, railroad and mining towns figure prominently also in Allen's narrative. His experiences with the "motley crowds" of Deadwood sharply contrasted with his life in Valentine and Chadron. He recounted the

development of these two frontier communities as bringing order to such initial chaos. Valentine "pass[ed] through a cycle of rough rowdyism" before the building of homes, businesses, schools, churches, and civic societies ended the cycle (pp. 102-03). In Chadron, women operating through their sphere of influence morally uplifted the town and "spurred business men" into virtuous action. Allen empathized with the assaults on Native American communities, but noted their need for instructions in "civilized procedure" (p. 143). The narrative culminates with Allen's eyewitness account of Wounded Knee. This event marked, for Allen, the passing of the West that Was.

Jensen's editing is exceptional. He provides concise descriptions of events, places, people, and concepts, clarifying Allen's manuscript without distracting from the author's prose. He utilizes a variety of sources, including government documents, other reminiscences, contemporary newspapers, and secondary histories to substantiate his statements. Jensen has edited a volume of interest both to the general reader and the scholar. **John Husmann**, *Department of History, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*.