

Literature of the
Prairies and Plains

Contributors

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For

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on hand in libraries*

INTERLIBRARY LOAN STAFF

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Introduction

In this *Guide*, we have tried to identify as many titles of reference value as we could that relate in whole or part to the region of the United States and Canada we are calling Prairies and Plains. The titles we list vary widely in content and comprehensiveness, and represent those we selected that we were able to examine at the shelf or over the Internet. The annotations that accompany entries attempt to describe the works in such a way that seasoned reference librarians will be able to visualize the sources and use them readily. Some annotations make recommendations concerning a source's usefulness, usually positive, but evaluative comments are by no means lacking; indeed, contributors have not been laid under obligation to suppress personal opinion in writing about any source.

THE REGION.

The Prairies-Plains region is that part of the United States that Edwin James, chronicler of Stephen Long's expedition that explored overland the country west of St. Louis as far as the Rocky Mountains, called the "Great American Desert." Its geophysical characteristics were specified by Walter Prescott Webb in *The Great Plains* (1931) as treeless, flat, and semiarid. Webb noted the change that occurred in the region's geophysical nature somewhere around the 100th meridian: east of that indefinite boundary, rainfall was more dependable and vegetation relatively luxuriant—it is the tallgrass Prairie. West of the 100th meridian, rainfall drops below 20 inches per year and often becomes undependable; in good years, enough rain falls to support conventional agriculture, but cycles of drought often render the land fit at best for grazing. It is the short-grass prairie, often called the Great Plains or High Plains.

We define the Prairies-Plains as the region west of the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountains, stretching from the Rio Grande River at the border with Mexico to the Parkland Belt in the Prairie provinces of western Canada. It includes the states of Kansas, Nebraska, and North and South Dakota in their entirety; western portions of Oklahoma and Texas; eastern portions of New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana; southern portions of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta; and, recognizing its importance in the history and development of the region, the Missouri River watershed from source to mouth. Except for the latter, the region in which we are interested does not differ in any important respect from the Great Plains described with such care by David Wishart in *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*, p. xiii-xviii.

But no region is adequately described by simply specifying its boundaries or describing its rainfall or physiography. The heart of a region lies in the interaction between its physical surroundings and the people who live there. When a storm blows up in harvest season on the plains of North Dakota, everyone stops to watch the sky to see whether the clouds may bring hail, which could lay the wheat to the ground and cause grave economic hardship not just for farmers but for everyone nearby, nearly all of whom depend on agriculture. Throughout the Prairies-Plains, travelers and residents cannot escape a sense of space and distance. On a brilliant summer day on the High Plains, one sees the land running without hindrance to the horizon, with the blue sky arching to meet it, an immense prospect in which people often feel insignificant.

Many find the experience intimidating. Prairies-Plains was one of the last regions of the continental United States and Canada to be settled, is still sparsely populated, and is predominantly rural. Cities are confined primarily to the region's perimeter (Denver, Cheyenne, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Fargo, Omaha, Kansas City, Tulsa, Dallas); cities sitting unprotected on the Plains are rare (Saskatoon, Lincoln, Wichita, Amarillo). Residents who live on farms contend with loneliness as a constant fact of life, and look forward to church services, quilting bees, rodeos, trips into town, and in an earlier age, trapper rendezvous, as social opportunities. It is not a country for the faint of heart.

In compiling this *Guide*, we have been anxious to encourage a view that regards Prairies-Plains as a region remarkable in its diversity but whose people share both common experiences and reactions to the Plains environment they inhabit. We have learned to our disappointment that the overwhelming share of reference sources are concerned with individual states. Bibliographies, histories, field guides, and encyclopedias tend to be concerned only with, say, Nebraska or North Dakota, making the unvoiced assumptions that birds do not cross state boundaries or that citizens of North Dakota are uninfluenced by what happens in Saskatchewan or Montana or South Dakota. That mindset may well be dictated by the funding of research projects—money nearly always comes from a state, whose officials, in the Plains as elsewhere, have little interest in research that concerns itself with other states. The surveyors' lines that established state boundaries have set barriers that political entities are reluctant to cross. Even works that take a regional approach often define the Plains as a specific group of states, pushing some parts of Prairies-Plains into other regions (e.g., **A3**, **A7**, **A8**). *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains* (**A5**) and *A Great Plains Reader* (**A6**) both take a regional approach that is one of the greatest contributions these titles make to raising the view of researchers interested in Prairies-Plains topics. Both give voice to a regional consciousness that is, we hope, gaining strength around the region in research institutes like the Center for Great Plains Studies in Lincoln, the Center for Western Studies at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, and the Canadian Plains Research Center in Regina. Prairies-Plains is a region that crosses state, provincial, and international boundaries.

AUDIENCE.

We intend the *Guide* primarily for scholars and students interested in studying the Prairies-Plains region. We include some sources that will help younger readers, but primarily aim for an audience of educated adults. Like other guides, this one also hopes to be helpful to reference staff looking for sources that will help readers or refreshing their memories concerning titles they use infrequently, and to collection staff seeking to build collections.

Since the chosen audience will be familiar with bibliographic entry format, entries in the *Guide* follow a version of the format specified by the International Standard Bibliographic Description, except that titles appear in boldface rather than italic. We find boldface easier to read than italic, and it provides some visual relief on the printed page.

We are not happy with the format we use for Web sites, although entries for these sites are drawn from descriptions we found for the most part in standard catalogs, principally those available online from the Library of Congress and the Online Catalog Library Center. In its brief life, the Internet and its associated communications protocol, Hypertext Transfer Protocol, have ridden off in so many directions libraries have been unable to keep up. It would be helpful to readers if providers included with each site the official site

name, the producer, the size of the file, the date the site first became available, and the date of last revision. Some national organizations like the Modern Language Association supply satisfactory specifications for citing individual articles or locations drawn from Web sites, but a national or international standard for describing the sites themselves has not appeared. The MARC format, developed for books, is not very satisfactory for Web sites.

SCOPE.

We restrict the kinds of sources we list to published books, periodical sets, and Web sites. Some in all three categories are government publications, and a handful are academic theses. We exclude periodical articles but include lists of periodicals and periodical indexes, and also exclude newspaper articles, but cite lists of newspapers.

There is no restriction as to language, although apart from English, we list chiefly dictionaries in Spanish and French, together with dictionaries of Indian languages. We also held the *Guide* open to all subjects, but found that the subjects of greatest interest to compilers of reference sources were history, natural history, and Indians. We assumed that we would find few sources in the natural sciences, since mathematics, physics, and chemistry are not often concerned with the region where research happens to be conducted, but that there would be lively interest in the natural resources of the Prairies-Plains region, in its flora and fauna, and in the region's climate and underlying geology. The resources we found bore out both assumptions. We also thought we would find ample sources that would support research in the social sciences, but, except for history, found that not to be the case. In all the social sciences except for history, reference sources were thin and frequently devoted to narrow subtopics. In a number of subjects that have a rich American national literature—music, theater, literature, medicine, education—the Plains sources are simply anemic in both numbers and coverage. We suspect that reasons for this lie in the relatively recent settlement of the Prairies-Plains region, its sparse population, and the existence there of relatively few of the institutions that have interest in producing scholarly reference titles—publishers, learned societies, and front-rank universities.

The positive aspect to this is that the field lies open to institutions and researchers who have interest in the region. We can envision a range of titles that would enrich the Prairies-Plains literature: films of the Plains, a survey of Plains rivers and drainage basins, a first-rate encyclopedia of Plains literature, another of Plains music, an index to Plains-related periodicals, a directory of Plains institutions that hold primary materials of interest to historians and others. Although histories exist for most of the region's states and provinces, we have found no general history of the region.

We also made no restriction as to dates of either publication or coverage, but recognized that little publication, especially of reference sources, could be expected before the 20th century. We include imprint lists that go back to the earliest years of white settlement in the Plains, but include bibliographies and other works that cover the earliest non-Indian exploration of the Prairies-Plains, dating from Coronado's expedition in 1540-1541 through the late 19th century, featuring American explorations beginning with Lewis and Clark's expedition to the Pacific in 1803-1806.

We have tried to compensate for the paucity of Prairies-Plains sources by citing more general sources that cover the North American continent, the United States, Canada, or the trans-Mississippi West. All pro-

vide some form of coverage of the Prairies-Plains region, which as the largest plains region in the Western Hemisphere, can scarcely be ignored. Annotations for these sources describe the degree of Prairies-Plains coverage and often cite where in each source Plains material may be found.

ARRANGEMENT.

Entries in the text are arranged by 23 alphabetically designated sections, A, “General Works” through T, “Military Science ; War,” with an appendix of works dealing with gunfighters and the subduing of the West. The sections present an arrangement by subject of the titles we cite in the book, and while this may fall short of the desirable characteristics found in a full-fledged classification, which would proceed from the general to the specific and collocate like entries, they group related fields in sections of general works, history, humanities, social sciences, sciences, agriculture, and military science.

Besides the formal entries (there are 1,104 records), the *Guide* offers 13 sidebars that group sources which share an emphasis (e.g., WPA guides to the states, Historical Records Surveys, Agricultural Statistics Services), but which are better presented together than scattered through the book. They serve to supplement entries in the main list of entries. Some are simply institutional sites, but we think it may prove helpful to call their existence to the attention of readers, and hope that grouping them may add weight to the reference utility of the *Guide*. Jeanetta Druke had the idea for the sidebars, and prepared them all.

A few words concerning terminology. We use “Blacks” in preference to “African Americans” in recognition that not all African Americans are black, and “Latinos” as a general terms for emigrants from Mexico, Central America, South America, the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, and the Iberian peninsula. We use “Indians” rather than “Native Americans” as a compromise term that will include native peoples from the entire international region and will be readily recognized. This usage does nothing to resolve contentions among Indians themselves in both the United States and Canada concerning appropriate labels; “Indians” is simply a term of convenience.

RECORD STRUCTURE.

For books, records have a common structure, consisting of three parts: Bibliographic entry, Notes, and Annotation. Entries are based on International Standard Bibliographic Description, arranged in the following pattern:

Author [if any]. – **Title : Subtitle** / Statement of Responsibility. – Edition. – Place: Publisher, Date. – (Series [if any]).

The Notes section supplements the entry with items that will assist collection officers in deciding whether to purchase a title (Library of Congress Control Number, International Standard Book and Serial Numbers, OCLC numbers). Notes also provide items that give publication history (earlier editions, cessations, or resumptions), occasionally list a volume’s contents when that may help readers decide whether the title may help them, or any other information that may shed light on the publication’s origin.

The annotation section describes the book, attempts to give some notion of its arrangement, assesses

its usefulness to Prairies-Plains researchers, and often appraises the title's stature in its field and its value to students and scholars. Annotations, signed with the initials of the contributors (see the page facing the title), are preceded by a symbol v.

For Web sites, record structure differs. All Web sites have title entry, indicate whether the site charges for access or is available free, and because sites change frequently, indicate the date (month and year) when the contributor viewed the site.

The pattern:

Title : Subtitle / Statement of Responsibility (personal or institutional, if available). – Version. – Place : Producer, Date (if available). – URL.

INDEXES.

Indexes of names, titles, and subjects follow the main list of entries. In the Names index, all authors, editors, or compilers from the entry are listed (but not illustrators, series editors, photographers, cartographers, or other ancillary contributors), as well as authors cited in annotations. The Titles index lists titles occurring in the entry, notes, or annotations, but omits titles of chapters or papers listed in Contents notes.

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We cannot pretend that the *Guide* is comprehensive. We identified a fairly large number of titles we hoped to include (somewhere between 150 and 200) that we had to drop because we could not examine them. Copies were not available in libraries to which we had access, and we were unable to persuade libraries that owned copies to release them through interlibrary loan, although many libraries were exceedingly generous in lending reference titles.

We are also uneasy that titles we might have included have simply eluded our efforts to locate all the reference titles that might be pertinent to Prairies-Plains studies. We encourage librarians and scholars to notify us of titles we have omitted, either through the publisher, KWS Publishers, 1516 North State Parkway, Chicago, IL 60610, KWSPublishers.com, or at our editorial e-mail, arebee@prairiesandplains.com.

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1 This work has a new title, Guide to Reference Sources, and is being prepared in a 12th edition under the editorship of Robert Kieft, Librarian at Haverford College (see <http://www.haverford.edu/library/grb/>) .