

# Kansas: Study in Contrasts

by Neil Byer

History is perhaps most generally considered the record of events; sometimes, more nicely, it is thought to be the events themselves. Finally, with the most imaginative of those who consider themselves working historians, there is lively concern, not with record only and not with the event, but with the thing to be recorded. It is this latter group who know the makers of history, who attempt to understand and evaluate all the phenomena of human life and of the natural world as well. Non-historians, such as I am, are thus the reapers of great benefit from them. For they veer dangerously and happily close to a study of heritage, the whole body of what each of us is, the primary and secondary and tertiary, and so on *ad infinitum*, causes which dictate our individual circumstance and our response to it.

I offer as almost complete evidence of the importance of this latter group the major inclusion in this number of the *Heritage of Kansas*, Mr. Robert Richmond's talk on "Highlights of Kansas History." The talk was one of eight given during a Kansas heritage workshop this past summer at Emporia State Teachers College.

The workshop itself was an interesting and, I think, important adventure for those attending who had both breadth and depth of understanding, for those who were willing to come to grips with the admittedly amorphous giant, Kansas heritage.

There were the tall tales of Kansas, dealt with by Dr. Mary Francis White of Kansas State College; there was the treatment of Kansas industrial development and all its intricacies by John Sticher, director of the

Kansas Industrial Development Commission; there were Betty Sue Chapman of the E-State art department, giving insights into pioneer art forms; Dixon Smith, now registrar at the college, surveying Kansas geography; W. M. Richards, long-time superintendent of schools in Emporia and Kansas author, discussing "Fencing the Prairies"; there was my old friend George Jelinek from Ellsworth, whose collections include stamps, money, guns, postcards—"You name it, we've got it," George is wont to say. Anyway, George talked with first-hand knowledge about the means and importance of preserving elements of heritage. And there was Joanie O'Bryant of the Wichita University faculty, singing appropriate folksongs and explaining with more than a little insight why they mattered. "The boys they were drunken on powder and wine/ And came to burn Lawrence just over the line," sang Miss O'Bryant, with as much verve as if she had been there, or indeed, was being there at the moment. She was singing, of course, of Quantrill's raiders.

And there was Bob Richmond, whose talk is our immediate subject. The others will have their reincarnation in later issues of the *Heritage*.

I was talking about the insight of especial historians. Mr. Richmond undertook the awesome task of surveying in an hour and some minutes not only the whole breadth of the history of our state, but the depth of it as well. No mean task. The reason I chose to reprint it first in a series of talks which all record aspects of Kansas heritage is not simply that it is the most general. Rather it is that, in one sense, at least, it stands to be most useful. For here is four hundred years in a nutshell, or as nearly encompassed as is possible. Here the ground is plowed, if a metaphor be allowed, and here lies all the fallow ground an earnest seeker needs. Here are Kansas' seeds—another mind as fertile and imaginative as Richmond's can make this ground produce bountiful harvest.

Speaking intimately of the long reaches of time which support today's Kansas, he deals with the event and then record. Then, giving it the last full measure, he intimates certain interpretations. Kansas history, he assumes, is more than a scroll of bloody and frustrating occurrences and new-blood excitements; it is, complexly, a study in contrasts.

A word about the texts of this number and following numbers which will be based on workshop talks. All the remarks of each consultant were recorded on tape. Typescripts then were made from the tapes and subsequently were edited by me. I am thus responsible for all errors that are introduced. Naturally I hope there are none, for the whole experience of eight days was one whose value I find difficult to measure.

And a further note. The careful reader will notice certain punctuation practices which deviate from convention. The system used was this: in cases where the speaker was obviously quoting and where the quoted matter was brief, normal rules of punctuation were observed; in cases where the quoted matter was longer and some paraphrasing by the speaker was

possible and probable, quotation marks were abandoned. Such longer borrowings generally follow a colon mark.

I suggested earlier that Richmond's talk on "Highlights of Kansas History" was the major inclusion of this number. At this point I should like to qualify the statement. Certainly his talk is the core of things here. But included as a supplement to this number is a bibliography compiled by my friend J. Frank Dobie; its downright usefulness to teachers and students interested in Kansas heritage is indisputable. General and complete as it is in scope, it seems the natural handmaiden of the "Highlights" talk. It is reprinted with Mr. Dobie's permission.

All of which puts me in mind of a final point concerning people like Dobie and Richmond and honest, vigorous, enthusiastic, intelligent, and imaginative people like them wherever they are. They are constantly busy involving themselves in things: study and humanity and the marriage of these two, life.

Certainly they raise a signal banner.

Mustn't we, mustn't we follow it?