

Cowboys, Gentlemen, and Cattle Thieves: Ranching on the Western Frontier. By Warren M. Elofson. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000. 202 pp., \$34.95, hardback, ISBN 0-7735-2100-3.

One of the classic stories in western Canadian history revolves around an encounter between the United States Cavalry and the North-West Mounted Police at the international boundary. A handful of Mounties had been sent to assume control of a band of Indians being escorted back to Canada. When the American officer asked when the rest of the troop would arrive, one of the mounted policemen calmly explained that no additional men were necessary, "You see, sir, we wear the Queen's Scarlet."

This image—that western Canada was a "mild" frontier in comparison to its "wild" American counterpart—has shaped and informed the popular image of the Canadian prairie west. Whereas the United States waged war on its Indian population, Canada pursued an honorable and just policy. Whereas the six-shooter tamed the American West, the Mounties imposed peace and order on the Canadian prairies. And whereas American ranchers tried to keep invading farmers from their pasture lands, rancher and settler lived in harmony on the Canadian range. Put quite simply, the American West featured free grass, Western Canada long-term leases.

In *Cowboys, Gentlemen, and Cattle Thieves*, Warren Elofson of the University of Calgary challenges the notion that the frontier had little or no impact on the early western Canadian ranching industry. Most scholarly writing on the topic speaks of a privileged elite who took advantage of extremely generous federal leasing regulations to establish several large ranches in southern Alberta by the mid-1880s. These cattle barons—or "cattle compact" as one author has dubbed them—had more in common with Old World values and institutions and tried to recreate the best features of Victorian civilization in the Albertan foothills, including richly furnished homes, Chinese cooks and governesses, and polo and tennis.

Elofson, on the other hand, argues that the big cattle spreads were not only an anomaly on the western Canadian frontier, but failed to survive into the twentieth century because they were poorly suited to local conditions; the large companies had difficulty managing their stock on the open range and sustained heavy losses. He also convincingly demonstrates that eastern capital may have financed many of the larger operations, but that western

know-how, particularly in the form of the American cowboy, made possible the successful day-to-day running of the first ranches. In fact, the material dealing with the life of the cow hand is quite instructive. Elofson also disputes the idea that the Mounties always got their man and suggests that cattle thieving by two-legged predators constituted a major problem for ranchers. Finally, he describes how the environment, especially the weather, forced the rancher to adapt his practices and that successful ranches by the beginning of the twentieth century were increasingly mixed farms which raised their own feed and tinkered with grain-finishing.

Cowboys, Gentlemen, and Cattle Thieves would have benefitted from a heavier editorial hand. It is riddled with orchestrating phrases—certainly not the kind of style best suited for the topic. The material on Indian-rancher relations is also weak; the section on the Almighty Voice incident, for example, is wrong. Still, Elofson presents a much-needed alternative view of the early western Canadian ranching industry. He demonstrates that the story is not only much more complicated, but has many striking parallels with the situation on the other side of the border.

Bill Waiser

University of Saskatchewan

The Harvest of Knowledge: Scientific Publications of the Kansas Agricultural Experiment Station, 1888–1945. By Kansas State University. Manhattan: Kansas State University, 2000, 4-disc CD-ROM set, \$36.50, ISSN 1521-7175.

What a wonderful bargain *The Harvest of Knowledge* is! The price is reasonable, and the amount of data on the four discs provides students of Kansas agricultural history with a plethora of significant information.

The collection includes nearly sixty years of publications issued by the Agricultural Experiment Station (KAES), from its founding in 1888 until 1945. Over 24,000 pages of scientific publications on crops, pasture, gardening, foods, weeds, insects, diseases, livestock, machinery, buildings, soils, natural resources, farm economics, and farm life are offered in the original formatting whenever possible. In addition, there are 121 black and