

Bibliography for the North American Prairies

by Kelly Kindscher

Here's a real nice bibliography on the prairie bioregion of North America. Never been done before and can serve as a model for other bioregional cultural revivals. Kelly's a great guy and worked hard on this. —Peter Warshall

PRAIRIE WRITERS

MARI SANDOZ — Historian, mystic, native to the Sand Hills of Northwest Nebraska. *Love Song to the Plains* (1966; \$4.50) is not her best work, but is her largest in scope geographically. *Old Jules* (1962; \$5.95) and *Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Ogallalas* (1961; \$5.50) are two others that are representative of her fine writing. (All postpaid from University of Nebraska Press* or Whole Earth Household Store.)

JOHN NEIHARDT — Born in Kansas, grew up near Bancroft, Nebraska, and became the Nebraska Poet Laureate. Known for *Black Elk Speaks* (NWECC p. 44). I thank Gary Snyder for leading me to Neihardt's *Cycle of the West*, a two-volume epic poem about the explorers and trappers of the West and about the Indian demise (*The Mountain Men*, 1971; \$5.95; and *The Twilight of the Sioux*, 1971; \$4.50; both postpaid from University of Nebraska Press* or Whole Earth Household Store). I am also very fond of *Indian Tales and Others* (which unfortunately is out of print), in which Neihardt retells Omaha Indian stories of their first encounter with the whites.

WILLA CATHER — Coming to the prairie near Red Cloud, Nebraska, as a young girl from Virginia, she was struck deeply by this gently rolling country, the red prairie grass, and the people who persevered in their attempt to make this rich country, with a heritage of extremely fertile prairie soils, their home. I identify closely with her stories because my great-great-grandparents homesteaded in the county she grew up in and the stories she tells could be my own. *My Antonia* (1961; \$5.95) and

O Pioneers (1962; \$4.95) are two of her best works. (Both postpaid from Houghton Mifflin Company, Mail Order Department, Two Park Street, Boston, MA 02107 or Whole Earth Household Store.)

OLE RÖLVAAG — *Giants in the Earth* (1927; \$3.45 postpaid from Harper and Row, Mail Order Department, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022 or Whole Earth Household Store) is a Scandinavian perspective on the difficulties faced by the pioneers and how their hopes and dreams could be shattered. It is a good book, with a South Dakota setting.

ECOLOGY AND NATURAL HISTORY

JOHN ERNEST WEAVER — *Prairie Plants and Their Environment* (1968; out of print from University of Nebraska Press*), a 50-year study in the Midwest; *North American Prairie* (1954; out of print from Johnsen Publishing Company, Lincoln, NE); *The Prairie* by Weaver and T.J. Fitzpatrick (1934, 1980; \$6 postpaid from Prairie/Plains Resource Institute, 1219 16th Street, Aurora, NE 68818). When one talks about grasslands, about the prairies of North America, and what is known, one speaks of Weaver. He was an ecologist at the University of Nebraska, and his work still is the authoritative source on prairie ecology. He dug 20 feet deep to understand prairie roots, the most important part. His work was science, but some of his writing is prose. *Prairie Plants and Their Environment* is the most readable, but almost all of his work is fascinating. As you can see, I'm a Weaver fanatic. Listen to this: Weaver spoke of prairie as

"much more than land covered with grass. It is a slowly evolved, highly complex organic entity, centuries old. It approaches the eternal. . . . Each grass-covered hillside is a page on which is written the history of the past, conditions of the present, and predictions of the future. Some see without understanding; but let us look closely and understandingly, and act wisely."

*Another Weaver book in print is Native Vegetation of Nebraska, 1965; \$11.95 postpaid from University of Nebraska Press.** —Art Kleiner

PAUL SEARS — *Deserts on the March* (1935, 1980; 4th Edition; \$13.33 postpaid from University of Oklahoma Press** or Whole Earth Household Store) is a new edition (revised and rewritten) of an important book. More than just a book about the Dust Bowl and how the deserts went on the march after men broke the prairie sod, it tells about our misuse of natural resources and how they can be managed properly. Also, *Lands beyond the Forest* (1975; out of print from Prentice-Hall) covers this bioregion. Paul Sears is now 90, still working and writing, a former University of Oklahoma botany teacher and director of the conservation program at Yale. He tells a wonderful story of hunting springs to sip, taste, and compare with his grandfather in Ohio while growing up, and how now, after the native vegetation has been removed, the springs "are alllllllll gone."

DAVID COSTELLO — *The Prairie World* (1969, 1980; \$6.95 postpaid from University of Minnesota Press, 2037 University Avenue SE, Minneapolis, MN 55414 or Whole Earth Household Store). Costello is a Nebraska native, scientist, and lover of prairie. This and Durward Allen's book *The Life of Prairies and Plains* (1967; out of print from McGraw-Hill) are the two best introductions to prairie. This one is slightly more detailed and provides a wider view — plants, mammals, birds, insects, reptiles and amphibians, water, migrations, catastrophe and renewal, man, and the prairie year, ending with a good bibliography. Costello also wrote *The Prairie Chicken* (?), which I am trying to find. The prairie chicken (Native Americans surely had a more reverential name) should be the totem bird for our area. Although it takes more than one species to cover the area, it seems to be the most symbolic bird — requiring fairly large areas of prairie for habitat. It was and is a popular

Photos of prairie plants from
The Prairie by Weaver and
T.J. Fitzpatrick.

* University of Nebraska Press
901 North 17th Street
Lincoln, NE 68588

** University of Oklahoma Press
1005 Asp Avenue
Norman, OK 73019

BIOREGIONS

food source, and its ritualistic mating dance (now in progress early each morning) is thought to have been copied in some Native American dances. If we are to speak for prairie, we must speak up for prairie chicken. These nonmigratory birds make the prairies their only home.

DAVID DARY — *The Buffalo Book* (NWECC p. 115). The buffalo should be the totem mammal of our biogeographical region and this is the best book on the subject. Another angle on the subject is Mari Sandoz' *The Buffalo Hunters: The Story of Hide Men* (1954; \$4.50 postpaid from University of Nebraska Press* or Whole Earth Household Store).

PHILLIPS PETROLEUM COMPANY — *Pasture and Range Plants* (NWECC p. 99). The totem plant should be big bluestem or turkeyfoot bluestem (*Andropogon gerardi*) because 1) grasses make up 90 to 95 percent of the prairie vegetation, and bluestem makes the grasslands; 2) bluestem occurs throughout the range, dominant in the tallgrass prairie, and can be found in wetter habitats in the West; and 3) bluestem was a favorite food of the buffalo and now of cattle. Note: it is possible that the oldest living plant, other than a bristlecone pine, is a grass. With no rings to count, it is impossible to tell, but some big bluestem clump on the edge of a stony ridge in the Flint Hills of Kansas may be of a genetic stock that has been there for centuries, growing from rhizomes that have held the same ground for the entire time, firmly rooted in the soil.

HISTORY

JAMES C. MALIN — *The Grasslands of North America: Prolegomena to Its History* (1967; \$9.36 postpaid from Peter Smith Publishers, 6 Lexington Avenue, Magnolia, MA 01930 or Whole Earth Household Store). This is an introduction and interpretation of the history of the North American grasslands. Although in some respects it is becoming outdated (most of the text was written prior to 1946), it is a primary work (including a detailed historical bibliography through 1946).

WALTER PRESCOTT WEBB — *The Great Plains* (1931, 1981; \$10.95 postpaid from University of Nebraska Press* or Whole Earth Household Store). This book was a landmark in the regional approach by historians to the Trans-Mississippi West. In it Webb describes the Great Plains as generally being level, treeless, and subhumid (something that we are still trying to change). He stated that ways of life and human institutions had to change for this region to be settled. Although criticisms of many of Webb's ideas have arisen, this book

is still considered one of the major histories of the Great Plains.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND ARCHEOLOGY

WALDO WEDEL — *Prehistoric Man on the Great Plains* (1961; \$17.78 postpaid from University of Oklahoma Press** or Whole Earth Household Store). I believe that this is the most recent and specific book on the subject. Wedel, a Kansas native, has worked extensively in the Great Plains and as of 1978 was Archeologist Emeritus for the Smithsonian Institute. I am particularly thankful for his *An Introduction to Kansas Archaeology* (1959; out of print from Scholarly Press) and its section on petroglyphs in Kansas.

ETHNOBOTANY AND AGRICULTURE

GEORGE F. WILL AND GEORGE E. HYDE — *Corn among the Indians of the Upper Missouri* (1964; \$4.95 postpaid from University of Nebraska Press* or Whole Earth Household Store). Excellent! This book describes the corn culture of the first agriculturists of the area, including the Arikara, Hidatsa, Mandan, Iowa, Omaha, Pawnee, and others. The Pawnee had at least ten varieties: white flour (Mother Corn), yellow flour, yellow flint, red flint, blue flour, sweet corn, white and red striped, blue-speckled flour, popcorn, and red flour. A fascinating account with many fine illustrations.

MELVIN R. GILMORE — *Uses of Plants by the Indians of the Missouri River Region*, (1919, 1977; \$5.95 postpaid from University of Nebraska Press* or Whole Earth Household Store). This is a delightful ethnobotany — a classic of the Northern Great Plains, illustrated and with many insightful observations. Gilmore wanted to show through this book that primitive man and his culture were tied intricately to plants and the environment. He also wanted to demonstrate that many plants used by American Indians might be fruitfully cultivated by others. These two ideas, nurtured in 1919, are still alive and growing today.

GILBERT L. WILSON — *Agriculture of the Hidatsa Indians: An Indian Interpretation* (1917, 1977; \$26 postpaid from AMS Press, 56 East 13th Street, New York, NY 10003). Buffalobird-woman, a Hidatsa, tells of her people's agriculture and their beliefs. Speaking of the Hidatsa's five principal varieties of corn, she says, "For one thing, they each had a distinct taste. If at night I were given to eat of hard white corn, or hard yellow or soft yellow, I could

at once tell each from any of the others. If I were given mush at night from these three varieties, each by itself, I could distinguish each variety, not by its smell, but in my mouth by taste." She tells the story of an indigenous agriculture that is now only a memory.

ORGANIZATIONS

CENTER FOR RURAL AFFAIRS — "A private, nonprofit organization established in 1973 to focus public attention on issues dealing with people, land, and food through publications, speeches, conferences, and major research projects." Publishes *The Prairie Sentinel*, edited by Dan Looker, \$10/year (6 issues) from Center for Rural Affairs, P.O. Box 405, Walthill, NE 68067. Also sponsors the Small Farm Energy Project in Harrington, Nebraska (NWECC p. 122).

THE LAND INSTITUTE — Codirected by Wes and Dana Jackson, this is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the search for sustainable alternatives in agriculture, energy, waste, and shelter. (Wes wrote the article on p. 70.) They publish *The Land Report* three times yearly. Also, each year on the last weekend in May they sponsor the Prairie Festival, an environmental celebration. (The Land Institute, Rt. 3, Salina, KS 66044).

PRAIRIE/PLAINS RESOURCE INSTITUTE — Codirected by Bill and Jan Whitney, it "is part of a growing network of people who are looking for, preserving, studying, and even planting prairie. The Institute is also working to design and promote a concept of resource development which protects and sustains the health and productivity of people, soils, watersheds, and communities." The first two issues of their journal have just come out: *Prairie/Plains Journal*, edited by Jan Whitney, \$10/calendar year (2 issues; includes membership) from Prairie/Plains Resource Institute, 1219 16th Street, Aurora, NE 68818.

SAVE THE TALLGRASS PRAIRIE — This has been the organization dedicated to preserving a sizeable remnant of tallgrass prairie. Their emphasis has been on creating a Prairie National Park in the Flint Hills of Kansas — the largest remaining area of tallgrass prairie in the U.S. I think it is significant that the grasslands are not represented in our National Park system — they could be and were used for agriculture instead. Elaine Shea is the hard-working person behind this organization. STP, 4101 West 54th Terrace, Shawnee Mission, KS 66205. ■

