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Man-Hunters of the Old West by Robert K. DeArment (review)

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BOOK REVIEWS

Man-Hunters of the Old West. By Robert K. DeArment. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017. Pp. 344. \$29.95 hardcover)

Author Robert K. DeArment has done it once again. Following the pattern he set with his book *Knights of the Green Cloth* and his successful *Deadly Dozen* series, DeArment presents readers with *Man-Hunters of the Old West*, a compendium of biographical sketches of eight noteworthy bounty hunters from the frontier era. Some of the names will be immediately recognized by students of western history, including John Riley “Jack” Duncan, who was instrumental in the capture of the notorious John Wesley Hardin; Wells, Fargo and Company detective James Bunyan “Jim” Hume; and the legendary cowboy-detective Charles Siringo. Others will not be so familiar.

Though the author is dealing with oft-sensationalized subjects—lawmen and gunmen, robberies and murders, manhunts and gunfights—DeArment does not sensationalize and neatly avoids the trap of exaggerating and hyperbolizing. *Man-Hunters* is a serious, well-researched, and scholarly work of non-fiction, replete with citations and end notes. This is not to say the book is as dry and dusty as a summer cattle trail. DeArment writes in a very enjoyable and engaging manner. In relating these tales, he eschews erudite argot and unnecessary verbosity in favor of simple and straightforward language, which makes the book a pleasurable and informative read.

The subjects the author has chosen to include are a mixed bag. Some, like David J. Cook, who founded the Rocky Mountain Detective Agency, and the aforementioned James Hume, could be classified as dedicated and deliberate career lawmen. Others, like Jack Duncan, who, DeArment notes, often frequented the low-rent saloons and brothels of Dallas, and Charlie Siringo, who was, by his own admission, a wild and wooly cowhand in his youth, would seem to have gravitated to the profession of man-hunting simply because the adventurous and dangerous lifestyle suited their tempestuous natures.

DeArment does not coat his subjects in high-gloss varnish. Though these men he writes of performed heroic deeds in their attempt to impose law and order in the West, they could also be base scoundrels. Walter Scott Davis rode with William C. Irvine and the Wyoming Stock Growers Association in the Johnson County War. M. F. Leech was given to exaggerating his exploits, especially in regard to his role in the hunt

for the outlaws Joel Collins and Sam Bass. Perry Mallon was a low-class confidence man and swindler whose brief career as a man-hunter was nothing more than a bid to obtain some fast, easy reward money.

Many of these subjects have been written about before, with varying degrees of accuracy. DeArment does well in his efforts to separate the facts from the legends, and where this is not possible, the author readily informs the reader of discrepancies in anecdotes, deviations from the historical record, and outright fabrications found in the available sources. In the process, he explodes many myths about the man-hunters of lore.

DeArment's new book is recommended reading for the student of frontier history.

DAVID GRASSÉ
Payson

Man-Hunters of the Old West, Volume 2. By Robert K. DeArment. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018. Pp. xi, 344. \$29.95 hardcover)

As settlements and communities grew in the American West, so did the population of criminals seeking to take advantage of a region sparsely policed by the federal government. Many criminals threatened the livelihood of American settlers by utilizing brutal tactics to increase their wealth and popularity. Addressing this in 1987, historian Patricia Nelson Limerick wrote in *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*, "The West was once the Wild West, the old image held, and then, heroically, law and order were introduced and the wilderness was mastered." Robert K. DeArment, a prolific and respected author of the American West, uses a microhistory approach to trace the lives and careers of eight lawmen, termed "man-hunters," who played vital roles in the process Limerick described. In *Man-Hunters of the Old West, Volume 2*, DeArment suggests that while the eight figures highlighted in this book used ruthless tactics to hunt down—and sometimes kill—fugitives, their success between 1810 and 1867 changed the American West for the better.

Following much of the same narrative of *Man-Hunters of the Old West, Volume 1* (2017), this new collection of biographies remains focused on the man-hunters and the practices they employed to subdue criminals. This second volume covers the lives and careers of Harry Love, Tom Tobin, Granville Stuart, Harry Morse, Bass Reeves, John Hughes, and Frank Norfleet, and highlights the trials and tribulations of working as an unrestricted agent of the law. DeArment seeks to place these men in historical perspective, connecting their exciting, if rela-