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The Sod-House Frontier, 1854-1890: A Social History of the Northern Plains from the Creation of Kansas Nebraska to the Admission of the Dakotas [Illustrated]

Everett Newfon Dick

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#3757181 in Books 1954-01-01PDF # 1 #File Name: B0007E9IDE550 pages | File size: 40.Mb

Everett Newfon Dick : The Sod-House Frontier, 1854-1890: A Social History of the Northern Plains from the Creation of Kansas Nebraska to the Admission of the Dakotas [Illustrated] before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Sod-House Frontier, 1854-1890: A Social History of the Northern Plains from the Creation of Kansas Nebraska to the Admission of the Dakotas [Illustrated]:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Excellent read.By WayneThis book is very interesting. It is written to be read easily while digesting what life was like in various aspects of the frontier such as land grants, housing, disease, banking, swindlers, teamsters and squatters. There are footnotes that add to the text. I'm about half way through this book and wish I had the time to read it in one sitting.11 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Not your Little House on the PrairieBy Ronald ScheerAt 550 pages, this classic social history of the first decades of settlement in Nebraska, Kansas, and the Dakotas is informative, entertaining, sometimes poignant, and one heck of a read. For anyone whose knowledge of this period is as limited as mine, it's also full of surprises -- lots of them. Historian Everett Dick dips into a substantial collection of documents, listed in his 10-page bibliography, and organizes what he's found into 35 chapters, each on a different subject, including the sod house of the title, homesteading, prairie towns, vigilante justice, farmers vs. cattlemen, extremes of weather, Indians, hunting and

trapping, the railroad, sports, education, the church, journalism, doctors, lawyers, and entertainment. And that covers only about half of them. Settlement moved quickly and furiously across the Missouri River, while the federal government was still negotiating the relocation of the current residents, i.e. Native Americans, then spread across the territories in a surge of speculation and rapid development in a series of booms and busts. Cliches and stereotypes from movies and television quickly fall left, right, and center, as the author revels in the rich tapestry of human endeavors portrayed against a raw, still alien landscape. Law and order were virtually nonexistent, and a recurring theme in the book is the frequency of scams, fraud, graft, and chicanery of all kinds that were the order of the day. In such an environment, the carrying of weapons was universal, and differences of opinion were normally settled with bloodshed and no questions asked afterwards. There is the land rush, featuring claim jumpers and speculators with no interest in tilling the soil or putting down roots but turning a quick buck, usually in total violation of whatever law existed at the time. There are the wild cat banks, printing their own money, all of it eventually worthless to those left holding it. There are the crooked investment schemes that raised capital for towns that were never built. Prairie communities lure railroad companies to build lines in their direction with outlays of cash. Elections are rigged, bribes paid, and blood spilled over the location of county seats. Phony local governments elect themselves into office and after borrowing money for public projects abscond with the funds and leave the area's legitimate settlers under a crushing load of debt. And on and on. It's a fascinating account of the frontier as a kind of bonfire of vanities. But this is only one theme in the book. There are many others, and much to relish in descriptions of the daily life of more ordinary folks who are typically jacks of all trades, short of cash, either hard-working or hard-drinking, often overwhelmed by the isolation of their circumstances. It's a delight, for instance, to read of country and small town pastimes and pleasures from baseball to dances that go until sunup. Given the book's origins in the 1930s, it tends to neglect the lives of women (an oversight that has been corrected in many more recent books), and while it seems to want to give a balanced view of Indians, it tends to focus its interests elsewhere. Unfortunately, the treatment of African Americans is somewhat condescending. Those faults aside, the book is a page-turner, especially for anyone who, as I did, grew up in this part of the world with only a glimmer of an idea of its actual history. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Georgia Excellent book about life on the western plains.

Dust jacket notes: "A hundred years ago the great prairie region now comprising the states of Kansas, Nebraska, and North and South Dakota was regarded as unfit for human habitation. As late as the middle of the last century the maps of the United States included it within 'The Great American Desert,' and successive waves of migration passed it by for what seemed more hospitable lands farther west. But now these prairie states, so completely ignored at first, have become one of the richest sections of the land, the agricultural heart of the country, and the seat, moreover, of a distinctive culture within the general American frame. The background of this culture, the conditions, problems, and struggles of pioneer life on the Sod-House Frontier from 1854 to 1890, is the theme of this important and fascinating book. In vivid detail, enriched with the fruit of exhaustive research, the author tells where the settlers came from, how they traveled, how they located themselves and built new homes, how they founded towns and industries, what hardships and calamities they endured, how they lived and worked and amused themselves, how democracy functioned among them, how they provided for education and developed social and political institutions. Here also are picturesque accounts of builders and outlaws, homesteaders and claim-jumpers, bankers and horse thieves, preachers and teachers, doctors and medicine men, lawyers and politicians - in short, the whole motley throng that made up frontier society. Here, too, is the epic story of the farmers' triumph over hostile Indians, of how they withstood the menace of prairie fires, droughts, blizzards, and grasshoppers. Every page reveals some new and interesting aspect of frontier life, and the whole book bears the stamp of authenticity and sympathy in recreating the arduous days of a vanished era." Illustrated with 31 period drawings and photographs.