



In God We Trusted

*Pioneer Stories from
Kansas*

~ ROY BIRD ~

In God We Trusted



Pioneer Stories from Kansas

And eastward groan the schooners,
Slogans changed:

**“In God We Trusted,
In Kansas We Busted;”**

**“Gone Back to Live
with the Wife’s Folks!”**

—Kenneth Wiggins Porter,
The Ghosts of the Buffalo

In God We Trusted

~

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Rowe Publishing

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Cover painting by late Kansas artist George Stone. The original graced the Governor's Office in the Kansas statehouse for many years. Courtesy Kansas Historical Society.

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Preface

The following pages contain stories about people, places, and happenings in Kansas and the Old West. They were written over a span of some 15 years, 1975-1990. They include personal interpretations of historical events, sites, and personalities, both well-known and obscure. There are also simple narratives which zero in on particular aspects of the culture and heritage of Kansans and Westerners. All the tales selected for this collection were written solely because they caught my fancy.

I have often said I am a Kansan not only by birth but also by inclination. I am uncomfortable outside the state's borders, and my regional chauvinism puts the braggingest Texan to shame. Yet I am also a Westerner who sees the importance of the frontier to American history. The stories in this book—no matter how great or how small—are components of the larger story of the exploration, exploitation, and civilization of the frontier.

Reading history sometimes causes people to hark back to their school days when a seeming

grab bag of names and dates and places had to be memorized—a distasteful task for even an historian, useful only for trivia games. But reading history should be educational, informational, cultural, and recreational. It does not have to be dull, the reason there are American students who are desperately lacking even basic knowledge about their country's past and why the methods of teaching history have come into question in recent years. Reading history can be fun.

Researching and writing history can be fun as well. Studying and chronicling life in Kansas and the West gives me a sense of the human experience involved in either specific events or in large, sometimes abstract, concepts of the past. We use history for awareness of where we've been, so we know where we are, and so we will have visions for the future. Yet how can any of us have an awareness without attempting to put ourselves into those situations?

The ensuing accounts, biographies, and explanations represent an attempt to transport readers into the past. Picture the stories as though they are on a brightly lit screen, then attempt to enter with me the remarkably exciting or reminiscently interesting ways people actually acted and lived in the past.

To Easterners we of the West seem to move slower, have more relaxed life styles, and do things in

our own old-fashioned ways. For some this seems romantic and appealing, for others quaintly backward. A few might recognize that involved in these stories is man's attempt to adjust to life on the prairies and the plains. They are examples of the culture and heritage of the West. A few have even become part of its folklore.

I have pulled together *In God We Trusted* with two convictions. First, writers of history have obligations to convey dramatic ways people behaved in previous generations. Second, it is possible that researching, writing, and reading history can be fun.

Both of these convictions have shaped my articles and this book. In the end, readers should have a better grasp of the history of Kansas and the frontier, of the way that all the people, places, and dates shaped and were themselves shaped by the time and setting in which they existed. If readers are able to put themselves into the places of the characters in the following stories they might also learn the most important thing that history has to teach us: we all live in history, being shaped for the future by what it has been as well as by what it is now.

By taking themselves out of the present and in their minds' eyes seeing what it was like in the Old West, readers may likewise see that reading history is a way of discovering our kinship with all those real people who have gone before us, who survived

their struggles and their exaltations with the same effort and *joie de vivre* that go so deeply into all our lives. We all are results of the past whether we know it or not.

So read *In God We Trusted* and enjoy some reading. It's good to know a little something about the past.

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