ForeWord Reviews

HISTORY

Cowboy's Lament: A Life on the Open Range
Frank Maynard
Jim Hoy, editor
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For twenty years, 1866-1886, the author rode the range as a buffalo hunter and cattle herder in Kansas and the Indian Territory that is now Oklahoma. In *Cowboy's Lament,* Frank Maynard (1854-1926) vividly recaptures his years as a cowboy in the Wild West. His simple yet sophisticated writing will captivate readers whose only exposure to the frontier West is from motion pictures. The book's title is taken from a Maynard poem, which, it is now believed, became the modern version of the iconic western song, "The Streets of Laredo."

Included here are Maynard's memoir, his twenty-two surviving poems, and a few journalism pieces that describe his cowboy life, written after he settled down in Colorado Springs with his wife, Flora. Editor Jim Hoy, director of Great Plains Studies at Emporia State University and the author of *Flint Hill Cowboys: Tales of the Tallgrass Prairie,* provides a fascinating account of how he worked with Maynard's family to introduce the memoir to the public. In the foreword, David Stanley, professor emeritus of English at Westminster College, Salt Lake City, and co-editor of *Cowboy Poets and Cowboy Poetry*, includes an illuminating look at Maynard's writings and his place in cowboy literature.

Restless for adventure, sixteen-year-old Maynard left home and found plenty of what he was looking for, including raging blizzards that seem to come out of nowhere, hangings, gunfights that left plenty of men dead "with their boots on," attacks from marauding Indians, and poker games in which card sharks left their guns on the table to warn cheaters of their limited options.

Readers will be struck by the author's matter-of-fact descriptions of killings. Maynard was not a violent man, but, as he says, "The broad prairie was our home, and we carried our laws in our belts." Among the people who crossed Maynard's path were David Rudebaugh, a future member of Billy the Kid's gang, and future US Marshal and columnist Bat Masterson, who the author knew as a saloonkeeper, newspaper editor, and sheriff. Maynard refers to African and Native Americans in offensive terms that were acceptable at the time. Yet, he writes warmly about a Choctaw family who nursed him back to health after he was kicked by a horse,

and observes that, “While we blame them (American Indians) for their cruel deeds, let us also sympathize with them in the wrongs which have been heaped upon them.” Students of the American West and fans of frontier stories will enjoy the lively and poignant writings of this authentic American cowboy.

Karl Helicher