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Review of *The West of Wild Bill Hickok* By Joseph G. Rosa

Gary L. Roberts

Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College

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The West of Wild Bill Hickok. By Joseph G. Rosa. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. xvi + 223 pp. \$24.95.

Joseph G. Rosa's earlier book *They Called Him Wild Bill* is not only the definitive biography of the redoubtable James Butler Hickok but also a model for biographies of other western figures. The same qualities that marked Rosa's original biography of Hickok are evident in the present work. *The West of Wild Bill Hickok* is not a revision of the original biography (although it does present some new material not included in Rosa's 1974 revised edition), but rather, a thoughtful and detailed examination of the photographic record of the life and times of Wild Bill Hickok. The purpose of the book "is to reproduce in one volume all the known portraits of Wild Bill Hickok, together with a selection of photographs of his family, his friends, his foes, and the places that knew him."

Eschewing the temptation to make the book simply an album of Hickok photographs, Rosa uses a spare chronological text to provide the context for the photographs and concentrates his efforts upon a careful analysis of the known likenesses of Hickok. Rosa examines photographs with the same demanding standards that he used in researching newspapers, original documents, and reminiscences. Rosa seeks to place the photographs in the correct chronological sequence, to determine when and where they were made, and who made them. He also presents a sampling of illustrations, drawings, and popular dime novel likenesses. Rosa reveals a number of attempts to alter and change photographs and points out the sometimes unfortunate results of this practice.

Yet, ultimately, the technical analysis is not what makes this book work. Its main contribution is to add a human dimension to the Hickok story. When Rosa published *They Called Him Wild Bill* nearly twenty years ago, Hickok emerged from the shadowy world of frontier legend into the searching light of historical reality. Now, in this volume—as one

gazes into the face of the man Hickok in all his moods; as one is introduced to Hickok's father and mother, his brothers and his sisters; as one sees the places and people that shared his experiences—the light softens, and Wild Bill emerges as a human being of flesh and bone.

The West of Wild Bill Hickok testifies to the power of the photograph as a historical tool and to the importance of learning to use photographs as an integral part of historical research rather than as an afterthought. *The West of Wild Bill Hickok* should be on the shelf of every student of the old West next to *They Called Him Wild Bill*.

GARY L. ROBERTS
Department of History
Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College