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Review of *Valentine T. McGillicuddy: Army Surgeon, Agent to the Sioux* by Candy Moulton

Jason Pierce
Angelo State University

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BOOK REVIEWS

Valentine T. McGillicuddy: Army Surgeon, Agent to the Sioux. By Candy Moulton. Norman, OK: Arthur H. Clark Company, 2011. 288 pp. Map, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95.

Valentine T. McGillicuddy is not famous, but he should be. His presence at many critical events in the 1870s and '80s compelled Candy Moulton to write this engaging biography. McGillicuddy worked as a doctor and surveyor on the Northern Boundary Survey and the 1875 Newton-Jenney Expedition into the Black Hills. He tended wounded soldiers as an army surgeon during the war with the Lakotas and Cheyennes in 1876 and served as an Indian agent on the Pine Ridge Reservation from 1879–86. He brushed shoulders with such iconic western figures as Calamity Jane, William F. Cody, Marcus Reno, Red Cloud, and Crazy Horse, the latter a good friend whom he tried desperately, but unsuccessfully, to save

following the tragic confrontation with U.S. soldiers at Fort Robinson.

Moulton provides insight into familiar events while covering some subjects that have often been overlooked, like the boundary survey and General Crook's nearly disastrous march through the southern Dakota Territory following the Battle of the Rosebud. The most valuable section of the book, however, focuses on McGillicuddy's time at Pine Ridge. We learn a great deal about the fiery agent's ongoing battle of wills with Red Cloud, the decision to create a Lakota police force, and the daily difficulties of running the reservation.

There are, however, a few problems with the book. One is McGillicuddy's lack of introspection. Despite Moulton's best efforts, the reader never really gets into his head. Moreover, the volume lacks a thesis. Was McGillicuddy's life significant for more than his uncanny knack for being in the right place at the right time? His career as an Indian agent is a case in point. Moulton portrays McGillicuddy as an honest and sympathetic agent. Yet he is also a strong advocate of efforts to introduce farming and boarding school education among his charges. Is he typical of agents of his time or more progressive in his views? Also, he spends a great deal of time defending himself from a host of detractors. Moulton suggests that he was innocent of the charges of favoritism and corruption leveled against him (and indeed he was never actually found guilty of any wrongdoing), but the author does not really examine these in enough detail. Given the low opinion of many scholars toward early Indian agents, she needed to spend more time defending her subject and engaging the secondary literature.

Valentine T. McGillicuddy is a well-researched and enjoyable biography of an undeservedly forgotten figure of the Northern Plains. Scholars of the region and the Indian Wars will no doubt find it a welcome addition.

JASON PIERCE
Department of History
Angelo State University
San Angelo, Texas