

Ferdie J. Deering

JUN 29 1982

An Epic Poem of the Santa Fe Trail

THE ROMANCE and adventure of the West have been portrayed countless times in prose, songs, movies and television, but rarely has there been a great literary poem written about this fascinating region.

So when Welborn Hope produced an epic poem of the Santa Fe Trail titled "The Prairie Ocean," the Diamond Jubilee Commission sponsored its publication through private contributions and with the Oklahoma Historical Society as publisher.

Although the Santa Fe Trail crossed Oklahoma only in the Panhandle and the locale of Hope's poem moves along the Trail in other states, Oklahomans may relate to the story because of proximity, heritage and tradition.

Indian tribes mentioned were resettled later in Oklahoma and not a few present-day Oklahomans have heard family folklore relate similar adventures experienced by their pioneer ancestors.

If the story told in "The Prairie Ocean" had been written in prose the book might have qualified as a

live story or a novel, as a western adventure, or as romanticized history.

The narrative poem consists of recollections of an old wagon master on the trail in classic English rather than the slurred grammar commonly attributed to muleskinners. The principal character is a Yale graduate who came West from New England after killing a man he saw embracing his wife.

"No arbitrary claim of God or man

Barred my footsteps now as I descended

The Trail down through a valley of the Plains."

The theme deals with his flight to escape the laws of God and man, as well as to eschew women forever. He could not get away from God, he fell in love again, and he saw beauty.

"When I sprawled on my blanket at day's end,

Little cared I for the beauty of the Plains...

Yet God must have cared for the West to send

From Heaven such gentle reminders of His glory

As golden coreopsis and the scarlet mallow,

Their faces brightly ringing every buffalo wallow."

The poem offers humor in such passages as the one telling of the invention of Windwagon Thomas, pathos as traders cheat Indians of their valuable buffalo hides by swapping them whiskey and "foof-eraw" baubles, and adventure, both real and lies told by would-be heroes.

Dedication of the book to Jesus of Nazareth is most unusual.

Jack T. Conn wrote the foreword, portraying frankly the eccentricities of the author, who was born at Ada, Indian Territory, in 1903, the only son of a banker and prominent club woman.

Hope wandered over the United States for decades as "The Tramp Poet" and returned to Oklahoma several years ago to write what are certain to be his greatest works.

Already half done is the next in this series, "The Chisholm Trail," another epic poem of the rugged people who made the West.

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12/22/'81



Dear Ferdie:

Your Christmas card has been received by ~~my~~ me--- and ~~##~~ appreciated.

In lieu of a card, I am writing you a few words to apprise you of how I am making out. I have known a lot of sickness in the two years I have lived at the Sieber, with emphysema and diverticulosis equally painful and wracking. But, curiously, it has been the happiest time of my life: my spiritual ^h achievement has transcended all the pain.

You remember, 'way back 50 years ago, when you wrote a col-
^r for the Ada News, I started a considerably-publicized epic poem of the Santa Fe Trail. Just a few weeks ago, in 1981, I finished it.

Now let me indulge myself in immodesty---which is characteristic of me but not always genuine, for I know my faults as well as anyone. "The Prairie Ocean" is a great national poem, written in honor of Jesus Christ, my Companion (some of the time) on the tramp around America. Even Jack Conn says it is great, and the English department of OCU, while not calling it great has written critiques that are most congratulatory. So "The Prairie Ocean", an Epic Poem of The Santa Fe Trail, has been selected by the Commission as a project of Oklahoma's Diamond Jubilee. So now, I start on "The Chisholm Trail", a companion-epic laid in Texas and Oklahoma. It, too, will be 250 pages, over 5000 lines of poetry. Forgive my vanity: I've

worked for it. I'll need your help now and then---on the ranch ^{of my creating} as a model of the Old West. Please drop by. Jackson



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JACK T. CONN
VICE CHAIRMAN

FIDELITY OF OKLAHOMA, INC.
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

June 29, 1982

Mr. Ferdie Deering
11608 Susan Lane
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Dear Ferdie:

Thanks so much for your excellent review of The Prairie Ocean. It was well done and said precisely that which should have been said. Both the Diamond Jubilee Commission and the Oklahoma Historical Society are most grateful. We hope that this very fine epic poem receives the acclaim which it deserves and we believe that upon Hope's completion of The Chisholm Trail, the work will be published by the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Thanks again, to a fellow Adan of whom I'm enormously proud.

Sincerely,

Jack T. Conn

JTC/hr

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