



Daggett: Life in a Mojave Frontier Town (Creating the North American Landscape)

Professor Dix Van Dyke

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When twenty-two-year-old Dix Van Dyke arrived in Daggett, California, in 1901, the town was a wild and raucous frontier settlement, with barrooms and brothels, silver mines and land swindles, cattle drives, and shootouts at the Bucket of Blood saloon. Dix, a ranch-boy with no formal education but whose father and uncle were writers, became the town's unofficial historian.

Edited and introduced by award-winning poet and nature writer Peter Wild, this is Dix Van Dyke's account of how the twentieth century arrived in a California frontier town. Located a hundred miles outside Los Angeles and just east of Barstow in the Mojave Desert, Daggett attracted a rich assortment of settlers lured by the wealth of nearby silver mines or the promise of cheap farmland conjured up by dubious irrigation schemes. With wit, humor, and a writer's eye for the telling detail, Dix describes the delicate beauty of the desert and the human hopes that often ended in folly there.

Among the citizenry: • Mother Preston, a madam of sumptuous proportions and valorous spirit, capable of locking the head of an unruly client in the crook of an immense arm and pummeling his face with her windmilling fist.

- Death Valley Scotty, who claimed to have a fabulously rich gold mine at a secret location north of Daggett. Only decades later was it discovered that Scotty's wealth came from an eccentric Chicago millionaire.
- Bill Frakes, who tried unsuccessfully to breed "coyote-killing sheep," and who prowled the wild riverbottoms tracking real and imagined malefactors.

Dix also reveals the Van Dyke ranch as an unlikely crossroads for intellectuals, some of them famous. Conservationist John Muir's visits included one memorable argument with Dix's Uncle John. Muir admirers may be surprised at the tangle of family relationships begun when daughter Helen married Daggett resident Buel Funk -- a story never told in print before.

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