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“Blackfoot Redemption” wins Great Plains book prize

Lincoln, April 26, 2013 — “Blackfoot Redemption: A Blood Indian’s Story of Murder, Confinement and Imperfect Justice” by William E. Farr is this year’s winner of the Great Plains Distinguished Book Prize from the Center for Great Plains Studies at the University of Nebraska. Richard Edwards, director of the Center, made the announcement Friday at the Center’s annual fellows meeting.

In “Blackfoot Redemption,” Farr reconstructs the events of a Canadian Blackfoot called Spopee who shot and killed a white man in 1879. Through the narrative, he reveals a larger story about race and prejudice as the transition to reservations began.

Spopee, or Turtle, was captured as a fugitive and narrowly escaped execution. He disappeared inside an insane asylum in Washington, D.C. for more than 30 years until a delegation of American Blackfeet discovered him and gained a pardon from President Woodrow Wilson.

“It is a small story telling a larger one, for the book is not only about what happened to Spopee, it is also about what happened to the Real People, the Niitsitapi, in this same period as they were confined or imprisoned on their reservation, as they underwent a wrenching transition from freedom to dependence, from communal buffalo hunting to irrigation and reservation allotment ... Too often individual experiences were lost in that transition and are now invisible,” Farr said.

“(The book) contains a compelling narrative of an individual Native American who was caught up in an alien political/justice system—that of the frontier U.S.—and sets it as part of the larger tribal and settlement histories of the Montana border regions,” said Kari Ronning, one of the Book Prize judges and editor of the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition.

Farr is a senior fellow and founding director of the O’Connor Center for the Rocky Mountain West and professor emeritus of history at the University of Montana, Missoula. He is the also the author of “Montana: Images of the Past and the Reservation Blackfeet, 1882-1945.”

This fall Farr will deliver a lecture at the center, after which he will be presented with a cash prize of \$5,000 and the Distinguished Book Prize medallion. “Blackfoot Redemption” was published by the University of Oklahoma Press. The Great Plains Distinguished Book Prize was created to emphasize the interdisciplinary importance of the Great Plains in today’s publishing and educational market. Only first edition, full-length, nonfiction books published in 2012 were evaluated for the award. The other finalist was Doreen Chaky’s “Terrible Justice: Sioux Chiefs and U.S. Soldiers on the Upper Missouri, 1854-1868.”

The Center for Great Plains Studies is a four-campus interdisciplinary, research and teaching program chartered in 1976 by the University of Nebraska Board of Regents. Its mission is to promote a greater understanding of the people, culture, history, and environment of the Great Plains through a variety of research, teaching, and outreach programs. For more information, contact the Center for Great Plains Studies at 402-472-3082 or visit its website www.unl.edu/plains.

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Attachments: Book dust cover, Farr photo