

Bob Burke. *Good Guys Wear White Hats: The Life of George Nigh*. (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: Oklahoma Heritage Association, 2000), pp 415. \$28.95 ISBN 1-885596-17-0.

As a life-long resident of the state of Oklahoma, I recall the refrain: “good guy, good governor” as one of the first political slogans to catch my attention as a new member of the electorate in the state of Oklahoma. The thing is, the political slogan was merely a statement reflecting the true nature of one of our state’s most enduring and endearing political figures, George Nigh. Bob Burke’s *Good Guys Wear White Hats* is a detailed and thorough rendering of George Nigh’s life. This work is rich with detail and fascinating description.

Bob Burke takes us from the early beginnings of George Nigh’s life as a school teacher and budding community leader in McAlester, Oklahoma to his early political career as a state representative and his long time occupancy of the office of Lieutenant Governor. The humorous telling of Mr. Nigh’s short term as governor (nine days) while replacing J. Howard Edmondson propels the reader to the eventual capturing of the Governor’s office and George Nigh becoming a political oddity—a two-term chief executive. Burke leads the reader up to George Nigh’s eventual presidency of the University of Central Oklahoma and beyond. All along the way, Burke reminds us of the ever-present support given to him by his family, his friends, and his wife, Donna. Burke gave this reviewer the distinct impression that the source of George Nigh’s success was not in his obvious political adroitness; the give and take and “wheeling and dealing” that is necessary as a state’s chief executive, but rather in his ability to gain the trust and confidence of those who worked for him and knew him best. It should be highlighted that Governor Nigh’s ability to gain the trust of others extended to his political opponents, both in the

Democratic and Republican parties. Governor Nigh was able to persuade through cooperation, negotiation and the ability to present his case for the people of the state of Oklahoma, not for his own political gain.

George Nigh's substantive accomplishments are too numerous to list. George Nigh was present and influenced almost every major political event in our state's history after the 1950s. His leadership in creating an ethics commission, the building of roads and bridges, his stewardship during the expansion of UCO into a major regional university, and his fight to improve the quality of public education is a short list of his accomplishments. For this reviewer, the most significant theme regarding George Nigh's lengthy political career has to be his tireless promotion of the state as a great place to live, work and play.

While there are several policy disputes that might be taken up with Governor Nigh's record, most can be understood in the context of history. Perhaps he could have provided better leadership in budgetary matters. Who could have foreseen the difficulties regarding our oil-based economy? Many might point out that George Nigh was career politician, doing little else in his life. It is true that the bulk of Governor Nigh's professional career was spent in public service. For that, the citizens of Oklahoma should feel fortunate, indeed.

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