

Review of Texas Books

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Lamar University
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Managing Editors

Holly Carey
Harrabeth Haidusek
Janet Turk

Founding Editor

Sally Dooley

Associate Editors

Joe Nordgren
Andrew Preslar

Business Manager

R. S. Gwynn

Business and Subscription Offices:

P.O. Box 10023
Beaumont, TX 77710

Email Address:

txbooks@hal.lamar.edu



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Inside This Issue

<i>Editors' Choice: The Magic Curtain: The Mexican-American Border in Fiction, Film, and Song</i> , Thomas Torrans	2
<i>"They Ain't Wanted Here" and Other Texas Stories</i> , Joel Kirkpatrick	2-3
<i>The Bone Pickers</i> , Al Dewlen	3
<i>The Tentmaker</i> , Clay Reynolds	4
<i>From Texas to the World and Back: Essays on the Journeys of Katherine Anne Porter</i> , Eds. Mark Busby and Dick Heaberlin	4-5
<i>Have a Seat, Please</i> , Don Reid, with John Gurwell	5
<i>The Ghosts of Spindletop Hill</i> , Wanda A. Landrey	5-6
<i>Jazz Cats</i> , David R. Davis	6
<i>The Scariest Alphabet Book</i> , Rowland-Grey Ellis and Teddy Kentor	6
<i>The Dallas Public Library: Celebrating a Century of Service, 1901-2001</i> , Michael V. Hazel	7
<i>Beyond Contentment</i> , Glen Onley	7
<i>A Grand Gathering</i> , Sammie Munson	8
<i>Elvis: A Radio History From 1945-1955</i> , Aaron Webster	8
<i>Top Texas Teachers</i> , Dorothy McConachie	9
<i>The Forgotten War: Texas Veterans Remember Korea</i> , Mackey Murdock	9
<i>Close to the Heart</i> , Diane Gonzales Bertrand	9-10
<i>New Religious Movements and Religious Liberty in America</i> , eds. Derek H. Davis and Barry Hankins	10
<i>The Roots of Texas Music</i> , eds. Lawrence Clayton and Joe W. Specht	10-11
<i>Land! Irish Pioneers in Mexican and Revolutionary Texas</i> , Graham Davis	11
<i>Black Powder, White Smoke</i> , Loren D. Estleman	11-12
<i>Black Sunday: The Great Dust Storm of April 14, 1935</i> , Frank L. Stallings Jr.	12
<i>The Lone Star and the Swastika: German POWs in Texas</i> , Richard P. Walker	13
<i>Orange Candy Slices and Other Secret Tales</i> , Viola Canales	13
<i>For Love or Country</i> , Kerelyn Sparks	14
<i>Texas Bad Boys: Gamblers, Gunfighters, and Grifters</i> , J. Lee Butts	14-15
<i>A Private in the Texas Rangers: A. T. Miller of Company B, Frontier Battalion</i> , John Miller Morris	15

Thomas Torrans lives and writes in Fort Worth, Texas. He is the author of the companion volume *Forging the Tortilla Curtain: Cultural Drift and Change along the United States-Mexico Border from the Spanish Era to the Present*. This volume was published by TCU Press in 2002 and has a list price of 29.95.

Featured Publisher:
TCU Press

A product of Texas Christian University, TCU Press is among the smallest university publishers in the nation. This press focuses on history and literature of the American Southwest. TCU Press has won awards from the Texas Institute of Letters, the National Cowboy Hall of Fame, and Western Writers of America, among others.

Editors' Choice:

The Magic Curtain: The Mexican-American Border in Fiction, Film, and Song

Thomas Torrans

The Things That Divide Us
Review by Sally Dooley

In this companion to his previous publication, *Forging the Tortilla Curtain*, retired journalist Thomas Torrans of Fort Worth explores the U.S. border with Mexico as depicted in fiction, film, and song. He views the border as a fluid place where people, language, culture, and economy flow back and forth. In the past, each side of the border offered a more distinct culture and connotation, a line that has now blurred due to the border's porosity and modern communication. Torrans' purpose is to preserve this past by identifying the novels, films, and *corridos* with border themes. His illustrations derive from popular films such as *The Getaway*, *The Old Gringo*, and *Traffic*. Citing the novels of Larry McMurtry, Comac McCarthy, Rolando Hinojosa, and others, Torrans demonstrates the effect of the border on their characters and plots. *Corridos* (folk ballads) are still being composed and sung, and he shows their history and vitality with many examples in both Spanish and English. Both the immigrants and the migrant's hopes for economic improvement are retold in plaintive, narrative song. He examines the legendary story in "Corrido de Gregorio Cortez" and considers the plight of immigrants in songs from "Corrido de Inmigración," up to more contemporary ones about Caesar Chavez.

Torrans' background in history, anthropology, and psychology prepared him well for this analysis. Scholars with an interest in the culture of the borderlands will enjoy this thoughtful consideration of its literary and folkloric culture. The "Notes on Sources, Readings and Films" will assist students with additional research.

TORRANS, THOMAS. THE MAGIC CURTAIN: THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN BORDER IN FICTION, FILM, AND SONG. FORT WORTH: TEXAS CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2002. 235PP. INDEX. \$29.95 CLOTH. ISBN 0-87565-257-3.



"They Ain't Wanted Here" and Other Texas Stories

Joel Kirkpatrick

Down-Home Anecdotes About Lives and Legends
Review by Stephen Curley

Joel Kirkpatrick has printer's ink in his blood. He has been a Texas newspaperman since 1956. He wrote for the *Abilene Reporter News*, was the Galveston chief for the *Houston Chronicle*, and spent more than 30 years working for the *Galveston Daily News*. Versions of the forty-five stories in this anthology originally appeared in his regular "Morning Cup Column" in the *Galveston Daily News*. That has a great deal to do with their form—you get in, you get the facts, and you get out quickly. Plus he has a reporter's eye for telling detail.

(Continued on page three)

(Continued from page two)

For example, consider the opening sentence to the title story in his collection: "On that Monday morning, Constable John D. "Pop" Payton and his nephew Panama Daly were the only customers having breakfast in the High Island Café when a man with a submachine gun in the crook of his arm strolled in." Talk about a teaser! The armed man that day in 1934 turns out to be Clyde Barrow, followed by Bonnie Parker with a sawed-off shotgun, and teenager Little Johnnie Beeler with a pistol. The constable's nephew whispered that there was probably a \$25,000 reward for capturing the famous bank robbers: "They're wanted all over the country." The constable kept on eating: "Wee-ll, so far as I know, they ain't wanted for anything in High Island, Texas." Bonnie and Clyde were shot down a few days later in an ambush in Louisiana; but the constable didn't die for another 26 years from natural causes and in bed. Kirkpatrick lets the story tell itself. No editorializing, no prettifying—just a seductively straightforward account of what happened. Of course, along the way he adds some spicy filler, like about the time Bonnie and Clyde in a Galveston brothel "bought the house," including all its professional ladies, for the weekend.

Kirkpatrick's subjects vary as widely as the tellers. The animal stories are particularly intriguing (although sometimes a little raw for the tender-hearted reader), like the ones about cows on the porch, an oyster-hunting dog, a singing chicken, drunk runaway hogs, and a drunken horse. And Galveston legends abound: you can learn about Jean Lafitte from one of his crew; a fisherman's survival during the 1900 Storm; Louisiana Governor Earl K. Long's stay in a mental ward; gambling and prostitution during the wide-open era; and the man who invented the margarita for singer Peggy Lee.

It's a pleasant little diversion. The worst stories aren't bad, and the best stories are fine. Just sit back, listen, and you'll fall under their spell. You may find that putting the book down, as one of Kirkpatrick's character's says, is like trying to sneak dawn past a rooster.

KIRKPATRICK, JOEL. "THEY AIN'T WANTED HERE" AND OTHER TEXAS STORIES. AUSTIN: EAKIN PRESS, 2002. 157PP. ILLUSTRATIONS. \$16.95 PAPER. ISBN 1-57168-689-4.

The Bone Pickers Al Dewlen

Human Hearts Picked Bone Dry
Review by Sally Dooley

Texas Tech University Press is to be commended for reprinting this 1958 novel as a part of its Double Mountain Books-Classical Reissues of the American West. Literary critic A. C. Greene considers it one of the fifty best books of Texas, and old, tattered copies fetch handsome prices on the Internet. Reading the novel, set in Amarillo in the 1950s, one can easily see why the book is important. The plot focuses on the adult children of Cecil Munger, a poor, rough man who died fabulously wealthy due to the discovery of oil on his ranch. All of the children are curiously named: Spain, Texas, China, Alaska, Bethel, and lastly Brother, a man with a child's mind. Through flashbacks, the father's life and his troubled relationships with his children are related. The family operates the Estate with Spain as their leader, which creates a great deal of unspoken but palpable tension. Spain actually dictates where they will live, the type of cars they will drive, and their community involvement. The two husbands of China and Bethel are demeaned by their jobs and Spain's control.

Dewlen writes a deeply textured novel with this Panhandle setting and observes the newly rich and their social inadequacies, vanities, hopes, and dreams. His characters are colorful and unforgettable. Spain, in his pontifical manner, mixes his metaphors; "But—well, you have to face your facts right in the eye, and fit them to your picture, and I have to say it doesn't seem in the cards we could win your election..." This is in reply to Moon, Bethel's husband, who would like to run for the school board. The book turns out to be his story too as he begins to realize himself in this suffocating family situation. Two women provide the catalyst: the hussy turned secretary Teddy Birdsong, and China, the most beautiful daughter who charms everyone, especially Brother but carries a secret. An editor's note, introduction, and the author's introduction to this edition add social context to the novel.

DEWLEN, AL. THE BONE PICKERS. REPRINT. LUBBOCK: TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2002. 424PP. \$14.95 PAPER. ISBN 0-89672-479-4. 2002017360.

An absorbing story, *The Bone Pickers* is sure to please a new generation of readers. A newspaperman for years, Dewlen's other fiction includes *Twilight of Honor*, winner of the McGraw-Hill Fiction Award, *Servants of Corruption*, and *The Session*. Two novels have been made into major motion pictures: *The Night of the Tiger* and *Twilight of Honor*.

Stephen Curley is professor of English at Texas A&M University at Galveston, Texas. He holds a Ph.D. from Rice University.

Sally Dooley is the founder of *Review of Texas Books*. She is a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin and has great respect for Texas writers and their diversity, as her numerous reviews attest.

A professor of literature and aesthetics at the University of Texas at Dallas, Reynolds is the author of five previous novels, including the critically acclaimed Monuments. He is an NEA Fellow and a member of the Texas Institute of Letters and a member of the Western Writers of America.

Dale Farris is a long time professional reviewer for *Library Journal*, *Quality Press*, *Quality Progress* magazine, and *Review of Texas Books*. He holds a master's degree from the University of Texas at Austin and a bachelor's degree from Lamar University, along with post-graduate hours in Aging Studies and Information Science. He is also a professional grant writer and organizational dynamics consultant.

The Tentmaker Clay Reynolds

Some of How the West Was Won
Review by Sally Dooley

Like thousands of young men after the Civil War, Gil Hooley, young and penniless, goes west. Hooley takes with him canvas and thread to be a tent maker, but he carries heavier emotional baggage: he is unambitious. Through a series of fateful accidents, a life begins to form around him. Two unlikely people influence him: Margot, a whore, and Mino, a silent but hardworking immigrant. Much to Hooley's amazement and near chagrin, they develop a business. Cowboys soon come to the tents for recreation, baths, and refreshments. The irony of his continued success amuses the reader yet confounds Hooley. But the mean guys in the black hats, led by Jefferson Tay, are out to pillage and rape settlers on the high Texas plains. When their paths do cross, Hooley realizes he is a different man.

Reynolds tells a gritty and raucously humorous western tale using a great deal of authentic detail with memorable characters and scenes. He describes the slow maturation of Hooley, but the number of scenes necessary to accomplish this curbs the novel's pace. The story builds on the myths and romance of Texas and the West, but with a twist: Hooley has no thirst for a homestead, adventure, or fortune. Life on the plains makes him an upstanding citizen of a town in spite of himself. The novel was a finalist for the Texas Institute of Letters' John Bloom Humor Award: fine recognition for one of Texas' finest novelist.

REYNOLDS, CLAY. *THE TENTMAKER*. NEW YORK: THE BERKLEY PUBLISHING GROUP, 2002. 389PP. \$14.00 PAPER. ISBN 0-425-18270-3. 2002016432.

From Texas to the World and Back: Essays on the Journeys of Katherine Anne Porter

Mark Busby and Dick Heaberlin, eds.

The Adventures of Katherine Anne Porter
Review by Dale Farris

This super literary analysis gathers sixteen essays first presented in a 15 May 1998 conference organized by editor Busby as director of the Center for the Study of the Southwest at Southwest Texas State University (SWT), held in San Marcos, Texas. The conference celebrated both Porter's life and works, and the recent acquisition by SWT and the Hays County Preservation Association of the house in Kyle, Texas, where Porter lived from age two until her early teens, when she left Texas to begin her journeys "to the world."

After Porter left Texas, she never again resided in the state and visited only rarely, but in her essay "Noon Wine: The Sources," she lyrically recalls her Texas past and acknowledges her Texas heritage as an important source for her stories and novellas. Porter was born in 1890 at Indian Creek, now a ghost town near Brownwood.

Porter is tied to Texas by three events that occurred during her career. In 1939, she expected to receive the Texas Institute of Letters Award for "Best Texas Book," only to be insulted when the award went to folklorist J. Frank Dobie. In the 1950s, she accepted an invitation to lecture at the University of Texas (UT) at Austin. During her lecture visit, Porter began to believe that UT would build a library and name it after her, Texas's most famous literary woman. Somehow, she and UT President Harry Ransom miscommunicated, and Porter left her materials to the McKeldin Library at the university of Maryland. Finally, in 1976, Porter returned to Texas to receive recognition from Howard Payne University in Brownwood. On that visit, she visited her mother's grave in the little cemetery in Indian Creek and decided that her own remains on her death belonged beside her mother. So, she finally returned to the state from which she had fled early in her life.

The contributing essayists include scholars of Porter's work and of Texas literature, with some concerning specific aspects of Porter's life, such as her love for her birthday or her marital record, while others focus on the main elements of her relationship with Texas, and others deal with specifics of her works, often relating these works to her Texas heritage. All of the essays are crisply written, with a clear voice that emanates from the professional editing.

(Continued on page five)

(Continued from page four)

Editors Busby and Heaberlin have gathered marvelous essays about Porter's life, her work, and most importantly the significant meaning of her early years as a Texan, thus providing a valuable addition to the growing literature on Porter.

Highly recommended for university library literature and literary analysis collections.

BUSBY, MARK, AND DICK HEABERLIN, EDS. FROM TEXAS TO THE WORLD AND BACK: ESSAYS ON THE JOURNEYS OF KATHERINE ANNE PORTER. FORT WORTH: TCU PRESS, 2001. 263PP. B & W PHOTOGRAPHS, INDEX. \$26.50 CLOTH. ISBN 0-87565-237-9. 00-064863.

Have a Seat, Please Don Reid, with John Gurwell

Old Sparky Unplugged
Review by Dale Farris

Author Reid spent thirty-five years covering the Texas prison system for the Huntsville *Item* and Associated Press. During this long career, he became a major national spokesperson for the abolition of the death penalty. Now deceased, in 1973 Reid originally published his memoir, under the title *Eyewitness*, and this important contribution to the study of criminal justice is now available in this paperback edition with the new title.

Reid began his newspaper career on the Chicago *Tribune*, where he covered the underworld during the bloodiest chapter of that city's history, and moved back to Texas to continue his journalism career, first in McAllen, with the *Monitor*, and then with the Huntsville *Item*, where he ended his career as editor and ultimately publisher-emeritus.

His memoir presents an in-depth, honest look inside the Texas process of executions during the many years in which the instrument of execution was the electric chair, nicknamed "Old Sparky." He reveals the inner impact of witnessing 189 electrocutions, and takes the reader through compelling, gut-wrenching accounts of the condemned on death row, and his eyewitness reports of their deaths in the electric chair. Even more captivating is his story of his personal journey of self-discovery

as he carefully examines the hotly debated issue of capital punishment.

Although the method of execution in Texas is now different, Reid's story will still prove a revelation to readers interested in learning more about exactly what happens during electrocutions, the imperfect criminal justice system, and Reid's own change of attitude about the death penalty based on what he witnessed and participated in over a thirty-five-year period.

As we all know, the executions continue and the debate goes on, and these personal recollections of the reality of electrocuting criminals continues to ring clear.

Highly recommended for all university libraries supporting criminal justice curricula.

REID, DON, WITH JOHN GURWELL. HAVE A SEAT, PLEASE. HUNTSVILLE: TEXAS REVIEW PRESS, 2001. 200PP. \$20.00 PAPER. ISBN 1-881515-33-8. 2001-027583.

The Ghosts of Spindletop Hill

Wanda A. Landrey

The Boomtown Ghosts

Review by Emma B. Hawkins

Spanning a period of almost nine years, from May 1892 to January 10, 1901, when the Lucas Gusher blew in on Spindletop Hill near Beaumont, this piece of juvenile fiction focuses on the growing-up process and youthful adventures of Billy Jack Thornton and his younger sister, Sarah Jane. By mixing actual wildcatters from the annals of the Texas petroleum industry, such as Pattillo Higgins and Captain Anthony Lucas, with fictional children; Sunday School picnics and lessons with oil drilling, fisticuffs, arson, kidnapping and arrest; and then adding ghosts, an Indian medicine woman, and a bit of intrigue, Landrey has created a fast-moving and exciting mystery-adventure. The author provides a brief four-page glossary to aid young readers with unfamiliar oil-drilling vocabulary and a short bibliography of additional resource material for enthusiasts.

Like the cattle industry, oil and natural gas
(Continued on page six)

Wanda Landrey, a descendant of early East Texas pioneers, is a historian, writer, and researcher with experience in onsite documentation of culture in the region of the Big Thicket of Texas. An additional publication by Landrey is Outlaws in the Big Thicket, reprinted by Takin Press in 2002.

Dr. Emma Hawkins is assistant professor of Medieval English language and literature at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. She is a frequent contributor to *Review of Texas Books*.

David R. Davis is a humorist writer with appeal to both adults and children. His other books include Redneck Night Before Christmas and Trucker's Night Before Christmas. Both books are available from Pelican Publishing.

Chuck Galey, illustrator of Jazz Cats, majored in graphic design and graduated from Mississippi State University. He has illustrated more than thirty books.

Andrea Karlin is an associate professor of education specializing in children's literature at Lamar University. She earned a Ph.D. in curriculum and reading instruction at the University of New Mexico.

(Continued from page five)
have strongly impacted both the Texas economy and the lives of many of its citizens. Thus, *The Ghosts of Spindletop Hill* would be an informative and entertaining addition to juvenile book collections, especially of libraries in and around Houston, Dallas, Midland, and other early Texas petroleum centers. The book is even more appropriately suited to the Beaumont area where the Lucas Gusher was actually drilled. Today the Spindletop/Gladys City Boomtown Museum located on the campus of Lamar University offers representative turn-of-the-century buildings, replica of wooden oil rigs, and a monument to the Lucas well. In 2001 the Gusher's 100th birthday was celebrated with a live reenactment before a large group of school children.

LANDREY, WANDA A. *THE GHOSTS OF SPINDLETOP HILL*. AUSTIN: EAKIN PRESS, 2001. 140PP. ILLUSTRATIONS, BIBLIOGRAPHY, GLOSSARY. \$15.95 CLOTH. ISBN 1-57168-449-2.

Jazz Cats David R. Davis

Jazz for Cat Lovers
Review by Andrea Karlin

"Down in New Orleans where the sounds are sweet,
In a back alley corner off Bourbon Street,
There's some hipster kitties (they don't chase no rats).
They make swinging music—'cause they're Jazz Cats!"

So goes the book *Jazz Cats* written by David Davis and illustrated by Chuck Galey. According to the front flap of the book jacket, the words of the book can be sung to the tune of "Mardi Gras Mambo." Unfortunately, if one is unfamiliar with that song, there is no musical score included.

Using the same rhyme pattern as above, the author takes the reader to points of interest in New Orleans's French Quarter. Cats are the main characters in this book and they have been cleverly illustrated often with very interesting perspectives. Those readers who are familiar with the French Quarter will recognize the sights and sounds for which New Orleans is famous. Those readers who are "cat people"

may get "jazzed" about the cats.

Taking the above into account, this book will probably appeal more to an older audience who has a greater awareness of the French Quarter of New Orleans or who share a love of cats or jazz rather than a typical first, second, or third grade class.

DAVIS, DAVID R. *JAZZ CATS*. GRETNA: PELICAN PUBLISHING COMPANY, 2001. 32PP. ILLUSTRATIONS. \$14.95 CLOTH. ISBN 1-56554-859-0.

The Scariest Alphabet Book Rowland-Grey Ellis and Teddy Kentor

A Children's Book by Child Authors
Review by Andrea Karlin

Ten-year-old authors/illustrators Rowland-Grey Ellis and Teddy Kentor wrote in a note at the beginning of their book *The Scariest Alphabet Book* that "we hope you like our book as much as we do!" I think that I can safely say that I do like their book as much as they do.

From aliens to zombies, with bats, rats, quicksand, and vampires in between, this imaginative alphabet book charmingly illustrates something scary for each letter of the alphabet.

This book is a must for Halloween lovers, alphabet book lovers, lovers of scary things, and individuals who want to support these talented young boys in their effort to raise money for America's Fund for Afghan Children.



ELLIS, ROWLAND-GREY, AND TEDDY KENTOR. *THE SCARIEST ALPHABET BOOK*. AUSTIN: EAKIN PRESS, 2002. ILLUSTRATIONS. \$7.95 PAPER. ISBN 1-57168-717-3.

The Dallas Public Library: Celebrating a Century of Service, 1901-2001

Michael V. Hazel

100 Years of Dedicated Public Education and Service

Review by Jeff Lacy

In this book, Michael V. Hazel builds upon the history of the Dallas Public Library (DPL) covered in Larry Grove's *Dallas Public Library: The First 75 Years* and Lillian Moore Bradshaw's *Celebrating the First 50 Years: Friends of the Dallas Public Library*. Hazel's book covers the seminal periods of the DPL's history and provides the civic context for these times.

The book is not strictly chronological—there are brief moments of backtracking and overlap—but the organization is never confusing. Hazel's writing is straightforward and purposeful. The text flows at a brisk pace with very few digressions. He describes his subjects with familiarity and includes pictures on nearly every page; thus readers may apprehend the character of the people and the essence of events. Nothing in the text or notes seems lacking, but a few extras would have been nice (a timeline or floor plans, for example).

The more interesting periods include the long struggle to create a branch for African American communities during segregation and the peak of the Ku Klux Klan's influence in Dallas (1906–1931); the term of Cleora Clanton, who was head librarian through the Great Depression and World War II (1922–1954); the rebuilding of the Central Library (1955); the financial shortfalls suffered in the 1980s; and the rebound of the 1990s.

This book is recommended for collections including librarianship and Texas history.

HAZEL, MICHAEL V. THE DALLAS PUBLIC LIBRARY: CELEBRATING A CENTURY OF SERVICE, 1901-2001. DENTON: UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS PRESS, 2001. 252PP. ILLUSTRATIONS, APPENDIX, BIBLIOGRAPHY, INDEX. \$29.95 CLOTH. ISBN 1-57441-141-1. 2001-27873.

Beyond Contentment Glen Onley

What would make one want to leave society? What would make one want to return?

Review by Jeff Lacy

In an isolated, hand-built cabin in the Pecos Wilderness, Blaine Wells is modern-day Henry David Thoreau. Blaine's reasons for retreating are not immediately clear, but his love for nature and his dislike of civilization are evident. As a psychologist, however, he finds it difficult to suppress his trained habit to interact. His social and antisocial tendencies conflict when a nearby plane crash intrudes upon his solitude, and only he can help the survivors endure the wild.

Blaine's internal conflict is manifest in the tension between him, characterized as a resourceful wilderness scout à la Natty Bumppo, and Bradley Hawthorne, a corporate "city slicker" type who survives the plane crash. The blatant privileging of nature over civilization lessens progressively as Blaine and the other survivors get to know each another.

Beyond Contentment offers a mild critique of overly romanticizing nature and implies that fleeing from life's problems is an inadvisably easy way out. The beginning is fast paced to increase the tension of the plane crash, and the narrative slows to an appropriately thoughtful pace as Blaine faces the possibility of returning to civilization. The plot focuses on Blaine's struggle to find a sense of peace and of place; secondary character development is not taken any further than necessary. The prose feels awkward in just a few spots (such lapses into soap operatic dialogue at the survivors' camp), but not to a degree that hinders the enjoyment of the book.

This brisk, uplifting book is recommended for general readers and fiction collections. It is available in both hardback and paperback editions.

ONLEY, GLEN, BEYOND CONTENTMENT. SANTA FE: SUNSTONE PRESS, 2001. 239PP. \$24.95 CLOTH. ISBN 0-86534-311-X; \$18.95 PAPER. ISBN 0-86534-343-8. 00-058779.

Michael V. Hazel is also the author of Dallas: A History of the Big D. The Dallas Public Library: Celebrating a Century of Service, 1901-2001 is recommended for collections including Texas history or librarianship. Librarians in particular and some patrons will find the developments of librarianship presented in microcosm interesting and possibly inspiring.

Glen Onley, a former Information Technology executive, was born in Texas and often enjoys New Mexico's Pecos wilderness.

Jeff Lacy is a reference and instruction librarian at Lamar University where he is completing his M.A. in English. He received his B.A. in English from Mercer University and his M.L.I.S. from the University of Alabama.

Sammye Munson is the author, compiler, and editor for A Grand Gathering, an anthology celebrating the strong bonds between grandparents and their grandchildren.

JoAn Martin is the author of *Yankee Girl*, a young adult novel released in 2002. She has also published numerous articles and reviews. She is a retired educator.

Mary Meaux has taught English Composition at Lamar University for the past four years. She is an Elvis fan and is currently at work on a novel with an Elvis twist.

A Grand Gathering Sammye Munson

What Is a Grandparent?
Review by JoAn Martin

When grandparents are mentioned in any gathering, everyone has unique memories to share. Grandparents' love has been called the purest love: it is unconditional and immeasurable.

Grandparents are nurturers and historians. They fill in the gaps left by working parents and broken homes. These essays make the reader aware of a great responsibility to create continuity in a society of change and to give a child a sense of belonging.

A Grand Gathering is a collection of stories depicting the pride in emigrating to America, of memories of the Depression, of cemetery cleanings, of triumphs over slavery, and of tears from joy as well as sorrow. The author has even included excerpts from Carol Burnett, Dan Rather, Eudora Welty and Laura Bush. Most touching are the written tributes and drawings from second-graders and fifth-graders in the Houston area to their grandparents.

As soon as a child is born, a bond is established between grandparent and grandchild, and that bond continues to strengthen. New grandparents are surprised at the surge of feeling for this scrap of life. Grandchildren are the promise of the ongoing of one's family. This kind of unconditional love and acceptance from a person who thought he was special will sustain a child through difficult times. In our country, there are over sixty million grandparents giving free gifts of love and time to their special grandchildren.

Sammye Munson, editor, has collected this anthology of memories hoping that we will learn more about being grandparents. She lives in the Houston area and has written five children's books.

MUNSON, SAMMYE. *A GRAND GATHERING*. AUSTIN: EAKIN PRESS, 2002. 115PP. \$22.95 PAPER. ISBN 1-57168-718-1. 2002010645.

Elvis: A Radio History From 1945-1955 Aaron Webster

The Misadventures of Pre-famous Elvis
Review by Mary Meaux

Since Elvis Presley's death in 1977, everyone and his cousin Bill has written a biography of the King, mostly focusing their efforts on Elvis's rise to stardom beginning sometime around 1956 when RCA bought the rights for pennies, which subsequently turned to the gold that's been rolling in since then. But Aaron Webster, a Southern Illinois disc jockey, toots a new Presley horn. Webster recounts the adventures, mostly misadventures, of the young "E" before those glitzy RCA days.

The reader rides along as Elvis practically begs Sam Phillips at Sun Records to give him a go, as Elvis hides out at the movies while "That's All Right (Mama)" rocks the Memphis airwaves and the deejay sends his parents to find him for an interview, and as the country and western Louisiana Hayride tour turns rock 'n roll with girls literally screaming and scratching for more. Webster includes interesting tidbits that often get lost in the cracks, like Elvis's first pink Cadillac dying a horrible death, engulfed in flames on the side of the highway, and how the female fans decorated his replacement vehicle with lipsticked names and phone numbers.

This is a fun read and a must-have for Elvis devotees of any age. Webster includes rare photographs from his own collection on nearly every page. Finally, a new and interesting approach to the man everyone loves to talk about.



WEBSTER, AARON. *ELVIS: A RADIO HISTORY FROM 1945-1955*. PLANO: REPUBLIC OF TEXAS PRESS, 2003. 251PP. PHOTOGRAPHS, ILLUSTRATIONS, BIBLIOGRAPHY, INDEX. \$18.95 PAPER. ISBN 1-55622-943-7. 2002006362.

Top Texas Teachers

Dorothy McConachie

Celebrating Great Texas Teaching
Review by Andrew B. Preslar

In an effort to recognize exceptional Texas K-12 teachers, McConachie solicited nominations from parent-student groups, faculty, and administrative staff at 100 randomly selected Texas schools, both public and private, as well as from the public at large via participating daily Texas newspapers. A screening committee of parents and educators then evaluated each nomination and identified the obvious standouts, with whom the author conducted follow-up interviews. From the collected material the screening committee then helped the author determine the thirty-five teachers this volume profiles.

These sketches are classified into fifteen unnumbered chapters according to the characteristics that distinguish the teachers included in each section: respect, discipline, caring, innovation, and almost a dozen more. Each profile includes: a photograph of the teacher with a caption identifying his or her city and school; a précis of his or her philosophy of teaching interspersed with quotations; a brief work history; and a varying number of comments from students.

The ostensible purpose of this work is to celebrate great Texas teaching. It is well written, printed with high-quality materials, attractive, and capably edited; however, its appeal to either a general or academic audience would be limited, except in those communities where the recognized teachers work and live, where it might serve as a sort of vanity publication.

McCONACHIE, DOROTHY. TOP TEXAS TEACHERS. PLANO: REPUBLIC OF TEXAS PRESS, 2002. 268PP. ILLUSTRATIONS, BIBLIOGRAPHY, INDEX. \$18.95 PAPER. ISBN 1-55622-883-X.

*The Forgotten War:
Texas Veterans
Remember Korea*
Mackey Murdock

Though Much Is Taken

Review by Andrew B. Preslar

In 28 numbered chapters, Murdock relates the stories told to him by the front-line veterans in interviews and gleaned by him from their emails, reunions, and letters. The stories read like fiction, perhaps because it is difficult to imagine anyone surviving with psyche intact the misery that characterized the Korean conflict—much less retaining the humor and perspective that mark these reminiscences. Some of the interviews overlap, and chapters are not always begun or ended where one would expect, but perhaps the asynchronous organization, the wrinkled timeline, the progress by association are devices that help make the interviews more immediate, less artificial.

The narrators' shared experiences and values distinguish them from the rest of their generation, but bind them closely to each other in martial fellowship. The Korean War was not popular, and one might expect the lack of support or recognition on the part of the nation to have left these veterans disillusioned and jaded. These interviews, however, reveal less cynicism than acceptance, less fractious bitterness than composed imperturbability. The occasional purple-tinged description can be easily overlooked.

While the book could possibly serve as supplementary reading for some academic disciplines, it would be of interest primarily to Korean War veterans and their families. Recommended for Texana and history collections, and for general circulation in public libraries serving an older population.

MURDOCK, MACKEY. THE FORGOTTEN WAR: TEXAS VETERANS REMEMBER KOREA. PLANO: REPUBLIC OF TEXAS PRESS, 2002. 247PP. B. & W. PHOTOGRAPHS, BIBLIOGRAPHY, INDEX. \$18.95 PAPER. ISBN 1-55622-899-6.

Close to the Heart
Diane Gonzales Bertrand

Can Two Stubborn People Find Happiness Together?

Review by Frances M. Ramsey

Jessie Medina is the enthusiastic new
(Continued on page ten)

Dorothy McConachie is a former teacher and the author of *Our Texas Heritage: Ethnic Traditions and Recipes. She Lives in Dallas, Texas.*

Mackey Murdock is a native of Texas and currently resides in Garland, Texas, with his wife. He is also the author of *Last of the Old-Time Texans. This book is available through Republic of Texas Press.*

Andrew Preslar is an award-winning instructor of English at Lamar State College-Orange and has served as contributor and associate editor for *Review of Texas Books* for over a decade. He has published critical articles, fiction, and poetry, but his purpose in life is spoiling his wife and son.

Diane Gonzales Bertrand's other novels include Sweet Fifteen, Lessons of the Game, Alicia's Treasure, Trino's Choice, and Trino's Time. Her children's books include Family, Familia, Uncle Chente's Picnic, and The Last Doll. Bertrand is Writer-in-Residence at St. Mary's University where she teaches creative writing and English composition.

Frances M. Ramsey is a retired librarian from the Beaumont ISD. She received her B.S. in zoology from Kansas State University and her library certification from Oklahoma State University.

(Continued from page nine)
development director for St. Joseph's High School, which needs much increased funding if it is to continue educating boys in San Antonio. She needs the help of the president of the Alumni Association, Roland Tovias. Jessie is an independent career girl dedicated to doing her best for the school from which her brothers graduated. Roland runs a successful auto repair business with his uncle and values family traditions with which he has been reared. He doubts the wisdom of a female development director for an all-male institution. Both are stubborn in holding out for their own ways of doing things as they grow in appreciation of the other's fine qualities. Together they manage a benefit concert by a famous alum of St. Joseph's and begin the process of putting the school on a stronger financial basis. However, they struggle with male-female roles and career versus family for modern young women.

Diane Gonzales Bertrand, a native of San Antonio, has succeeded in describing the yo-yo emotions of growing love and old ideas of how life should be. The issues that trouble these attractive young people are those which each couple must face in planning for a happy future together. In her own writing, she focuses on books that can be enjoyed by the whole family. Highly recommended.

BERTRAND, DIANE GONZALES. *CLOSE TO THE HEART*. HOUSTON: ARTE PÚBLICO PRESS, 2002. 169PP. \$9.95 PAPER. ISBN 1-55885-319-7.

New Religious Movements and Religious Liberty in America

Derek H. Davis and Barry Hankins, eds.

How Much Religious Liberty for New Religious Movements?
Review by Frances M. Ramsey

These essays on religious freedom and new religious movements were first presented as papers at a conference at Baylor University in March 2001. Credentials for each essayist are included. Timothy Miller gives historical

perspective to new religious movements. Anson Shupe, Susan E. Darnell, and Kendrick Moxon outline the abuses of the Cult Awareness Network and other deprogrammers with their disregard for individual rights. J. Gordon Melton describes the Sea Organization of Scientology as a contemporary ordered religious community. Susan J. Palmer discusses women in controversial new religions as slaves, priestesses, or pioneers. Satanism and witchcraft are discussed by James T. Richardson. Stuart A. Wright covers the treatment of the Branch Davidians and the trials that resulted. Catherine Wessinger points out the need for law enforcement agencies to have a better understanding of the religious groups they confront, as evidenced at Ruby Ridge and Waco. They should be more careful to remain calm and not escalate tensions unnecessarily. Herbert C. Jentzsch presents the history and ideals of Scientology and the false claims made against them. Adam C. English describes the purposes of Christian Reconstructionism as proposed by Gary North and others. Derek H. Davis concludes the book with a discussion of the problems of implementing President Bush's Charitable Choice Program. Recommended for government and religious collections.

DAVIS, DEREK H., AND BARRY HANKINS, EDS. *NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN AMERICA: WACO*. BAYLOR UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2002. 208PP. NOTES, INDEX. \$29.95 CLOTH. ISBN 929182-65-0. \$16.95 PAPER. ISBN 929182-64-2. 2002100646.

The Roots of Texas Music Lawrence Clayton and Joe W. Specht, eds.

This Buffet Includes Salsa
Review by Clay Reynolds

Probably nothing is harder than trying to understand music merely by reading about it, but in this new volume cataloguing the origins of Texas music, the late Lawrence Clayton was joined by Joe W. Specht to produce a valuable reference tool and history of the background of this vital cultural element of the Lone Star State. Divided into nine chapters, each separately authored, the volume parcels off specific areas of musical development in Texas history. After an overview by Gary Hartman, jazz is taken on by

(Continued on page eleven)

(Continued from page ten)

Dave Oliphant in one of the liveliest and most interesting chapters of the book. Subsequent chapters are devoted to the blues, classical composers, and various ethnic musical scores. One of the strongest chapters in the book is Kenneth W. Davis's discussion of sacred and religious music, truly a subject worthy of a separate volume in its own right by virtue of its complexity and diversity. Joe W. Specht's overview of country music is similarly truncated by space allotments, particularly as the "texana" craze presently going on continues the evolution in this, one of the state's more vital traditions. Well-balanced and closely controlled, this last scholarly effort by the much-beloved Clayton adds an important dimension to any discussion of Texas history but is marred principally by "sins of omission" rather than by anything resembling errors. Scholars will be pleased to discover the thorough apparatus that accompanies almost every chapter, although more casual readers will probably find the notes and academic jargon and occasional indulgences in encyclopedic listings a bit off-putting at times. Certainly, though, anyone interested in the subject of Texas culture and the music it gathered and ultimately produced will find this an essential reference tool.

CLAYTON, LAWRENCE, AND JOE W. SPECHT, EDS. *THE ROOTS OF TEXAS MUSIC*. COLLEGE STATION: TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2003. 225PP. ILLUSTRATIONS, INDEX, PHOTOGRAPHS, BIBLIOGRAPHY. \$29.95 CLOTH. ISBN 1-58544-221-6. 2002007119.

Land! Irish Pioneers in Mexican and Revolutionary Texas Graham Davis

Irish Roots in Texas
Review by Clay Reynolds

This study by British historian Graham Davis offers a worthy addition to the body of hard scholarship about early Texas. It is not only a compendious and well-researched account of the role Irish immigrants played in the days of the Texas colonization and subsequent revolution; it is also an exceedingly entertaining text filled with observations that

are often tinged with irony and good humor. In many ways, the Irish, as well as the French and the Italians, who were also important additions to the ranks of early Texas settlers, were a natural match for the inquisitorial Catholicism of the Spanish *cum* Mexican government of the period; that they have never been fully credited with a role in Texas history that matches their impact and importance is, likely, a testimony to the anti-Catholic sentiments of many of the more visible Anglo Protestants who rose to prominence in early Texas politics and who, to some degree, were the authors of its early history. Of particular interest is Davis's use of period documents—letters, etc.—to offer contemporary accounts, often hyperbolically rendered, of the land itself, the Indians, and other accidents and properties of this new opportunity for Irish fleeing the poverty and oppression of their homeland. Unlike many similar volumes, Davis's account is fascinating in its selection of examples and in the way he melds them together in an entertaining and informative historical account. Although seemingly full of apparatus for further study and research, the book would have profited by more illustrations, particularly photographs, drawings, or paintings of the period, but as it sits, it is more than an academic tool. It's also a good read.

DAVIS, GRAHAM. *LAND! IRISH PIONEERS IN MEXICAN AND REVOLUTIONARY TEXAS*. COLLEGE STATION: TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2002. 304PP. ILLUSTRATIONS, MAPS, PHOTOGRAPHS, INDEX, BIBLIOGRAPHY, APPENDICES. \$29.95 CLOTH. ISBN 1-58544-189-9. 2001008478.

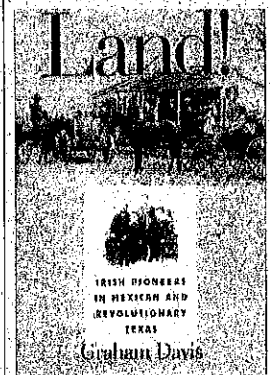
Black Powder, White Smoke

Loren D. Estleman

The Trails Meet at Denver
Review by Clay Reynolds

With a vivid demonstration of his remarkable devotion to period accuracy, Loren Estleman's latest novel picks up again on the same themes he used so effectively a few years ago in *The Master Executioner*. This novel follows four story lines that ultimately connect through the lives of two desperate men. Honey Boutrille, a bouncer in a New Orleans brothel, kills a

Loren D. Estleman is a prolific editor and author. Some of his other publications include *American West: Twenty New Stories from the Western Writers of America*, published by St. Martin's Press, (2001) and *White Desert* published by Forge (2001).



(Continued on page twelve)

Frank L. Stallings, Jr. received his B.A. and M.A. in English from West Texas State College, Canyon, Texas, and a Ph.D. in English from the University of Texas. He has had an extensive teaching career, and currently he is emeritus professor at Northern Kentucky University.

Clay Reynolds is professor of literature and aesthetic studies as well as associate dean of undergraduate studies for the School of Arts & Humanities at the University of Texas at Dallas. His published books include *The Tentmaker*, *Ars Poetica*, *Monuments*, and *The Vigil*.

(Continued from page eleven)

maniacal white man who threatens to behead one of the prostitutes. Because he is "blacker than black," Boutrille is forced to flee. By a circuitous route, he takes river transport to Galveston, Texas, killing an unscrupulous boat pilot along the way, then falls ill and is befriended by the black population of the island. This leads to another shooting and sends him on to Corpus Christi, a fugitive with no future. In the meantime, Twice Emerson, a former bushwhacker from the border country and pathological killer and train robber, runs afoul of the San Francisco Tong. His murder of one of the Chinese leaders puts him back on the lam, and he terrorizes the northwest territories, seeking anonymity in a rapidly civilizing frontier. Meanwhile, Torbet, a failed novelist from Chicago, is dispatched by his publisher to locate Boutrille and capture his life story; at the same time, a theatrical promoter named Box, touring the West with his lesbian quick-change artist, decides that by locating and pairing the two desperadoes in an exhibition, he can make a fortune. Estleman follows these four strains across the western United States until they converge in the booming mining mecca of Denver. Gritty and unapologetic, the story moves forward, bolstered by Estleman's almost encyclopedic knowledge of period detail, ranging from name brands to colloquial and slang expressions for common items. In a way, that's the novel's greatest virtue as well as its greatest fault; at times, the strain of naming every item and making sure of the proper term clutters the prose and pushes character and plot into the background. By the end, though, a sterling tale laced with irony and spirited charm emerges to provide a sometimes exciting and ultimately satisfying read.

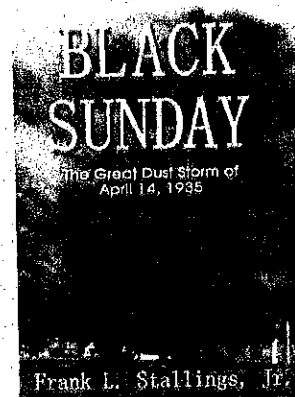
ESTLEMAN, LOREN D. *BLACK POWDER, WHITE SMOKE*. NEW YORK: FORGE, 2002. 318pp. \$24.95 PAPER. ISBN 0-765-30189. 20020692266.

Black Sunday: The Great Dust Storm of April 14, 1935

Frank L. Stallings, Jr.

This April Blizzard Had the Wind, But No Snow

Review by Jon P. Tritsch



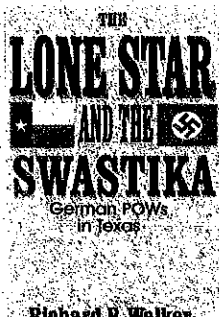
For people living in the Texas Panhandle during the 1930s, terms like "Black Sunday" or "Black Blizzard" are sure to invoke memories of that Palm Sunday of April 14, 1935. The author, Frank Stallings, was only a lad of seven years in Pampa, Texas when he witnessed this granddaddy of dust storms as it rolled across the drought-stricken areas of eastern Colorado, southwestern Kansas, the Oklahoma and Texas Panhandles, and northeastern New Mexico. Other dust storms had struck this area now known as the "Dust Bowl," but this one took everyone by surprise by its suddenness and the intensity of the blowing dust. Stallings' book is comprised of transcribed oral histories of numerous individuals who experienced the phenomenon. Each recorded recollection bears stark witness to that day when a calm, clear Sunday turned darker than night. People who were outside enjoying the weather found themselves fleeing for shelter from the oncoming tidal wave cloud of dust. It proved to be almost impossible to keep homes free of the gritty and sometimes oily dust as it seeped through every crack and crevice and coated everything, even inside bathroom medicine cabinets. The many photographs throughout the book are an added pictorial witness to what people saw on that "Black Sunday." The author also included many newspaper stories reporting the event of that time and of the fifty-year anniversary remembrances. Poetry verses and even a short one-act play about the storm complete this fascinating book.

This collection of oral histories that tell the story of the Great Dust Storm should be a needed purchase for libraries in the affected areas. Other public and academic libraries should likewise consider this book for their collections as well.

STALLINGS, FRANK L. *BLACK SUNDAY: THE GREAT DUST STORM OF APRIL 14, 1935*. AUSTIN: EAKIN PRESS, 2001. 152pp. ILLUSTRATIONS. \$19.95 PAPER. ISBN 1-57168-528-6. 2001-54465.

The Lone Star and the Swastika: German Prisoners of War in Texas

Richard P. Walker



A Look at POW Camps in Texas During World War II and Their Guests

Review by Jon P. Tritsch

Other than Judith Gansberg's 1977 book *Stalag, U.S.A.: The Remarkable Story of German POWs in America*, little has been widely published on camps hosting Axis prisoners of war (POWs) in this country, particularly in states like Texas. In this well-documented and extensively researched book, the author examines several facets of these Texas POW camps, including the site selection processes for the camps, the rations and daily camp routines, the Axis prisoners themselves and their activities, and civilian interaction with the camps and prisoners. Since the Texas camps were home to the largest single share of enemy prisoners of any state—nearly 50,000—Walker has determined, probably correctly, that his survey can be seen as being fairly typical of other camps across the country.

It should be noted that the book's title is slightly misleading as Italian and Japanese POW internees in the Texas camps are also mentioned, although they represented only a tiny fraction of the overwhelming numbers that were German prisoners.

This work, published posthumously a year after Walker's death, is based on his doctoral dissertation from North Texas State University in 1980. Included are some helpful maps and a few pictures, mostly of the Kenedy POW camp and some of its German officer prisoners. Extensive endnotes and a first-class bibliography of mostly primary material top

off this excellent book. *The Lone Star and the Swastika* merits a strong recommendation for any academic library wishing to add to their collection of World War II material, particularly on the home front. Public libraries in communities that were host to any of the Texas POW camps may want to consider this fine work as well.

WALKER, RICHARD P. *THE LONE STAR AND THE SWASTIKA: GERMAN PRISONERS OF WAR IN TEXAS*. AUSTIN: EAKIN PRESS, 2001. 260PP. ILLUSTRATIONS, BIBLIOGRAPHY, INDEX. \$24.95 PAPER. ISBN 1-57168-341-0. 99-23794.

Orange Candy Slices and Other Secret Tales Viola Canales

Hispanic Rjo Grande Valley

Review by Janet K. Turk

In Viola Canales' debut collection of short stories, she offers readers a vivid view of Hispanic culture and lifestyle in the Rio Grande valley as seen through a child's eyes. Readers experience an homage to the Virgin of Guadalupe, the celebration of the three Magi, and the worship of saints important to the Hispanic population of the area. Likewise, readers are given an intimate view of family and community dynamics as the coming-of-age narrator discovers changes within herself and her surroundings.

Canales' command of imagery shines throughout the collection. In the story entitled "Nopalitos," one can almost feel the prickly thorns, both on the plant and in the community. Plus, in "The Bubble Gum Pink House," the narrator vividly describes the colorful, flamboyant houses of the neighborhood with such attention to detail that the readers feel as if they are walking the streets with the young girl. Likewise, the stories "The Flamingoes," "The Cafe," and "The Magi" illustrate with loving detail the relationships that blossom between grandparents and grandchildren.

This debut collection is highly recommended

CANALES, VIOLA. *ORANGE CANDY SLICES AND OTHER TALES*. HOUSTON: PIÑATA BOOKS, 2001. 176PP. \$9.95 PAPER. ISBN 1-55885-332-4.

Richard P.

Walker, author of *The Lone Star and the Swastika: Prisoners of War in Texas*, was a longtime professor at Victoria College in Victoria, Texas.

Jon P. Tritsch works as a cataloger and helps develop collections for history and political science for the Gray Library at Lamar University. He holds an M.L.S. from Emporia State University and an M.A. from Sam Houston State University.

Janet K. Turk has been a lecturer of English at Lamar University for seven years. She teaches composition classes and sophomore literature classes.

Kerrellyn Sparks lives in Katy, Texas, with her husband and two children. She is a member of the West Houston and Northwest Houston Chapters of Romance Writers Associations. For Love or Country won nine awards under its original title of Insatiable and Saucy.

J. Lee Butts is also the author of Texas Bad Girls: Hussies, Harlots, and Horse Thieves (2000) and Hell in the Nations (2002).

For Love or Country Kerrellyn Sparks

When a Spy Falls for a Spy
Review by Janet K. Turk

Kerrellyn Sparks' debut novel offers multiple avenues for reader interest. Set in the political hotbed of Boston Massachusetts shortly before the Revolutionary War, the story line presents Quincy "Quin" Dearlington Stanton, a foppish loyalist by day and a saboteur of British plans by night. He believes his vast array of spy gadgets will help keep him safe and help his true cause. However, when he encounters Virginia Munro, a fellow patriot turned spy, his gadgets are not enough to keep them both safe, neither from the British nor from each other.

The novel blends delightful characters with political intrigue, historical details, romance, and slapstick humor as the two spies stumble into each other and into love. While attraction and love may not seem like a problem, conflicts mushroom when the two people involved are each unaware that the other person is also a spy. The plot is further thickened as negative family dynamics of the England based Dearlington relatives encroach upon Quin and his uncle, the third son of a wealthy British landowner.

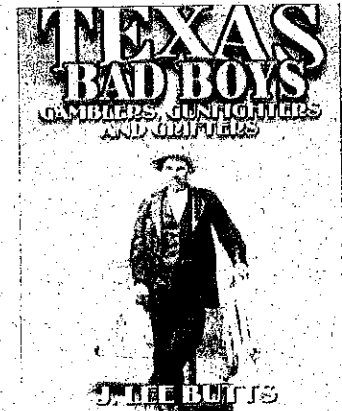
Although the novel is a fast-paced, entertaining read, there are slight problems with some of the details Sparks presents in the story. For example, she introduces a submarine for Quincy's use during his spy games, and his carriage has more hidden compartments and disguised weapons than the Pentagon does. Likewise, she has the colonists blow up a ship in the Boston Harbor, instead of just dumping tea as an act of protest.

Despite these slight flaws, *For Love or Country* is a highly amusing novel for a lazy summer day. Collectors of romance fiction will find Sparks' novel to be a welcome addition to their collections.

SPARKS, KERRELYN. FOR LOVE OR COUNTRY. NEW YORK: FORGE, 2002. 304PP. \$6.99 PAPER. ISBN 0-765-34037-2.

Texas Bad Boys: Gamblers, Gunfighters, and Grifters J. Lee Butts

Infamous Texans
Review by Steve Zani



J. Lee Butts has produced colorful biographies of several infamous figures from Texas history. The book is well researched, and Butts does an excellent job of trying to make sense out of the many tangled and conflicting accounts that describe the lives of these criminals and adventurers. Included in the book are such familiar and notorious figures as John Wesley Hardin, and several other less well known but equally deadly men like bushwhacking "Watt" Moorman, or Jim Miller, who, at the tender age of eight, allegedly killed his parents. Also included are accounts of the lives of men who demonstrate that the label "bad" is a fickle one. "Pink" Higgins was less a bad man than simply someone adept at killing his enemies. Gregorio Cortez was hounded by the law less for his actions than due to an error in translating one of his sentences. One positive aspect of this book is that it does not intend to glamorize its subjects. It's clear from these accounts that murder is often an empty, despicable act, accomplished by empty and despicable men—whose own lives are often ended in the same violent ways they were lived. Butts has a very particular writing style, heavy on comic similes and colloquial expressions. Readers looking for humor and a lesson in Texas slang will be delighted (as they might be by his prior work, written in a similar style, *Texas Bad Girls*). The rapid-fire wit might, however, put off a reader looking for a research (Continued on page fifteen)

(Continued from page fourteen)
source or a more deliberately "objective" biography of these men. That caveat aside, the Republic of Texas Press has produced a stable of well-researched, informative biographical histories over the past few years, and this book more than adequately carries on their publishing tradition.

BUTTS, J. LEE. TEXAS BAD BOYS: GAMBLERS, GUNFIGHTERS, AND GRIFTERS. PLANO: REPUBLIC OF TEXAS PRESS, 2002. 206PP. ILLUSTRATIONS, BIBLIOGRAPHY, INDEX. \$18.95 PAPER. ISBN 1-55622-879-1.

A Private in the Texas Rangers: A. T. Miller of Company B, Frontier Battalion

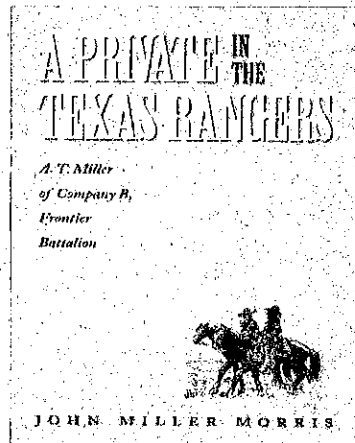
John Miller Morris

A Frontier Diary
Review by Steve Zani

More than a selected diary of one Texas Ranger, this book is a sumptuously researched window into the late nineteenth-century frontier as it transformed itself into the Texas of today. Thrillseekers looking for the shooting, gambling, whoring, and racism that otherwise make for good sensationalist history will be disappointed by A. T. Miller's terse, sometimes sentimental journal entries. However, for the true researcher and historian, the book is essential to understanding this era in the development of Texas. Inside are Miller's personal accounts of Rangers as they hunted for criminals, negotiated with striking workers, and dealt with the personality conflicts and property struggles of a growing state.

The potential and familiar glamour of Ranger justice, however, is mitigated by writing that is self-effacing, personal and often touching. Quiet moments of the diary reveal that a Ranger could sometimes accomplish much of his job by doing nothing more than being a visible presence in town, or in a situation. Equally understated entries, such as the one that begins "But he is not here," display the frustration and solitude of a hard but futile day's ride on the frontier. What makes the

book even more notable, though, is the work and thoughtfulness behind the annotations that frame and contextualize the diary entries. Author Morris, the great-grandson of diarist Miller, provides a great deal of history and explication, without which much of the import of the text would be lost. Every page of the book is filled commentary and explanation, and it is in that commentary that the book shines. In providing the necessary background to understand these diaries, Morris has revealed the humanity of his great-grandfather, but even more importantly, this essential history reveals the shared humanity of the townsfolk and settlers of an era of Texas history.



MORRIS, JOHN MILLER. A PRIVATE IN THE TEXAS RANGERS: A. T. MILLER OF COMPANY B, FRONTIER BATTALION. COLLEGE STATION: TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2001. 334PP. ILLUSTRATIONS, BIBLIOGRAPHY, INDEX. \$24.95 CLOTH. ISBN 0-89096-964-7.

The Texas Institute of Letters, an organization whose purpose is to stimulate interest in Texas letters and to recognize distinctive literary achievement, announced its award winners at the March conference. Look for a list of award recipients and reviews of some of the fiction in the summer issue of *Review of Texas Books*.

Email:
txbooks@hal.lamar.edu

John Miller Morris's A Private in the Texas Rangers offers both a personal and factual look at the lives of Texas Rangers, as supported by his extensive research and the use of his great grandfather's personal journals.

Steve Zani has a Ph.D. in comparative literature and teaches in the English Department at Lamar University.

Review of Texas Books is published four times per year. Approximate delivery dates:
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Review of Texas Books

Department of English and Foreign Languages
Lamar University
P. O. Box 10023
Beaumont, TX 77710

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