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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Jean Laffite Prince of Pirates, Jack C. Ramsay, Jr. (Eakin Press, P.O. Drawer 90159, Austin, TX 78709-0159) 1996. Appendices. Index. B&W Photos. Notes. \$21.95 Paperback.

Jean Laffite Prince of Pirates is Jack Ramsay's quest to use only authentic Laffite data to unravel the mystery of America's most famous pirate. The author traces the buccaneer's life from New Orleans through Barataria and Galveston, maybe to Cuba, and finally to his possible resting place on Isla de Las Mujeres.

Ramsay's chapters on Laffite's stay on Galveston Island will disappoint serious students of East Texas history. This section included no new information and contained several serious omissions. The author failed to grasp Laffite's significant role in shaping the ethno-history of the Texas coast (he forcefully removed the Karankawa Indians from their ancestral homeland, Galveston Island). The author did not mention how Laffite's operation at Campeachy shaped the larger geo-political confrontation between Spain and the United States. A perusal of Charles Hayes' classic *Galveston: History of the Island* could have refocused these oversights.

Who was Jean Laffite and what is his place in history? Ramsay posited, "This is a mystery well worth solving." The puzzle remains unsolved.

Don Willett

Texas A&M University at Galveston

Cowboys: Ranch Life Along the Clear Fork of the Brazos River, Lawrence Clayton (Eakin Press, P.O. Drawer 90159, Austin, TX 78709-0159). 1997. Contents. Index. P. 120. \$14.95. Paperback. B&W Photos.

Some people wonder if cowboys exist? Dean of Arts and Sciences at Hardin-Simmons University Lawrence Clayton knows intimately twentieth-century cowboys from scholarship and personal experience. He answers emphatically, yes.

Clayton believes that cowboys of the Clear Fork of the Brazos River typify those living in Texas, Oklahoma, Arizona, and eastern New Mexico. He reveals their work, individualism, personal life, gear, and transition of past to present ranching. Clayton describes the practical elements of today's roundup, the danger, and the role of horses, helicopters, and pickups. Readers can almost hear the cattle bawl. Included in this social history are recipes (anyone care for calf fries?) and perceptive quotes: "The Lord is my foreman" (p. 55). Black-and-white photographs show chaps, hats, saddles, bridle bits, boots, and spurs. The book's significance is that it is a good, brief introduction to the life, culture, and spirit of recent Texas cowboys.

Irvin M. May Jr.

Blinn College at Bryan

Lone Cowboy: My Life Story, Will James (Mountain Press Publishing, P.O. Box 2399, Missouli, MT 59806) 1997. Illustrations. P. 416. \$16.00. Paperback.

This autobiography of Will James is the sixth reprint of the twenty-four books by the author. After James' death in 1942 interest in his books waned

and they eventually went out of print. Renewed interest in James' work resulted from recent biographies and film documentaries on him and with the formation of the Will James Society and the Will James Art Company, and all of the author's books are being reprinted.

Orphaned at age four, James spent his formative years in the care of family friends, including a French Canadian rancher and fur-trapper. During winters the two lived in a log hut in Canada's north woods. The trapper ran his lines and the boy contented himself drawing pictures of horses and learning the mysterious words he found in old magazines. With no formal education, Will became semi-literate bilingually through his own and the trapper's efforts. It was on his own, however, that he became a good artist.

A drowning accident of the trapper left Will, a teenager, to shift for himself. He began a life as a drifting cowboy, working on an endless succession of ranches learning well the hard trade. He explains how innocently he sold someone else's cattle and got into trouble. It was still called cattle rustling and James spent a short term in the penitentiary.

Space does not allow a complete summary of James' exciting life. His books inspired a generation of young Americans in their time. Many modern youths could find the reprints just as exciting if they could leave their computers and TVs long enough to read anything. This book is recommended for public and public school libraries, or for anyone who still likes to read a good western story.

Robert W. Glover
Shiloh Ranch

Science on the Texas Frontier: Observations of Dr. Gideon Lincecum, Jerry Bryan Lincecum, Edward H. Phillips, & Peggy A. Redshaw, editors (Texas A&M University Press, Drawer C, College Station, TX 77843-4354). 1997. Contents. Appendices. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. P. 211. \$35.00. Hardcover.

Science on the Texas Frontier, a history of Gideon Lincecum's life and scientific contributions during the early 1800s, is recommended as both interesting and refreshing reading. The author presented Lincecum's scientific contributions in letters sent to other scientists. Those letters afford insight into Lincecum's impressions, interpretations, and philosophy.

Attaining only rudimentary formal training in science, Lincecum accumulated an amazing list of contributions. He published manuscripts in the *Journal of the Linnaean Society*, *Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Science*, and *Smithsonian Institute*, while collaborating with such scientific giants as Charles Darwin and Spencer Baird. The lack of formal training, however, resulted in anthropomorphic interpretations and allowed him to inject wit and to wax philosophically in his manuscripts. His range of scientific interests included Zoology, Botany, Meteorology, Geology, and Medicine.

Lincecum's letters revealed a highly intelligent person with attributes common to most scientists: a driving curiosity about the biotic and abiotic world; an ability to observe carefully and critically; and an analytical mind. For example, as a pioneer on the primitive Texas frontier, he kept detailed meteorological data. His fascination with the Texas "Norther" was particularly interesting.

Lincecum had vision. He believed that Texas contained a vast wealth of mineral resources (a half-century prior to Texas' oil boom at Spindletop), and advocated formation of the Texas Geological Survey to explore and develop mineral wealth. He also proclaimed the need for a state academy of science as a repository for biological and geological collections and scientific publications. Thirty years later the Texas Academy of Science was founded in 1897.

Jack D. McCullough
Stephen F. Austin State University

News of the Plains and Rockies 1803-1865, Volume 3: Missionaries, Mormons, Indian Agents, Captives, Compiled and Annotated by David A. White (The Arthur H. Clarke Company, P.O. Box 14707, Spokane, Washington 99214) 1997. Maps. Tables. Facsimiles. References. Bibliography. P. 310. \$50.00. Hardcover.

David White's annotated compilation of *News of the Plains and Rockies 1803-1865, Volume 3: Missionaries, Mormons, Indian Agents, Captives* presents a significant set of firsthand perspectives of the Euro-American expansion into the prairies and mountains of North America. The reader will discover original narrative involving the religious interaction of white and Native American as well as that reporting the interaction of agents and white captives with the various tribes in the American West.

Difficulty in organizing the source material is evident. White's work is divided uncomfortably into two sections: the first is a group of extracts, reports, and exposes related to the extension of American religion to the West; the second is reports, letters, speeches, and first-hand narratives of Indian agents and Indian captives. Despite this unnatural grouping, the two sections individually work well. "Missionaries, Mormons, 1821-1864" includes William D. Robinson's almost fictional description of Western geography; John Dunbar's report of his twelve-year mission to the Plains Indians; a series of epistles from Brigham Young and the Latter Day Saints and their settlement of the Great Salt Lake Valley in 1848 and 1849; and Samuel Parker's reports of the Presbyterian Mission to the Oregon natives during the 1830s. The wealth of information is abundant. Two examples suffice: scholars and almost no laymen realize that one of seven immigrants from the Missouri along the trails to the Pacific from 1847 to 1869 was a member of one sect or another of the Latter Day Saints, while the themes of religious rivalry and conflict of missions between Samuel Parker and Marcus Whitman can be found in Parker's report.

The work's second section, "Indian Agents, Captives, 1832-1865," reveals the depths of human struggle and tragedy inherent in the clash of native and Euro-American cultures on the Western frontier. A brief aside about Major Robert Neighbors, an Indian agent in Texas, reveals the conflict of interests among the whites: Neighbors was murdered by a white man, presumably as a result of the agent's actions to protect the tribes from the lawless incursion of white men into tribal lands and reservations. The series of reprints in this section document the dual commitment generally by agent and missionary to the removal and resettlement of the native from his tribal lands to reservations to facilitate American expansion into the plains and mountains. The six captivity narratives describe the horror that many captives suffered. A particular twist to this mini-section is White's comparison/contrast of truthful narratives

by Rachel Plummer and Jane Wilson with the false stories of Caroline Harris and Clarissa Plummer. The reporting of R. Plummer and J. Wilson is stark and horrific, reminding the reader that other captives than those lucky ones such as Cynthia Ann Parker suffered terrible times among the tribes.

The importance of *News of the Plains and Rockies 1803-1865, Volume 3: Missionaries, Mormons, Indian Agents, Captives* is that it preserves, with a valuable commentary, primary source material of participants and witnesses to the exploration and settlement of the American West. The work reveals the belief and intention of missionary and agent that the tribes should be and would be removed for American expansion. The Mormon letters demonstrate the intent of Utah Mormons to build God's Kingdom, a theo-democracy, at the crossroads of the mountains. The captivity narratives document the inhumanity of tribal man toward some of those whom he understood to be taking his land. David White and The Arthur H. Clarke Company have presented another valuable addition to the preservation of the history of the American West.

Melvin C. Johnson
Layton, Utah

My Confession: Recollections Of A Rogue, Samuel Chamberlain, William H. Goetzmann, editor (Texas State Historical Association, 2.306 Sid Richardson Hall, University Station, Austin, TX 78712) 1996. Contents. Appendices. Notes. Index. Color Illustrations. Maps. P. 384. \$60.00. Hardcover.

To hear it told by some, Sam Chamberlain was a roguish, racist, sexist, murdering xenophobic religious bigot with a mean streak as wide as the Rio Grande. Maybe so, maybe not. Without doubt, however, he was a self-centered braggart who enhanced his notoriety with barely concealed half-truths, occasional outright lies, and an unquenchable conceit all rolled into a generous slab of arrogant romanticism. In the bargain, he also happened to be a primitive water colorist of some skill, a master of the Palmer method of penmanship, and an imaginative keeper of an even more imaginative journal the contents of which are hard to imagine. Some of the stuff is so obviously eye-wash that Walter Prescott Webb dismissed the work as "a hoax" (p. 2).

Even William Goetzmann, whose enormous and diligent research on Chamberlain has eclipsed that of everyone else, allows that the narrative has "flights of fancy" that sometime place it in the same category as the *Edda*, *Beowulf*, and the *Odyssey* (p. 22).

Chamberlain fought in the Mexican War (largely the focus of this very large tome), the American Civil War, and sandwiched in between a scalp-hunting expedition with Tom Glanton's thugs in Arizona. If a reasonable reader concludes that Chamberlain had the irritatingly inevitable excuse for his whoring, robbing, and murdering in the first two instances, one can only in some awe wonder at his prosy legerdemain in rationalizing the last. In the end, he got religion, or so we are told, the fact of which is explained by his collection of over 800 Bibles and his enormous regret for the bloody misdeeds which he expressly excused by the folly of his wasted and wicked youth. In this process of contrition, as is sometimes the case with reformed miscreants, one might profitably assume that he was not excessively burdened by past iniquities, at least if the tone of this retrospective guilt may be trusted any more than any other part of the *Confession*.

For all its hypocrisy, sham, and pretense, this reviewer still loved the book, so much so that he purchased a copy to present as a gift to one who showed a particular kindness to his daughter. And one more thing – Goetzmann’s effort is a *tour de force*, the consummate combination of intelligence, art, and scholarship. There are those who may regard Chamberlain as no more than a self-inflated ass of Munchausean proportion. If so, they need not explain themselves; the point is well taken. But wouldn’t it be nice if the adventures, as Samuel Chamberlain presented them and then worried about, turned out to be indeed true?

James W. Pohl
Southwest Texas State University

With the 18th Texas Infantry: The Autobiography of Wilburn Hill King, L. David Norris, editor (Hill College Press, The Confederate Research Center, P.O. Box 619, Hillsboro, TX 76645) 1996. Contents. Epilogue. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. P.126. \$15.00. Hardcover.

The material in this book was written for other purposes than as an autobiography. King apparently copied himself extensively. This results in considerable duplication in an already thin volume – 126 pages. The editor wrote whole chapters and a large part of others. This part is referenced to standard histories of Walker’s Division and is well written and scholarly.

In spite of its shortcomings, this book fills a gap in the literature of Texas in the Civil War. I had seen this unit and this general only on lists.

King was born in Georgia and grew up in his grandfather’s home. He does not mention his education. It is obvious that he had a superior education, at least for his time.

King rose from private to major to colonel of the 18th Texas Infantry in a few months. He had a divisional assignment in Richmond for a while. Kirby Smith promoted him to brigadier general after he was wounded in the Battle of Mansfield. General King wound up in command of Walker’s Division at the end of the war.

He became a lawyer after the war and was Texas’ adjutant general for ten years.

Wallace Davison
Lufkin, Texas

Cullen Montgomery Baker, Reconstruction Desperado, Barry A. Crouch and Donaly E. Brice (Louisiana State University Press, P.O. Box 25053, Baton Rouge, LA 70894-5053) 1997. Contents. Sources. Illustrations. Maps. Index. Essay. P. 190. \$34.95. Hardcover.

At last, thanks to authors Brice and Crouch, we have a realistic account of the life of Cullen Baker, the infamous, post-Civil War outlaw, depicting what a sorry, degenerate piece of human scum he really was. Louis L’Amour and others have portrayed him as a Robin-Hood type of folk hero, “attributing traits and attitudes to him that he did not possess” (p.7). These two scholars have researched everything available about Baker, favorable and unfavorable,

in an attempt to obtain the real truth about him. They have done this after several generations have gone by, biases have disappeared, and things are looked at more objectively.

Most previous writers have portrayed Baker as a noble defender of the Southern "lost" cause. Such was not the case, say Brice and Crouch. He was actually "a sociopath turned psychopathic killer whose actions were not guided by discrimination between right and wrong and one who is best referred to as a moral imbecile" (p.169).

For those interested in reading a true account of a cowardly, ruthless killer who preyed on poor, helpless victims, newly freed blacks in particular, this is a riveting book that will be hard to put down. It is one that sets the record straight on this much over-rated, over-eulogized, small-time desperado.

Fred A. McKenzie
Avinger, Texas

From Can See to Can't: Texas Cotton Farmers on the Southern Prairies. Thad Sitton and Dan K. Utley (University of Texas Press, P.O. Box 7819, Austin, TX 78713-7819) 1997. Contents. Epilogue. Notes. Bibliography. Index. P.316. \$16.95. Paperback.

Thad Sitton and Dan Utley wrote a powerful and dynamic book about Texas agriculture and life. They asked the important question: how did the hundred-acre, yeoman cotton farmer actually live? Sitton and Utley focused on the daily lives of German, Czech, Anglo, and African American farm families during the late 1920s in Fayette and Washington counties and expertly combined oral history with secondary sources.

Chapter organization reflects the agricultural cycle. A brief survey of Texas cotton prior to the 1920s brings the reader to the lay of the land. There, readers meet the ethnic farmers, the Brazos River cotton planters who deserve a book of their own, and tenants. This chapter could have been strengthened by asking what was the result of declining cotton prices on land ownership? Yet, the reader understands the feelings and emotions of the farmers on the land.

Farmers were more skilled than some historians would have us believe. They operated a complex agricultural system. There was more to life than cotton planting, cultivation, harvesting, and ginning. Corn, cane, mules, hogs, education, and social events enriched life. Readers visualized house parties, gambling, and drinking, but not the cotton farm family at church. Yet, religion was more important than gambling and drinking, and on this subject we are still in the dark.

What is the significance of this book? The authors came close to writing a great book in Texas history. *From Can See to Can't* is a major contribution to Texas historiography and should be read by all students of twentieth-century Texas history.

Irvin M. May Jr.
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