Book Notes

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BOOK NOTES

Among the many books received for reviewing, we have the latest volume in Malcolm McLean's *Papers Concerning Robertson's Colony in Texas*, volume 15 (University of Texas Press, Box 19929, Arlington, TX 76019-0929, $35.00 Hardcover). McLean's contribution to the historiography of Texas is monumental. His works have made an important primary resource available to all Texans with access to libraries. According to the compiler, "This volume covers two major themes: the organization of the Texas Rangers, and the activities of the First Senate of the Republic of Texas, both as seen through the eyes of Empresario Sterling C. Robertson." There is a list of previous volumes, a list of awards won by the series, a painting of Robertson, a dedication to Jenkins and Virginia Garrett, a preface and an introduction, and 600 pages of documents relative to the subject and period covered. Users should pay special attention to McLean's introduction to increase the utility of the documents.

*The Sportsman's Guide To Texas: Hunting and Fishing in the Lone Star State*, by Dick Barlett and Joanne Krieger, and edited by David Baxter with illustrations by Jack Unruh (Taylor Publishing Co., 1550 West Mockingbird Lane, Dallas, TX 75235, $34.95 Hardcover), is magnificently illustrated in color photos and drawings. Readers begin with an introductory chapter titled "Texas: An Ecological Perspective," followed by chapters on the dove, quail, ducks, geese, turkey, pheasant, deer, and hogs. There are also chapters on small game, predators, fishing, and a section on making camp. A chapter on a species of game contains introductory essays on, for example the turkey, advice on how to hunt it, and recipes for the preparation of the meat if you are successful. The chapter on the camp is most useful; it includes advice on all sorts of things, including how to care for problems from blisters to heart attacks. But the illustrations are the best part of the book for the casual reader.

*Texas: A Modern History*, by David G. McComb (University of Texas Press, P.O. Box 7819, Austin, TX 78713, $12.95 Paper, $24.95 Cloth), might have been published during the Sesquicentennial. It is good that it was not, because it deserves more attention and use than it probably would have received during that Niagara of Texana. David long has been established as Texas' leading urban historian by his studies of Houston and Galveston. Now he has broadened his examination to look at the whole of Texas. In six chapters and an afterword, he traces the history of the state from its natural history to modern struggles. Most pages contain either black-and-white illustrations of the subjects they cover, marginal additions, or both. There are also charts and maps to illustrate the text. This coverage is brief, but it will be of interest to the general reader and could be used in a college class.

Association member Mike Kingston's latest edition of the *Texas
Almanac (Dallas Morning News, distributed by Texas Monthly Press, P.O. Box 1569, Austin, TX 78767, $8.95 Paperback), for 1990-1991, is a continuation of the good work that has made this work indispensable for all who study Texas. This issue contains special coverage of science, a history of West Texas, the environment, crime and punishment, and the usual statistical report on the state of the state. It is impossible to be a Texas historian, and darn hard just to be a Texan, without the Almanac at hand.

The Statehouse Press of Austin continues to reprint works of interest. The book at hand, The Border And The Buffalo, An Untold Story of the Southwest Plains, (State House Press, P.O. Box 15247, Austin, TX 78761, $14.95 Paper, $21.95 Cloth), and subtitled “The Bloody Border of Missouri and Kansas, The Story of the Slaughter of the Buffalo. Westward Among the Big Game and Wild Tribes. A Story of Mountain and Plain,” by John R. Cook, first appeared in 1907. The present edition contains a foreword by David Dary. As Al Lowman once told me, “For the folks who are interested in this sort of thing, this is the sort of thing that will interest them.” I assumed that was double-talk at the time, but now I think it is inspired. Indeed, those who are interested in the buffalo-and-Indian era of plains history will find this book a must.

We have received a batch of books from Wallace O. Chariton. They are titled Texas Wit & Wisdom ($9.95 Hardcover), Exploring The Alamo Legends ($18.95 Hardcover), 100 Days in Texas: the Alamo Letters ($21.95 Hardcover), Forget the Alamo ($18.95), and This Dog’ll Hunt, (Wordware Publishing Inc., 1506 Capital Ave., Plano, Tx 75074, $14.95 Hardcover). The latter contains an introduction by Ann Richards, whose speech to the Democratic Convention in 1988 is the inspiration of the title. It is a compendium of Texas sayings that is reminiscent of our own Bob Bowman’s works. “Professional Texans” will find these books amusing and interesting.

Washington, D.C., In Lincoln’s Time: a Memoir of the Civil War Era By the Newspaperman Who know Lincoln Best, by Noah Brooks, and Abraham Lincoln: A Press Portrait, both edited by Herbert Mitgang (University of Georgia Press, Athens, GA 30602), are reissued editions of works that testify to the role of journalism during the American Civil War. Both show the power of the press during this important era of our nation’s history.

How To Write Biographies and Company Histories, by Richard Sawyer (Mountain Press Publishing Company, Missoula, MT), is an interesting “how to” book. It contains samples and exercises for the beginner, but the experienced writer can profit from the review of fundamental techniques it offers.

Gunsmoke: A Complete History, by SuzAnne and Gabor Barabas (McFarland & Company, Inc., Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640), says its subtitle, is a “complete history and analysis of the legendary broadcast
series with a comprehensive episode-by-episode guide to both the radio
and television programs.” The Barabas’ have written a monumental book
to a television monument. They enjoyed the cooperation of the network,
producers, guest stars, “regulars,” and even the show’s reclusive main
character, James Arness. Part I traces the history of the series, Part II
contains a lengthy photo section, Part III an episode-by-episode list of
characters and plot analysis, and Part IV contains quotes from
“Gunsmoke” and lists of directors, writers, producers, and awards. If
there ever was a book that will tell everything you might want to know
about its subject, this is probably it.

Two juvenile books have come from Hendrick-Long. They are Blind
Bess, Buddy, and Me, by Ruby C. Tolliver with illustrations by Lyle L.
Miller (Hendrick-Long Publishing Co., P.O. Box 12311, Dallas, TX
75225), and The Ghost at the Old Stone Fort, by Martha Tannery Jones,
with illustrations by Donna Loughran (Hendrick-Long Publishing Co.,
P.O. Box 12311, Dallas, TX 75225). “Me” is eleven-year-old Gus Round-
tree, whose story is told against the backdrop of the Great Depression
in East Texas. Buddy is his friend, and Bess is a mule. The book is about
their adventures. The Ghost book features the story of two sixth-graders
in Nacogdoches who spend two nights in the old fort and find various
adventures.

Folks who like cartoons such as the Far Side will find Dan Piraro’s
Too Bizarro (Chronicle Books, 275 Fifth Street, San Francisco, CA 94103),
lives up to its title. The cartoons, two to a page, are presented without
comment, save for the creator’s credits on the last page. He claims to have
been “born off the coast of Missouri,” to have “played in the shipyards
as a child,” to have been “Minister of Punctuation for Louisiana,” and
he “worked as a representative of a male catalog called ‘Beff.’ ”. If you
believe that, you will relish his bizarre humor in the cartoons.

A challenging, entertaining, and even frustrating book is Jaime
O’Neill’s What Do You Know: The Ultimate Test of Common (and Not
So Common) Knowledge (Bantam Books, 666 Fifth Ave., New York, NY
10103. $9.95). Jamie gained national attention when the CBS television
show “60 Minutes” ran a story about a test he administered to his classes
at a community college in Washington State. His students flunked in
droves. The test consisted of questions on history, literature, geography,
and other things often taken for granted as shared information known
by the general public. Jamie found that not to be the case. At about the
same time, but not knowing of his activities, I conducted a survey of col-
lege students in Texas to see what they knew about their state. Not much,
was what I found out. After seeing the television show, I contacted Jamie
and we have corresponded a few times about this, and now comes this
book. I recommend it for all our members and for our members’ friends.
The book is a book of tests, and I challenge each of you to take them.
He does not claim that everyone ought to be able to answer every
question; rather, Jamie sees his tests as a way for each one of us to determine what we do NOT know so we can correct our ignorance. It is challenging, it is entertaining, but it is also frustrating — so be forewarned. But it is also important that we learn these things about ourselves and about our society. We Texans talk a good game about educational reform. It is past time that we did something about it.