BOOK NOTES

We continue to receive interesting books, despite the claim of some that everything worthwhile has been written. Many are reviewed by scholars; some are noted here by the editor for various reasons.

As to "everything worthwhile has been written," one might think thusly about the Kennedy assassination, but not so. Oliver Stone's movie "JFK" stirred the pot once again. Comes now JFK The Last Dissenting Witness (Pelican Publishing Co., 1101 Monroe St., Gretna, LA 70053), by Bill Sloan with Jean Hill. It is the story of Ms. Hill, the "lady in red" seen in the famed assassination film featured in countless news casts, documentaries, and now in Stone's film. Stone, by the way, wrote a brief foreword for their book. Simply put, Hill, a recent arrival in Dallas, witnessed one of the state's most tragic historical events, and saw, in her mind, much more than anyone else — a shadowy figure behind a fence who fired at the president, and a man in a brown coat and hat racing toward that fence. The rest is an account of her struggle to make others believe that she saw such things — among those who believe her are Stone and Jim Garrison — and of her on-again, off-again romance with Dallas policeman J.B. Marshall, who rode in the motorcade near the president's car. This is one more log on the fire to discredit the Warren Commission's version of events, to call for full discloser of all relevant government documents, and contains a strong implication of government coverup and a less strong implication of the participation of LBJ in all of it.

Pelican Publishing Company also has published God Bless The USA Gift Book, by Lee Greenwood "to remind us that freedom is not free." The text is the lyrics of Mr. Greenwood's famous song, accompanied with photographs based on patriotic themes. It appears to be an appropriate souvenir for the last three Republican national conventions, at which Mr. Greenwood has performed his song.

Bob Bowman's latest book, Plant Watermelons On My Grave And Let the Juice Ooze Down: A Handbook For Living In East Texas (Best of East Texas Publishers, 515 South First, Lufkin, TX 75901) is pure Bowman. He offers his own definition of the location of East Texas (where there are pine trees), and a running account of his practical jokes with George Henderson, Bowman's TALLEST friend. He also has a "brief" chapter on why it is hell to be short, as in being a "fraction over five feet, five inches," and mentioning several times that that fraction is important. Good comments on maw-haws, turnip greens, and other food delights reminds me that Bob does often think of his stomach. He also is more autobiographical that in previous works, as in an account of his gald bladder surgery, and in several tributes to friends and mentors, notably Ben Ransey and Ottis Lock. Writing in the late spring, a favorite anecdote involves his trouble-shooting days with a Lufkin paper mill when a resident called to complain of sulphur emissions. Turned out to be pine pollen. Good read for East Texans.
For those interested in politics – and who isn’t? – Mike Kingston, Sam Attlessey, and Mary G. Crawford, the team responsible for the biennial Texas Almanac, has produced The Texas Almanac’s Political History of Texas (Eakin Press, P.O. Drawer 90159, Austin, TX 78709, $16.95). Like the Almanac, the book consists of essays and quite a few pages of election data (voting returns) for each of the state’s races for governor and U.S. senator. Some chapters are narrative histories of Democratic and Republican partisan activities, some deal with electoral history, some trace the movement of minorities toward fuller political participation, and some are anecdotal, intended to point out some of the foibles and “sore thumbs” of Texas politics. The book is interesting, and potentially of great value to candidates who want to trace the voting history of a particular county or other political subdivision. My copy could have benefited from some proof reading; perhaps subsequent editions will catch those grimlins.

Paul F. Boller Jr., Memoirs of an Obscure Professor (Texas Christian University Press, Fort Worth), is the kind of book most college profs would like to write. Best known for his work in intellectual history and in collections of presidential and congressional anecdotes, Boller writes here of his life and his interests. The title, and his first chapter here, comes from his experiences at SMU in the 1950s during the McCarthy anti-communist hysteria. Boller was called “an obscure professor” by the Chicago Tribune after he published materials critical of the movement. He discusses his ill-treatment then, and later from the left while teaching in Massachusetts. He also has chapters on his days as a translator of Japanese during World War II, his “career” as a player of movie music, stories about the quotable Calvin Coolidge, H.L. Mencken, LBJ, Charles A. Beard, and the left’s reactions to the U.S. use of atomic weapons in Japan. It is interesting reading.

An interesting and provocative new look at General William T. Sherman can be found in Charles Edmund Vetter’s Sherman: Merchant of Terror, Advocate of Peace (Pelican Publishing Co., 1101 Monroe St., Gretna, LA 70053). Vetter is a sociologist who teaches at Centenary College in Shreveport, and he has brought the professional skills of his vocation to his avocation, a study of Civil War history, especially concerning Sherman. Vetter disclaims that his book is a biography; rather, it is an analysis of the development of Sherman’s thoughts and theories on “total war” as they developed from his traditional training at West Point, somewhat disappointing pre-war service (he missed the Mexican-American War in post duty in California), his several business failures, and his final triumph as a major commander of the Civil War. Vetter argues that Sherman’s famed destruction in Mississippi, Georgia, and South Carolina were not the acts of a barbarian, as so many Southerners thought – and many still do – but instead represented the application of his theory that technology had changed things, and now wars could be won best by destroying the enemy’s will to continue, including and especially enemy civilians. So, says Vetter, Sherman changed the South economically, politically, and sociologically, and changed war forever. Makes a good case for his position.