Book Notes

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BOOK NOTES

Two grand and impressive volumes head our list of notable books received since last this column took note of such. The first is *Papers Concerning Robertson's Colony In Texas*, compiled and edited by Malcolm D. McLean (The University of Texas At Arlington Press, Box 190919, Arlington, TX 76019-0929). This volume is listed as XVIII, August 11, 1840 through March 4, 1842, and is the last in the series that has won more awards – nineteen in all – than there are volumes. There is a calendar of materials included for the convenience of users. McLean and his wife Margaret have moved to Georgetown, “just above the North San Gabriel River, in the former Robertson Colony area, the region which the Comanches called “TEHA LANNA, THE LAND OF BEAUTY.” All present and future historians of Texas owe Dr. McLean a debt for his dedicated work on this project.

Equally impressive is *Hispanic Texas: A Historical Guide*, by Helen Simons and Cathryn A. Hoyt (University of Texas Press, Box 7819, Austin, TX 78713-7819), with the Texas Historical Commission. The work is illustrated heavily, and contains essays by Felix D. Almaraz, Hoyt, Robert S. Weddle, Patricia A. Mercado-Allinger, Jack Jackson, Joe S. Graham, Curtis Tunnell and Enrique Madrid, James W. Steely, Helen Simons and Roni Morales, Ann Perry and Jesus F. de la Teja. Part II is a guide to seven regions: San Antonio and South Texas; Laredo and the Rio Grande Valley; El Paso and Trans-Pecos Texas; Austin and Central Texas; Houston and Southeast Texas; Dallas and North Texas; and Lubbock and the Plains. It’ll go five pounds, easy, of words and pictures of Hispanic Texas.

A couple of smaller, monograph-sized publications are no less useful for their slimness. *Governors of Texas* (A.H. Belo Corp., Communications Center, Box 655237, Dallas, TX 75265), prepared by Mike Kingston of the Texas Almanac, is a review of the forty-two folk who have served our state as governor. From Henderson to Richards, the reader finds a biographical sketch, photo or likeness, and a boxed section titled “At A Glance” with vital statistics. Useful for a quick reference to the guvs. It also contains data on elections and related matters. If the schools are functioning, Texas history teachers (and others) will find David C. Deboe and William C. Hardt, *Teachers' Guide to the Handbook of Texas* (Texas State Historical Association, Box 2/306 Sid Richardson Hall, University of Texas, Austin, TX 78712) provides a brief history of the Handbook, a review of subject areas or themes therein, suggestions for ways the Handbook can be used to develop research and writing skills, and suggests a Texas Trivia “game” (answers in the Handbook, of course).

*Battleship Texas*, with text and contemporary photos by Hugh Power (Texas A&M Press, College Station, TX 77843) is a testimony to the endurance of the “Mighty T,” although I don’t think that nickname appears in the book. What does appear is Power’s love for this fighting ship. Born in
the WWI era, the ship's finest hours came during WWII when it covered five landings and performed many other chores to win the war on both fronts. Then it came to rest in 1948 at San Jacinto and endured forty-years of semi-neglect before an appropriate restoration. Once again in good shape, Texas is a floating museum of how it was, back when battleships showed our nation's flag on the water.

I am worrying about how to present Texas, My Texas by James Ward Lee (University of North Texas Press, Box 13856, Denton, TX 76203-3856). In the first place, Lee confesses he entered the world in Alabama, not Texas, but is Texan by unilateral proclamation. If that works, I look like Robert Redford when next you see me. Anyway, Lee writes good essays, eleven of which are in this book if you don't count the dedication in which he lavishes praise and gets even with various friends. With pathos (masked in humor) he's the equal of Billy Porterfield: witness the essay on Honky Tonks. He's a social critic: witness essays on preachers, buryings, and heaven. He's a food authority: witness essays on eats, meat, and pie. He's a social commentator: witness essays on Dallas Cowboy cheerleaders and the Texas myth. Most of all, he's a movie buff: witness essays on sidekicks and The True History of Texas as we learn it from movies – one of the best of the bunch. I'd have said that even if Jim hadn't mentioned me in it. But I'm still trying to figure out his meaning in citing me as an "old standby" like Rupert Richardson, Ralph Steen, and Ted Fehrenbach. Pretty good company, so I have decided to accept "old standby" as euphony for "acceptable" chronicler of the past and tell you that Jim Ward Lee writes a good essay, name dropper that he is. And will do to go honky-tonkin' with. And to eat with. Or the movies. I don't know about going to church with. And that thirty-five years does a Texan make.

Two books from Eakin Press have a similar format: anecdotes of Texas history, some significant, some less so but interesting nonetheless. Jack McGuire, Texas Amazing! But True or Texas: Amazing But True – there is a slight difference in cover and title page – (Eakin Press, Drawer 90159, Austin, TX 78790-0159) reproduces articles the author prepared for Southwest Airlines Magazine. McGuire, who prides himself on being a journalist first and a historian second despite his long tenure as chief of the Texan Institute of Cultures, is at his best writing about the "amazing" – I would say "unique" – aspects of Texas: first broadcast of a football game, the first Thanksgiving, or dealing with the mystery of who wrote "Home On The Range." That will give you a range of the subjects herein. Bill and Majorie K. Walraven, Magnificent Barbarians: Little Told Tales of the Texas Revolution (also Eakin, remember) and illustrated by John C. Davis, Jr. is similar in construction but more limited in scope: the Walraven's concentrate on the revolutionary era in six chapters (The Pathfinders, Rumblings of Revolt, Bexar, Death in the Springtime, Incredible Victory, and Paladins) and two appendices. I especially liked the writing style, and the coverage of William B. Travis.
Blades in the Sky: Windmilling through the Eyes of B.H. "Tex" Burdick, by T. Lindsay Baker with preface by Elmer Kelton (Texas Tech University Press, Lubbock, TX 79409-1037) is the history of Burdick's work with erecting and maintaining these wonderments in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona to provide the quickening element of water to a parched land. T. Lindsay's text accompanies photos of Burdick's operations and both establish the case for this quixotic-appearing but essential technology for the development of the southwest. Windmills are an important part of the material culture of the decades past, and Baker continues his work in telling their history and that of the people who built and used them.