Book Notes

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BOOK NOTES

Included here is the editor's views on these items received for review:

In October 1996 the Association and the Texas Folklore Society, with financial support from the Pineywoods Foundation and Champion International, produced a conference on the Neches River entitled "Shall We Gather At The River." Among the speakers was Blair Pittman, photographer for National Geographic Magazine; he even reminded one of Clint Eastwood, although Blair is not as tall. Pittman's The Stories of I.C. Eason, King of the Dog People (University of North Texas Press, P.O. Box 13856, Denton, TX 76203, $24.95) had just appeared and it sold well among those attending the symposium. Pittman became acquainted with Eason early in the 1970s while photographing the lower Neches thicket for NGM; after a period of mutual wariness they became close friends. Pittman learned Eason's river and Eason ventured into Pittman's Houston and functioned there well; the woods and the river framed their friendship. In time Pittman recorded Eason's life experiences and family stories, which are presented here pretty much in Eason's words with an accompanying "album" of Pittman's photos of Eason, his family, and his environment. East Texans will recognize the people in these stories because some of them are you or your family or friends. Good on you Blair; do more books.

The Texas Rangers, the standard book on this subject written by Walter Prescott Webb and published in 1935, has moved to Books on Tape (University of Texas Press, Box 7819, Austin, 78713-7819, $18.00). Webb's classic has stood the test of time. Actor-singer Steve Fromholz reads the text, which begins with the organization of the Rangers during the Republic of Texas and continues to the reorganization of the service in 1935. In between, vignettes of Inclian fighting, the Mexican-American War, border patrols, and dealing with outlaws up to Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow are presented. Fromholz's voice takes some getting used to, but in the end the worth is in the writing, anyway. Ben Procter's Just One Riot and Frederick Wilkin's The Legend Begins, volume one of a proposed four-volume rewrite of Webb's work, have added to the history of the Rangers, but it is still good to review the words of the pioneer in the field. Added note: I was privileged to take a seminar from Webb in 1959. When asked about his "sale" of The Texas Rangers to movie makers in 1936, he said all they used was the title, and that the fee made the Depression easier to endure!

Kenneth E. Morris, author of Jimmy Carter: American Moralist (University of Georgia Press, Athens, Georgia 30602) is a sociologist. He has written a book about Carter that is sometimes a biography and sometimes a psychological/sociological examination of the principle subject and sometimes an examination of popular culture. The beginning chapters provide significant data about President Carter's antecedents and early years, but later chapters which deal with his years in the White House focus less on the person than the times. And we hear more about Carter's family that most would want to know. Billy Carter's oft-quoted observation that he was the only sane member of a
family that encompassed a mother in the peace corps, a "holy-roller" faith-healing sister, a motorcycle riding sister, and a brother who thought he would be elected president is included and made creditable by Morris’ psychoanalysis of Carter (never could please his father, mother withdrew from the family, etc.) I’m still uncomfortable with psycho-history. Please don’t analyze that.

Our friend and benefactor Bob Bowman has expanded his collections of East Texana with Rub Onions and Skunk Oil On My Chest, And Call Me Well: A Collection of East Texas Home Remedies and Folk Medicines (Best of East Texas Publishers, 515 South First St., P.O. Box 1647, Lufkin, Texas 75902, $24.50). Bob says he had been collecting such for a while but really received a boost from the response to a newspaper appeal that East Texans share their solutions for preventing or treating health problems. He lists over forty folks who helped him compile several hundred potential health problems and a least a thousand remedies. There is a caveat: despite his personal testimony on the curative powers of axle grease, Bowman still recommends professional medical treatment. A shade older than Bob, I encountered many of these folk remedies growing up in Texas, but many will be a wonderment to you younger folk. The most cited ingredient must be Vaseline. I remember attending a rural funeral about fifty years ago and seeing a grave outlined in empty Vaseline jars, and hearing an older relative say, “That stuff must not have worked.” I guess it wouldn’t for cancer or a heart attack, but it will ease the slide of anything.

Odie B. Faulk has written Hill College: An Illustrated History (Hill College Press, Hillsboro, Texas 76645) to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the institution. Faulk is completing a distinguished career by directing the Hill College Press after teaching at various institutions, most notably Oklahoma State University. He is a prolific and skillful writer, so he brings considerable talent to the narrative and photo selection. The narrative, of course, traces the history of Hill College from founding to fruition as a center of learning, and the illustrations will trigger memories for many teachers and students.

Some politics and journalism: a recent reading in Ed Rollins’ Bare Knuckles And Back Rooms (Broadway Books, 1540 Broadway, New York 10036 $27.50) and Walter Cronkite’s A Reporter’s Life (ISBN 0-394-57879-1, $26.95), prompts these musings. Rollins is the political consultant who directing the re-election campaign of President Ronald Reagan in 1984, briefly advised presidential candidate Ross Perot in 1992, and directed other campaigns; Cronkite. “the most trusted man in America” in the 1970s when we couldn’t trust many others, did some growing up in Houston and attended the University of Texas before becoming a reporter for the Houston Press, United Press (also bureau chief in Moscow), and finally anchoring the CBS Evening News for nineteen years. Good reading, and autobiographies, both. Rollins’ career will confirm why so many are disillusioned with politics, and Cronkite’s will convince you that there are news persons with integrity.
Continuing the political, comes now Dan T. Carter's *From George Wallace To Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994* (Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, LA 70803, $22.95). The first three chapters were delivered as the Walter Lynwood Fleming Lectures in 1991, and the fourth chapter advances the examination through the Republican victory in congressional contests in 1994. Carter begins with George Wallace's lost in his first race for the Alabama governorship and his vow never to be outdone on the race issue again; not only did he win the next time, Carter credits Wallace with making many Northerners into Southerners by showing them that the consequences of racial integration would not be borne in the South alone. Having generated a powerful political backlash, observed Carter, presidential candidates Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, George Bush, and Congressman Newt Gingrich appropriated the issue from Wallace to wage victorious campaigns. Conclusion from reading these excellent essays on modern American society and politics: race remains a – maybe the – central theme not only of the South but the nation.

Carolyn Barta's *Bill Clements: Texian To His Toenails* (Eakin Press, P.O. Drawer 90159, Austin, TX 78709-0159, $29.95) is a well-written biography of Governor Clements and also a business history of SEDCO, his international drilling company. Barta was a writer-editor with the *Dallas Morning News* during Clement's tenure as governor and thus a first-person witness to many of his activities in office and afterwards. The Clements she presents is pretty much the one I observed as well. He sought his career in oil, the "bidness" of Texas for the majority of his life, but, as he always pointed out, as a driller, not a producer. Clements was not officially a Republican for quite a while, but he was always conservative – even though he supported LBJ in 1964 over Barry Goldwater. He did support Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, and became the deputy secretary of defense. Barta's coverage of his life often is laudatory, as one would expect, but she also includes the warts: the rubber-chicken tossing in Amarillo during Clements campaign against John Hill for governor; Poygat; and controversial comments about oil spills and the like. She concludes, and I agree, Clement's first administration was among the best in our state's history.

Old Friend Joyce Gibson Roach has produced yet another book, *Wild Rose: A Folk History of a Cross Timbers Settlement, Keller, Texas* (Donning Pub. Co., 184 Business Park Drive, Virginia Beach, VA 23462), an illustrated history of Keller, where Joyce lives and works. An introduction by James Ward Lee is followed by fourteen chapters of text and illustrations, a bibliography, index, and acknowledgments. It is of primary interest, naturally, to the folk of Keller, wherever they may be, but all of us can enjoy the pictures of those days gone by, even if we don't know the people or the places, because so many of us sprang from some place like Keller.