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Book Notes

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BOOK NOTES

by Archie P. McDonald

Here follows more of the temporary editor's musings about various publications, some recent and some not, that may interest East Texas historians.

The Triumph & Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson: The White House Years, by Joseph A. Califano, Jr. (Texas A&M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4354, \$17.95), published by Simon and Schuster in 1991, has been reissued with a new Afterword. Califano grew up in Brooklyn, attended Harvard, and was working as an assistant to Defense Secretary Robert McNamara when LBJ decided to move him to the White House as chief domestic advisor in 1965. Until the Johnson Administration ended in January 1969, Califano helped pass the bulk of LBJ's Great Society legislation. He describes his work with the "Great 89th" that produced the most domestic legislation of any Congress before or since. The Afterword, especially, lists all the ways they changed the way Americans lived more than any other administration. We read again of the obligatory examples of LBJ's crudeness that pervades all biographies and accounts of his presidency, but here, I think, they are presented more lovingly. It is obvious that Califano yet believes in the sincerity and greatness of his mentor. I agree, and think this a swell book.

Nancy Beck Young, *Wright Patman: Populism, Liberalism, & the American Dream* (Southern Methodist University Press, Box 750415, Dallas, Texas 75275-0415, \$34.95) published in cooperation with the William P. Clements Center for Southwest Studies, is an assessment of the political life of one of our state's and region's most significant twentieth-century congressmen. Wright represented the northeastern corner of Texas from 1928 until his death in 1976, long enough to rise to the chairmanship of the House Banking Committee and to exercise a powerful influence over the nation's economy. To the end an old-fashioned liberal, Patman battled money interests with the zeal of a true believer – one who believed that the "little man" needed a friend in the money market. Young's examination of Patman is balanced and fair.

Spindletop Boom Days, by Paul N. Spellman (Texas A&M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4354, \$29.95), published in 2000, arrived just in time for the 100th anniversary of the Lucas Gusher celebrated in Beaumont on January 10, 2001. Simply put, the discovery of the Spindletop field changed the world. It alone provided a quarter of the nation's oil production in 1901, and more importantly, shifted the focus of the energy industry from Pennsylvania and Ohio to Texas and eventually elsewhere along the Gulf Coast and the Southwest. Spellman weaves many first-person accounts into his narrative and focuses, appropriately, on individuals in the great drama. Having lived in Beaumont during my first two decades, I remember well the fiftieth anniversary of the first Spindletop gusher in 1951. My best memories are also of individuals. A good example was leather merchant I.W. Ableman, whom I interviewed for the French High School

newspaper. A lad in 1901, Ableman displayed a fine entrepreneurial spirit by collecting empty whiskey bottles from behind saloons, filled them with oil from ditches, and sold them for \$1 each to tourists who came to see the oil well.

Up and Down the Line: The History of the Angelina & Neches River Railroad, 1900-2000, by Bob Bowman (Best of East Texas Publishers, Box 1647, Lufkin, Texas 75902), is a history of a business begun in 1900 by "...an unlikely...quartet – a German, an Irish storekeeper, and two Jewish brothers" (p. 7). That was when Joseph H. Kurth Sr., Simon W. Henderson Sr., and Sam and Eli Weiner pooled resources to establish a short-line railroad to service Lufkin's mills and later other industries, including Lufkin Foundry, Southland Paper, Texas Foundries, and always the Angelina County Lumber Company. The volume is amply illustrated. Early chapters detail the development of the railroad in East Texas and the history of the families of the founders of the Angelina & Neches River Railroad. Bowman develops the story of the line through this centenary with familiarity that springs from a lifetime of experience with Lufkin's industrial and business community. Bowman has become the master of the institutional biography.

The American Reader: Words Than Moved A Nation, edited by Diane Ravitch (rev. 2nd. ed., Harper Resource, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022-5299), does not deal specifically with East Texas but is called to your attention because sometime you may want to read the Mayflower Compact, the Declaration of Independence, Washington's Farewell Address, etc. One never knows when one will have to make a speech to the Rotary Club and such will come in handy.

Taming Texas: Captain William T. Sadler's Lone Star Service, by Stephen L. Moore (State House Press, Box 15247, Austin, Texas 78761), is a biography of a Georgia immigrant and participant in many of the significant events in mid-nineteenth century Texas. Sadler fought at San Jacinto as a private in a company of volunteers from Nacogdoches and in such postwar squabbles as the Cordova Rebellion and the Battle of the Neches. Sadler served in the Republic's Congress, participated in the '49 gold rush, and even took part in the Civil War as a member of A.W. Terrell's cavalry unit. Moore provides a good account of the life of this East Texas pioneer fighter-farmer.

Rousing Songs and True Tales of the Civil War, by Wayne Erbsen (Native Ground Music, 109 Bell Road, Asheville, North Carolina 28805-1521) contains a dozen pages on the role of music in the war, then a narrative on twenty or so well known songs from the era, with words and music (treble clef, with guitar chords above the line). You would expect "Dixie" and "The Battle Hymn," but included also are such comic songs as "Here's Your Mule" and tear-jerkers such as "Just Before The Battle, Mother." Native Ground Music also publishes other collections of Civil War music, plus works on the music of Railroadng, Rural America, Kitchen & Kids, Nature & Lore, Old West, Heart & Soul, and instruction books on how to play banjo, mandolin, and

guitar. They also market cassettes and CDs with Erbsen and others performing the music.

A Dollar A Mile, Fifty Cents A Gate, by James G. Taylor, M.D, with Carol Sanderson (Nortex Press, P.O. Box 90159, Austin, TX 78709-0159, \$18.95), is a delightful account of Dr. Taylor's medical practice in Nacogdoches and his philosophy of life. Jim Taylor is well known to the citizens of Nacogdoches – he delivered over 4,000 of them over a period of forty years. Though trained in obstetrics, he found it more practical to present himself as a general practitioner in a rural community that offered as much opportunity to set broken bones and treat illness as it did in assisting with the miracle of birth. Taylor developed the phrase “dollar a mile” as his fee for house calls as a useful way to distinguish genuine need for his services, though he seldom collected much cash from most of his patients. Here also is Taylor's love affair with automobiles and some sage advice about hygiene. It is, above all, the story of a man who helped shape a community. I think Taylor's story would make an excellent movie or could even be the basis for a TV series. Sanderson did an excellent job in kindling Taylor's memories of a life of service through medicine.