BOOK NOTES

by Archie P. McDonald

The books keep coming, thank goodness, evidence that the spirit yet ferments among us for learning more about our region, state, and world. Many are reviewed by competent scholars elsewhere in these pages. The following were reserved for comment by the editor:

My Name is Ron And I'm A Recovering Legislator: Memoirs of a Louisiana State Representative, by Ron Gomez (Zemog Publishing, Box 81397, Lafayette, LA 79598 $18.75), is an autobiography with heavy emphasis on Gomez' legislative career in our neighbor state. Gomez was born into Louisiana politics, almost literally. A native of Baton Rouge, he can't actually recall but obviously has been affected by being told that he first visited the state capitol at the age of ten months when he was pramed past the coffin of Governor Huey Pierce Long. Gomez played on the capitol grounds while his mother worked in a downtown department store. His three-decade career in radio as disc jockey, sports announcer, and owner of several stations led him to a new home in Lafayette and a new life as an elected official from which he is still "recovering." Gomez tells us which legislators supported this or that issue or political personality, but the "deer lease" rule – that one never discusses the behavior of others while at the deer lease – applies. In other words, the sometimes bizarre behavior of lawmakers when away from home is rarely mentioned and unidentified. Gomez worked with three governors: he likes but did not respect Dave Treen; respects and likes Buddy Roemer, despite his ineffectiveness in fiscal reform; and neither likes nor respects Edwin Edwards. I love Louisiana. My parents came from there and I attended LS&U. So I always enjoy reading about this state, especially its always colorful political personalities. Frankly, they are a lot more honest about their shenanigans than are our Texas folks.

Best Editorial Cartoons Of The Year, 2001 Edition, edited by Charles Brooks (Pelican Publishing Company, 1000 Burmaster, Gretna, LA 70053, $14.95), continues a series begun in 1972. Something noteworthy is that the product costs less now than then, partly because it has been issued in paper binding since 1987. The organization is similar to previous publications: there is a tribute to Jeff McNelly, editorial cartoonist for the Chicago Tribune, followed by Pulitizer, National Society of Professional Journalists, National Headliners, and Fischetti awards. What follows is page after page of editorial cartoons that appeared in newspapers from throughout the United States, and some from Canada, in 2000. The year determines the topics: The Florida Vote, The Presidential Campaign, The Clinton Administration, Foreign Affairs, The Economy, Politics, Society, Education, Health, Crime, Gun Control, Sports, Media and Movies, Canada, The Military, and ... And Other Issues. General observations: cartoonists, or at least those whose work was selected, despised President Clinton, did not like Vice President and Democratic presidential nominee Al Gore, and rarely presented Republican candidate and now
President George W. Bush in any way but favorably. On the other hand, the
majority of the works included opposed the gun lobby, disliked Hollywood,
and was critical of American education. One has to understand Canada to
"get" the cartoons on that nation. Cartoonists amuse us or irritate us,
depending on the persons or issues they address. They also make us think,
because their art penetrates issues so obviously. One never has to wonder
about the cartoonist's point of view. Most importantly, the value of this series
grows right along with it as a chronicle of the "hot" topics of each year.

I have read nearly a dozen books on the Watergate scandal of the Nixon
Administration. Comes now two more. The first is by Will R. Wilson, Sr., A
Fool For A Client: Richard Nixon's Free Fall Toward Impeachment (Eakin
Press, Drawer 90159, Austin, Texas, 78709-0159, $24.95). Wilson served as
attorney general of Texas, where he was known for his strong opposition to
organized crime, before heading the Criminal Division in the Department of
Justice during Nixon's first administration. He had returned to Austin when the
Watergate break-in and subsequent cover-up occurred. Obviously, he was an
interested observer of the proceedings and subsequent history of the crimes,
the cover-up, and the consequences. Wilson concludes, and makes the same
points over and over, that: (1) the break-in and cover-up were unnecessary to
Nixon's reelection in 1972; (2) Nixon lacked executive experience and should
not have allowed himself to be isolated behind a wall of staff; (3) Nixon never
had the service of a good criminal attorney; (4) the impeachment need never
have taken place and could have been avoided if he had followed the advice
of a criminal attorney; (5) and that impeachment had a lasting negative impact
on America and the world. Given Wilson's strong Republican affiliation, I was
surprised at the harshness of his condemnation of Nixon - he plainly thinks the
president was guilty as charged, though not deserving of impeachment. Wilson
also goes easier on some Watergate personalities - John Mitchell and H.R.
Haldeman, for example - than other writers. This is an interesting account by
one who knew all the players well but was no longer among them when
Gordon Liddy and the others tumbled their snowball down hill.

Shadow: Five Presidents And The Legacy of Watergate, by Bob Wood­
ward (Simon & Schuster, Rockefeller Center, 1230 Avenue of the Americas,
New York 10020), shows how Watergate cast a "shadow" across the adminis­
trations of Richard Nixon's successors in the Oval Office. The accounts
concentrate on Gerald Ford's pardon of Nixon, Jimmy Carter's troubles over
investigations of Bert Lance and Hamilton Jordan, Ronald Reagan's Iran­
Contra difficulties, George Bush's similar problems, and Bill Clinton's
Whitewater, Fostergate, Travelgate, Filegate, and especially Monicagate
investigations. Woodward says the lessons of Watergate were plain: "if there
is questionable activity, release the facts, whatever they are, as early and as
completely as possible. Second, do not allow outside inquiries, whether
conducted by prosecutors, congressmen or reporters, to harden into a
permanent state of suspicion and warfare" (p.524). Despite such "plainness,"
one of Nixon's successors learned them well enough to avoid blights on their
administrations. Time has earned Ford a pass and Carter's post-elective good
works and Reagan's health problems yield similar results. Clinton remains the goat. Woodward devotes half of his 500-page book, including the entire epilogue, to Clinton. On the whole, his treatment of each president is nonpartisan, but, like the rest of us, he doesn't seem able to get a handle on the Clinton conundrum, and in the end can't resist a final dig - almost a cheap shot. Ever the fair one, he leaves Kenneth Starr in an unfavorable light, too. The world has changed. "Gotcha" politics and journalism prevail.

Ty Cashion and Jesús F. De Le Teja have edited The Human Tradition in Texas (Scholarly Resources, 104 Greenhill Ave., Wilmington, DE 19805 $18.95). It contains article-length treatments of Texans Cabeza de Vaca (John Miller Morris), Francisco Xavier Chavas (Elizabeth A.H. John), Robert Hall (Stephen L. Hardin), Louis T. Wigfall (Dallas Cothren), Thomas Williams (Barry Crouch), John B. Rayner (Gregg Cantrell), William Henry Bush (Paul Carlson), Hester Calvert (Rebecca Sharpless), Thomas Mitchell Campbell (Janet Schmelzer), Ormer Leslie Locklear (J'Nell Pate), Carter Wesley (Amilcar Shabazz), Bob Wills (Charles R. Townsend), Emma Tenayuca (Julia Kirk Blackwelder), Hermine Tobolowsky (Tai Kreidler), and Gary Gaines (Cashion). Each contains notes and suggested readings.

Holding Forth The Word Of Life: The Legacy of the First Presbyterian Church of Kilgore, text by Caleb Pirtle III (published by the church) is a history of this congregation from 1850 to the 1990s. Dedicated to the church's thirty-five pastors and filled with illustrations, it will be of particular interest to those involved in the history of the denomination and citizens of Kilgore. More about Presbyterianism can be found in Family of Faith: Cumberland Presbyterians in Harrison County, 1848-1998 (The Historical Foundation, 1978 Union Ave., Memphis, TN 38104 $50), by Rose Mary Magrill.

Patricia Foster's All The Lost Girls: Confessions of a Southern Daughter (University of Alabama Press, Box 8780380, Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0380 $24.95), is a strange one for us, but then East Texas "daughters" are Southern, too. This memoir traces the life of the daughter of a daughter of a daughter - in other words, of how generations impact their progeny - in small-town Alabama. The author's time centers on the last half of the twentieth century, but the previous generations take up the other half of it. Some of this story, especially the part about pleasing "mama," resonates for sons as well as daughters. Some of it, especially rebellion, will apply to fewer but perhaps will do so more directly. Knowing Texans, I say the "history" of this applies as much to us as to Alabamans.

The Portable Handbook of Texas, edited by Roy R. Barkley and Mark F. Odintz (Texas State Historical Association, 2/306 Sid Richardson Hall, University of Texas – Austin, Austin, TX 78712 $60) is a tome of such proportions it almost denies its title by sheer weight. Still, it is more portable than the six-volume set in which these articles and much more appeared in 1996 - except those that were first published in the original Handbook of Texas in 1952 or its Supplement in 1976, and even then updates or corrections make them as current as print can be. Portable is large, the print is small, and
the pages are jam-packed, but the data is there and will be useful, and perhaps more affordable, for secondary classrooms and general readers. It makes available in another form essential information about the always interesting history of Texas.

Bob Bowman’s latest book, *Pitser: The Rise Of A Native Son, The Life of Pitser H. Garrison* (Best of East Texas Publishers, P.O. Box 1647, Lufkin, TX 75902 $25), is a tribute to Lufkin’s longest serving mayor, bank president, senior partner in the city’s leading law firm, and Bob’s longtime friend. Garrison’s father moved the family to Lufkin near the beginning of the twentieth century. He served for many years as clerk of the court and simultaneously operated an abstract service and raised a large and successful family. Pitser Garrison’s older brother, Homer Garrison, Jr., became the longest serving chief of the Texas Department of Public Safety – the top cop in Texas. Pitser Garrison became “Mr. Lufkin” for the heart of the century. This book will delight genealogists because Bob included every possible family connection for the Garrison family, including in-laws. Here, too, are excellent photos and word pictures of several eras of Lufkin’s development. In a way, *Pitser* is as much a tribute to his beloved Lufkin as it is to Garrison himself. I especially like Pitser’s courtroom anecdotes, including this one on Joe Tonahill, who was defending a client accused of murdering another man by cutting his jugular. Preparing the defendant for trial, Tonahill asked, “Ernest … When you were in this fight, you just accidentally cut this guy with your knife. Is that right?” Ernest: “On no … that was no accident. I’ve killed too many hogs. When I heard that big thing (jugular) go ercch, I knew I had him.” Tonahill: “Ernest, if you tell it that way you’ll ride old sparky.” Ernest: “Lawyer, let me tell you about that accident.”

*Travels With Joe, 1917-1993, The Life Story Of A Historian From Texas* (Texas State Historical Association, 2/306 Sid Richardson Hall, University of Texas–Austin, Austin, TX 78712 $24.95) 2001, by David G. McComb, is a tribute to the dean of Texas historians during the 1960s and 1970s. Frantz directed McComb’s doctoral dissertation at the University of Texas, took him to Washington as part of the LBJ Oral History Project, and the two remained friends until one passed over the bar. This is a story told with love, awe, and unanswered questions about the latter decades of Joe’s life when he experienced several failed marriages, including one with his long-time employer, the University of Texas. Joe, an orphan raised by the Frantz family of Weatherford, inherited the mantle that passed from Eugene Barker to Walter Webb to Joe as our state’s leading historian. He became director of the Texas State Historical Association and headed the first oral history project focused on a sitting president and his administration. I first met Joe about 1956, when he came to Lamar University to speak. Later it was my privilege to serve on the TSHA Council during part of his tenure as director. I knew him long, and fairly well, but learned even more from David’s tribute to his mentor.

*The Reader’s Companion To American History* (Houghton Mifflin: Boston, 1991), edited by Eric Foner and John A. Garraty, is heavy reading –
about five pounds heavy. It contains over 1,200 pages, each filled with reference data on a variety of subjects relative to American History. It is a one-volume, handy-dandy desk reference that combines the usefulness of the Dictionary of American History and the Dictionary of American Biography because subjects include biographies and topics such as legislation, government agencies, treaties – the whole fabric of American history. Some essays are unsigned but were written by a team of twenty-four identified staff members; a great many are signed by over 400 contributors. Some entries contain a brief bibliography and a cross-reference referral concludes most of them. I keep reference works on my desk to check out items when I am editing and to answer pinpoint questions that arise from students, colleagues, and telephone visitors who regard a historical office as the ultimate "lifeline" for answers likely to be needed for appearances on TV's Millionaire quiz show. Looks like this will be the most useful reference book of all for either job.