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Book Notes

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BOOK NOTES

By Archie P. McDonald

This section contains reviews of recent publications by the editor. Selected items are assigned to this column for various reasons, one of which is that they have attracted the editor's attention. This is certainly the case with *Best Editorial Cartoons Of The Year, 2004 Edition*, edited by Charles Brooks (Pelican Publishing Company, P.O. Box 3110, Gretna, LA 70054, \$14.95). *ETHJ* began taking notice of Best Editorial annuals a good many years ago, and a review of the lot makes for an excellent study of change in recent American history. That is the case because each installment is filled with political cartoons/commentaries on what was "hot" during a given year. Readers/viewers may or may not find a single item on that subject in the next edition. For example, cartoons on Florida's botched counting of votes in the presidential race in 2000 goes unmentioned in 2004, but depictions of President Bill Clinton's sexual indiscretion continued to appear four years after the event and more than two years after he left office. Though the edition is labeled 2004, the cartoons all appeared in 2003. They are assembled under these headings – Award Winning Cartoons, Iraq/Terrorism, The Bush Administration, Politics, the Democrats, The Economy, The Media, Foreign Affairs, Health/Environment, Military Affairs, Religion, Society, Space/Air Travel, Sports, Education, Canada, and Other Issues. Most are poignant; all are interesting, and viewing them at a single sitting gives one a good review of the year.

The Character Factor: How We Judge America's Presidents, by James P. Pfiffner (Texas A&M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4354, \$40), concentrates on presidential lies, sexual misconduct, and the record of keeping promises during the campaigns that preceded their elections. As one might expect, William Jefferson Blythe Clinton gets the most column inches in all three categories – about twice the space devoted to Richard Milhous Nixon, Lyndon Baines Johnson, or John Fitzgerald Kennedy. These three are given approximately the same amount of coverage, with little attention given to George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Dwight David Eisenhower. Conclusions: not all presidents lie and not all lies should be considered character flaws; now all presidents are adulterers – though apparently a good many were – and not all adultery is condemnable; and some presidents do keep most promises and try hard to keep the rest but sometimes circumstances change, and not all promises should be kept. In other words, presidential politics is partisan, and my good guys come out pretty well by these standards but your bad guys are still bad guys. Wonder when Bill Clinton will stop being the scapegoat for everything from hangnails to the Fall of Rome?

John C. Waugh has given us *20 Good Reasons To Study The Civil War* (McWhiney Foundation Press, McMurry University, McMurry Box 637, Abilene, TX 79697-0637, \$12.95), in this slender publication, and Jim Lehrer confirms Waugh's authority on the subject in a brief foreword. And they are

“Because it...Was Unique, Was a Watershed in American History, Was a War of Firsts, Saved Republican Government, Killed Slavery, Originated New Ways of Waging War, Revolutionized War on the Water, Teaches Us Brotherhood, Showcases Undaunted Courage, Made Heroes, Created a New Industrial America, Produced Men of Fabulous Fortunes, Was a War of Political Oddities, Pioneered a New Journalism, Inspired Great Literature, Tested Our Faith, Is Our own Direct Tie to the Past, Makes Us Remember, Is Great Drama, and Speaks to Us Still.” Each topic is accompanied by an explanatory essay. This is followed by a review of classical writings in Civil War literature.

Random House Audio (1745 Broadway, New York, New York 10019) sent us two compact disks that contain dramatizations for four short stories by Louis L'Amour (“Bowdrie Passes Thorough,” “Where Buzzards Fly,” “McQueen Of The Tumbling K,” and “West of the Tularosa”). Each story is approximately one hour in length, and is a true dramatization, not a “reading,” meaning that many actors are involved. For those with sufficient age, the experience will kindle memories of old-time radio dramas. These “talking books” also make the miles go by pleasantly on a long auto trip, or have other uses for those who seek entertainment but cannot actually read the stories for one reason or another. This is a stretch for the *East Texas Historical Journal*, but at last Bowdrie is a Texas Ranger and McQueen was a Texan, so maybe that is enough. Anyway, I wanted you to know about it.

My Kind of Heroes, by Elmer Kelton (State House Press, McMurry University, McMurry Box 637, Abilene, TX 79697-0637, \$14.95), is a new Signature Edition of a collection of speeches originally published in 1995. The first publication contained four essays; the present one features three of those published previously and two more for good measure. The first, “My Kind of Heroes,” sets the mold for the volume: Kelton’s heroes are the working men of the West, such as his grandfather and father, who ranched, cowboied, and knew the land and the process from participation. “Myth v. Reality” reprises a similar theme – that most westerners were workers, not Hollywood stereotypes. “Oil Boom Days in West Texas” is a personalized reflection, and stimulated my own memories of East Texas rigs and rowdies. “The Truth of Fiction” shows us the roots of reality in the fiction we read and the history we remember, and “Politically Correct or Historically Correct?” reminds us to judge eras with their own standards, not ours – a classic historicist argument. I became a fan of Elmer Kelton later than sooner, mostly because I had little reason to know much at all about West Texas. I am glad Elmer is teaching me. One caveat: these five essays originated as speeches, but to what groups? I can vouch for only one. “Politically Correct...” was Elmer’s luncheon address to the East Texas Historical Association in Tyler on February 21, 1998, and it was Linda Cross who got him to do it.

Reading Glenn Dromgoole’s *A Small Town in Texas: Reflections on Growing Up in the '50s and '60s* (State House Press, McMurry University, McMurry Box 637, Abilene, TX 79697-0637, \$17.95) was pleasant for me

since I spent much of that time in nearby Beaumont, Texas, which, though larger, featured many of the same cultural aspects. I especially identified with Dromgoole's essays on that segregated world, the Kennedy assassination, fans (to combat hot weather), and family members. In fact, many of them read much like my own radio commentaries over Red River Radio – so much so that I have resolved to incorporate some of his topics and present them in the light of my own experiences. This is a good and pleasant read – I recommend it highly.

Sweetly Southern: Delicious Desserts from the Sons of Confederate Veterans, edited by Lynda Moreau (Pelican Publishing Company, P.O. Box 3110, Gretna, LA 70054, \$22.50) combines two interests of every member of the Association – history and food; and not just food, but dessert! Following preliminary units that provide a brief history of the SCV and an essay titled “Why Join the Sons of Confederate Veterans?” the reader/reviewer gets over 200 pages of recipes for “Cakes and Cobblers,” “Pies and Puddings,” and “Candies, Cookies, and Other Confections,” plus an index. The entry on “Dewberry Cobbler,” presented on p. 98, is an example of the fare. Herein are the ingredients, plus instructions on their combination and cooking, and we learn that the recipe was submitted by Lionel Wallis, a member of Judah P. Benjamin Camp #1984, and that Lionel is the great-grandson of Capt. Thomas Kelly Lillard, commander of Company A, 30th Texas Cavalry; there is also a brief biographical sketch of Capt. Lillard. An index lists all recipes by subject in alphabetical order.

Grape Man of Texas, The Life of T.V. Munson, by Sherrie S. McLeroy and Roy E. Renfro, Jr. (Eakin Press, P.O. Box 90159, Austin, TX 78709-0159, \$39.95), is the first complete biography of this internationally renowned horticulturist who developed over 300 varieties of grapes for the American South and Southwest, and especially for his role in dealing with the phylloxera epidemic that threatened vineyards throughout the world. Munson is the man, or maybe that should be *The Man*, who saved the French wine industry, and he did it in East Texas – by grafting *vinifera* to resistant native rootstocks, which then gave the French industry a new start with similar stock when their own vines became diseased. For this, Munson received the *Chevalier de Merite Agricole* in the French Legion of Honor.

Postscripts In A Rearview Mirrow, by Bob St. John, (Eakin Press, P.O. Box 90159, Austin, TX 78709-0159, \$22.95) is another collection of columns written over the years by St. John for the *Dallas Morning News*. It is exactly the kind of book I enjoy reading these days because the topics and direction of these daily observations on life's condition call up so many memories. I expect every major daily has someone like St. John who receives what other folks perceive as a dream assignment: to make comments of life's passing parade. Lewis Grizzard, before he turned to funny humor and serious politics, had such an assignment with the *Atlanta Constitution* – and about 400 other newspapers through syndication. St. John was ever bit as good as Grizzard at finding the “little” folks with large stories. I say, “was” because St. John

retired in 2000, though he continues to write for other venues.

Texas: A World in Itself, by George Sessions Perry (Pelican Publishing Company, P.O. Box 3110, Gretna, LA 70054, \$14.95), is a wonderful window into what Texans thought of themselves and their home state early in the 1940s. Much of Perry's observations reads like that venerable publication of that era titled *Texas Brags*, but the anecdotes and stories are so good they seem fresh – and will be to the callow among us who encounter this good old stuff for the first time. Perry is best known as a novelist, but his insider's observations of that old Texas are in a class by themselves. This is a reprint, or course, but it is faithful to the original, right down to politically incorrect references to minorities and slightly risqué references that make us long for an era when everything was not so blamed explicit.

We call your attention to Michael J. Vaughn's *Index to Personal, Business, And Place Names Appearing in the Trinity Advocate, Published at Palestine, Anderson County, Texas (22 April 1857-12 December 1860)*, (P.O. Box 2130, Flint, Texas, 75762-2130, \$85, plus \$5 postage, plus \$5.74 sales tax). The title tells its contents.

We are pleased to note the release of Fred McKenzie's *Hickory Hill* (Avinger, Texas, U.S.A., Vol. II (Fred McKenzie's Bayou Books, 210 W Austin St, Jefferson, TX 75657). Though the date of publication was 1999, we received a copy only recently and want to note it for the record. Fred's first volume appeared in 1988; he bills this part as "the rest of the story." Actually, Fred conceived of the project as a whole, but realized the need to "chop it off" in 1988 and publish as much as he had gathered of Avinger's economic eras, institutions, transportation, and reminiscences. Volume II, says the author, primarily is about families and genealogy. It is amply illustrated with photos of the peoples and places of Avinger.

Cowboy Corner Conversations, featuring Red Steagall and edited by Loretta Fulton (State House Press, McMurry University, McMurry Box 637, Abilene, TX 79697-0637, \$24.95) provides the yield of Steagall's conversations on his syndicated radio program with twenty-one persons – all but one male – associated with the West, as in rodeo, horse competitions, and Western movies. That one female is Reba McEntire. The guys are actors Roy Rogers, Ben Johnson, Rex Allen, Richard Farnsworth, Wilford Brimley, Dean Smith, Dale Robertson, Barry Corbin, and Buck Taylor. Writer Elmer Kelton is included as is Country/Western singer Roy Clark, rodeo champion Jim Shoulders and such cowboys/horse trainers/bootmakers, etc., as J.J. Gibson, Jigs Mann, John Gaither, John Justin, Sam Waldstein, Buser Welch, Boots O'Neil—and Texas Ranger Joaquin Jackson. This is, basically, a tribute to the West of rodeos, movies, 1960s television, and our culture's never ending love affair with cowboys.