BOOK NOTES

By Archie P. McDonald

We receive many books for review. Most are reviewed by scholars in appropriate fields, but a few books are selected for notice in this column.

One of the most interesting is Bob and Doris Bowman's latest murder thriller, Historic Murders of East Texas Book 3 (Best of East Texas Publishers, P.O. Box 1647, Lufkin, TX 75902). As was the case with "1" and "2," this volume includes murders-most-foul, this time providing details on eighteen homicides and their consequences. The fare includes the first murder in East Texas – of a fellow named LaSalle – and such well-known cases as the demise of Robert Potter. Lufkin's own Nick and Nora Charles launched their sleuthing career with The Mystery of Lady Bountiful (2002), and now folks track them down to provide leads on other lethal affairs. I summed it this way in an Introduction that I see no reason to alter: "Since every East Texan owns multiple firearms and knives, has access to poisons, flammable liquids and chain-saws, and many consider violence a viable solution, the Bowman's cup runneth over.... Meanwhile, 'it was a dark and stormy night,' and Bob and Doris are on the case."

Duty, Honor, Applause: America's Entertainers in World War II, by Gary L. Bloomfield and Stacie L. Shain, with Arlen C. Davidson (The Lyons Press, Box 480, Guilford, CT 06437, $29.95). This large volume is heavily illustrated with photos of entertainers from motion pictures, the stage, and radio who served in military assignments or devoted countless hours to entertaining troops at state-side or foreign bases, sometimes close to combat zones. Special attention is given to the operation of the Hollywood Canteen and the Stage Door Canteen in New York. One learns, for example, that Sterling Hayden served behind German lines as a member of the OSS, that Clark Gable and James Stewart flew combat missions, and that Ronald Reagan made training films. There are a few errors; for example, John Wayne is said to have really wanted to serve but could not ... even after James Olson discovered Wayne's requests for deferment in War Department files. There is redundancy – we learn five times that Artie Shaw's hand performed until completely exhausted. There is some failure to understand the system, as in five separate claims that FDR declared war on Germany and Japan, a function, of course, of the Congress. But Duty, Honor, Applause also contains much of interest, and when writing of the war itself, the authors tell a good story as a vehicle for their stars on parade. Plus you get to learn the real names for such stars as Tony Bennett, Tony Curtis, Charles Bronson, and Walter Matthau, among others. Good, interesting read.

The Adventures of a Cello, by Carlos Prieto (University of Texas Press, P.O. Box 7819, Austin, TX 78713, $24.95), is best appreciated if one enjoys classical music, as does this reporter. It also helps if the reporter's wife played cello in high school and college orchestras and to this day can discern the mellow cello within an assortment of stringed instruments. Let this quotation
stand as testimony for contents: "In 1720, Antonio Stradivari crafted an exquisite work of art - a cello know as the Piatti. Over the next three centuries...the Piatti cello left its birthplace of Cremona, Italy, and resided in Spain, Ireland, England, Italy, Germany, the United States, and Mexico. The Piatti filled sacred places...with its incomparable voice. It also spent time in more profane places, including New York City bars ... . The Piatti narrowly escaped Nazi Germany in 1935 and was once even left lying in the street all night. In 1978, the Piatti became the musical soul mate of renowned cellist Carlos Preito, with whom it has given concerts around the world." This, then, is Preito's biography of his cello, and contains a CD so readers may become listeners when the reading is done - or sooner, if they can't wait. This a little out of the ordinary for ETHJ, but hey, we got culture here, too.

Politics. politics. Consider two books edited (really compiled) by Martin Higgins, *The Nastiest Things Ever Said About Republicans* and *The Nastiest Things Ever Said About Democrats* (The Lyons Press, P.O. Box 480, Guilford, CT 06437, $14.95, 2006), volumes so companionable they share the same editor’s introduction. This creates an impression of impartiality but Martin’s heart must have been in the volume about Democrats because many of the nasties there are from his comedy act. These volumes contain approximately 180 pages of quotations - some nineteenth century, some as current as print can follow electronic media - that satirize or just plain skewer the other side. Few of the quotations are genuinely funny out of the context of specific campaigns or issue arguments, and depending on your party preference, which ever is the “other” book isn’t funny at all. So the beat goes on. If you missed these for the off-year elections last year, they will still be around for the Big One in 2008. Same Press, but by Randy Howe, is *Why I Hate The Republicans*. I expect there is or will be a companion volume to this one, too. This volume contains anecdotes and stories that tell why the author hates Republicans. Any of his reasons might be useful sources for one-liners for those addressing partisan audiences.

Gary D. Joiner’s latest book, *Through The Howling Wilderness: The 1864 Red River Campaign and Union Failure in the West* (University of Tennessee Press, 600 Henley St, Conference Ctr Bldg, Ste 110 Knoxville, TN, 37996-4108, $39.95), offers evidence that this campaign was far from a peripheral and inconsequential escapade of the war, as often presented. Instead, Joiner argues that such intensive Union involvement in Louisiana deprived it of troops needed in Georgia and thus prolonged the war itself. Joiner’s expertise in geography and extensive appendices enhance the interest and usefulness of the book. The print is small for these old eyes, but aside from that – Gary has written another winner.

Alan Burton’s *Dallas Cowboys: Quips and Quotes* (State House Press, McMurry University, Box 637, Abilene, TX 79697-0637, $14.95), is just that: a collection of what Cowboys have said about themselves and what others have said about the Cowboys. Example: “-If you needed four yards, you could give the ball to Walt [Garrison] and he’d get you four yards. If you needed twenty
yards, you could give the ball to Walt and he'd get you four yards. Dallas Cowboys quarterback Don Meredith” (p. 31). The quotations are divided into chapters titled A Star Is Born; America’s Team; Socks and Jocks; Jimmy, Jerry, Barry and Chan; and Tuna Takes Charge. Diehard Cowboys fans – and who isn’t? – will enjoy this collection even when it is not football season.

Texas in her own words, as told to Tweed Scott (Redbud Publishing, 109 Providence Court, Victoria, TX 77904, $24.95), by Tweed Scott, is also a collection of quotations, except these are longer and concern all of Texas. Stung by a barb from his Texas-born wife about the insurmountable liability of being just that – being a native-born Texan – transplanted New Englander Scott determined to understand Texas’ uniqueness. What he has compiled, then, is a handsome book with the comments of about sixty Texans speaking on their part of the pie. Most are normal folks, but I happen to know these commentators – Liz Carpenter, Paul Hutton, and Carol and Dick Voigtel. Illustrations presented in what I think is called sepia decorate the volume nicely.

State Capitols: Temples of Sovereignty (Excelsior, 133 Main St, Delhi, NY 13753-1219, $79.95), written, photographed, and produced by Francis Pio Ruggiero, must weigh five pounds. That is because the book is nearly 700 pages long, with 824 photographs, all printed on some pretty high-quality, slick paper. Nothing else would do for this one, for which Ruggiero and wife Marcy drove 21,393 miles and flew another 4,316 miles to visit, photograph, and study all fifty state capitols. The contents are compartmentalized as Original States (13); Charter States (11) – essentially Appalachia to the Mississippi; Nation States (3) – Vermont, Hawaii, and Texas, naturally; Purchased States (17) essentially the Louisiana Purchase and the Oregon Territory settlement; and War States (6), those taken from Mexico except West Virginia, which was taken from Virginia. Entries are similar, so let’s look at Texas, beginning on page 324 with a painting of the Alamo with the artist’s best guess of the likenesses of Bowie, Crockett, and Travis, plus, for some reason, Sam Houston – faced by a great photo of our pink capitol, with a text about Texas history, not the capitol, but there are twenty-three excellent photos of the dome, statues, and floor decorations. Good gift for a youngster studying what we used to call “civics” in French High School sometime last century.

Presidential Humor: For Candidates, Speechwriters, and Voters, Preachers, Housewives, Janitors, Hecklers, and Other Political Types (Bright Sky Press, P.O. Box 416, Albany, TX 76430, $9.95), by Liz Carpenter, has a title about as long as the text. That text contains humorous anecdotes involving American political figures from George Washington to George W. Bush – First to Worst – says one line, divided into nearly thirty topics that range from how to handle hecklers to taxes. Some of the stories have appeared in earlier publications, but anything by or about Liz Carpenter is always worth investigating. After all, she’s Getting Better All The Time.

More politics. Inside The Carnival: Unmasking Louisiana Politics. With A New Epilogue (Louisiana State University Press, P.O. Box 25053, Baton
Rouge, LA 70894-5053, $17.95), by LSU political scientist Wayne Parent, first appeared in 2004. Comes now this paperbound edition. Let me say first that the font is far too small, regardless of how much paper, ink, and money this may have saved LSU Press. Beyond that, though, this is an excellent examination of what makes Louisiana as it is, politically and other wise. Parent’s long tenure as observer, teacher, and participant in the state’s political process makes him an expert on his subject, where others, such as I, remain interested amateur observers. At least the politics of our eastern neighbor are always interesting and often fun. This is a good source to learn why that is so, but get your eyes checked before/after reading it.

Another grand picture book is *Under Stately Oaks: A Pictorial History of LSU*, revised, with text by Thomas F. Ruffin, and photography research and editing by Jo Jackson and Mary J. Hebert, and a new foreword by Chancellor Sean O’Neefe (Louisiana State University Press, P.O. Box 25053, Baton Rouge, LA 70894-5053, $39.95). This large (9"x11") volume begins, as it should, with William T. Sherman and Pineville, a skeleton-in-the-closet for this one-time Confederate state, then rises through federal largess (another not-much-touted-if-not-exactly secret fact is that LSU is also an A&M University), moving to Baton Rouge, the blessings and curses of the affection of the Kingfish, and so on, continuing to the building of the great university that LSU has become despite granting me a degree long, long ago. I was pleased to see photos of Troy Middleton, the good WWII soldier who conquered Pointe-de-Hoc at Normandy and came home to guide LSU, and I nearly teared up at the photo of T. Harry Williams on page 126. I have a photo of a meaner looking T. Harry on my office wall to remind me to get to work, one of the things he said to me most when I was his graduate assistant in 1962, and friend thereafter until his death. You can’t go back – but it is certainly good to look at pictures of it.

This one is a horse of a different color – actually, it is *Ultimate Horse Barns*, by Randy Leffingwell (Voyageur Press, MBI Publishing Company, 729 Prospect Ave, P.O. Box 1, Osceola, WI 54020, $34.95), who readily admits that “ultimate,” even beauty, is relative. His collection of eighteen facilities all met these criteria: “Their innovation; clever response to site challenges; beauty; meticulous attention to details, equine health, and safety; or their historical context...." Some says Leffingwell, remained in use and useful more than a century after construction. There is text, but of course the primary feature is hundreds of photos of the structures themselves, and few include horses – but the buildings remain the focus. You are likely to think that some of these places are too fancy for horses, that people ought to live in them, until you remember the economic worth and potential of a Triple Crown winner, or its equivalent, in other equestrian enterprises. Then, one might be willing to live in a tent if necessary for one’s horse to inhabit a structure than protects its value. Some of these buildings are massive and ornate, others modern and functional, and all are devoted to the magnificent animal that captures all of us – especially little girls. If there is a psychological explanation for that please don’t tell me and spoil the fineness of it. Great pictures. Wish I had a horse and a barn like any
of these "ultimate" ones for its dwelling. Architects will like this book; horse fanciers will love it.

*One Christmas in Old Tascosa*, by Cassandra Firman As Told by Quintelle Speck-Firman Garmany (Texas Tech University Press, P.O. Box 41037, Lubbock, TX 79409, $21.95), with foreword by Red Stegall, appeared for the Christmas sales of 2006, but as you receive this review later than that, it will still be a good read in 2007, especially if you remember the Depression and the Dust Bowl – and if you don't "remember," then they are a good place to grasp the spirit of those times. Most of all, this story is about family before that institution became a political football. Stegall's foreword is an important part of this. He remembers.

*D-Day Survivor: An Autobiography*, by Harold Baumgarten (Pelican Publishing Company, 1000 Burmaster St, Gretna, LA 70053-2246, $25), emphasizes the surviving more than activities on the actual D-Day. Baumgarten grew up in a Jewish neighborhood in New York City and entered the Army while still living there. He was assigned to the Twenty-Ninth Infantry Division, 116 Regiment, and went ashore in the Dog Green sector of Omaha Beach, the area depicted in Steven Spielberg's film, "Saving Private Ryan." Baumgarten survived five separate wounds that day, literally from head to foot, and endured multiple surgeries – including plastic surgery – during his recovery. He moved to Florida and became a medical doctor after the war. Describing these experiences consumes about forty-percent of *D-Day Survivor*; the rest recounts Baumgarten's considerable efforts, and success, in keeping the memory of fallen comrades in the Twenty-Ninth vivid.