BOOK NOTES

By Archie P. McDonald

We are grateful for the energy and production of the many presses that continue to publish Texana. Reviews by individuals provide evaluations for the majority of books received, but some are noticed in this column, often with personal comments by the editor. Note, also, the "guest" commentator on the Big Thicket book.

Those who attended our Spring meeting in Beaumont in February 2007 were introduced to Betting, Booze, and Brothels: Vice, Corruption, and Justice in Jefferson, County, Texas From Spindletop to the 1960s (Eakin Press, P.O. Drawer 90159, Austin, TX 78709-0159, 2006), when co-author Wanda Landrey presented a paper on this subject. Laura C. O'Toole and Landrey produced this volume after discovering the other's work on the subject. And what a subject! Beaumont and Port Arthur, principals cities in the county, were "wide open" for the first six decades of the twentieth century. Prostitution, gambling, and liquor violations went unpunished because of the corruption of such public officials as the district judge, district attorney, county sheriff, chief of police, and chief of detectives, and a broken grand jury system. Individuals who complained found themselves demoted or out of a job altogether. Then three honest citizens took a stand and a legislative investigating committee led by Representative Tom James exposed the cooperation between office holders and the madams — especially Sheriff Charlie Meyer and Rita Ainsworth, keeper of the Dixie Hotel in Beaumont — and the gamblers. Indictments and resignations resulted; some would claim that the county had cleaned up, others that the vice had only spread out. I remember those days, even remember seeing the white envelopes passed to policemen by the proprietor of the Texas Club where Gerald, Don, Glenn, and I stopped by after school to shoot pool. We were far under the legal age to be in that place, but the policemen never even seemed to notice us. Downtown Beaumont died soon after the clubs and pool halls and houses closed. Maybe it wasn't due to suburban shopping malls after all.

Cathy C. Post's Hurricane Audrey: The Deadly Storm of 1957 (Pelican Publishing Company-1000 Burmaster St, Gretna, LA 70053, $24.95), rekindled memories of the first hurricane that made a significant impression on me. I was in Beaumont on June 27, 1957, attending Lamar Tech, when Audrey paid us a visit. High winds whipped a large elm tree in the back yard as if it were a twig; heavy rain flooded our street; and the atmosphere was so still after the storm had passed. Then, forty-eight years later, we survived Hurricane Rita—déjà vu all over again. Post is from south Louisiana but now lives in Las Vegas, where there are no hurricanes. She chronicles Audrey through the experiences of the Battie, Broussard, Cagle, Carter, Clark, DeBarg, Griffith, Marshall, Meaux, and Welch families who lived in Cameron and Calcasieu parishes, directly in hurricane Audrey's path; some survived and some did not, but even the survivors were scarred forever by memories of collapsing houses, riding out the storm on flotsam — usually a part of a roof — seeking sanctuary in trees, and battling snakes. The narrative focuses on June 27 and the
immediate aftermath of the storm, but a concluding chapter tells the reader "the rest of the story" for survivors. This is a good book. Rarely does the written word moisten my eyes, as this one did. Perhaps you had to be there.

Ecology is the study of nature's big picture, of all the plants and animals and how they get along in the soils and the weathers of their environment. Geraldine Watson's *Big Thicket Plant Ecology* (University of North Texas Press, P.O. Box 311336, Denton, TX 76203-1336. 2006. P. 136. $14.95.) shows how that relationship exists in southeast Texas' Big Thicket. Watson recognizes that three Big Thickets exist: the traditional bear hunter's Thicket along Pine Island Bayou; the ecological Big Thicket that occupies the basin between the Trinity and Sabine rivers; and the Big Thicket National Preserve that consists of 96,200 acres of related plant and wildlife areas set aside by the national government as a public preserve. Watson relates the ecology of these three areas and shows how soils and climates all came together to create a unique environment, one friendly to all kinds of life, from dry land cacti to swamp land bladderworts. Ecologies came together in the Big Thicket to create a biological crossroads of plant life. F.E. Abernethy

*Lines In The Sand: Congressional Redistricting In Texas And The Downfall Of Tom DeLay,* by Steve Bickerstaff (University of Texas Press, P.O. Box 7819, Austin, TX 78713-7819, $34.95), is the most interesting and significant book I have read this year. Bickerstaff teaches and has practiced law for thirty years, and so is in an ideal position to understand and interpret the sequence that began with DeLay's efforts to engineer a Republican takeover of the Texas legislature in elections in 2002 - specifically to insure the selection of Tom Craddick as speaker of the Texas house of representatives, and then to use that speaker and his majority for mid-decade congressional redistricting to guarantee a Republican majority among the state's congressional delegation. Bickerstaff offers evidence that a majority of Texans were opposed to redistricting at that time but that DeLay, Craddick, and eventually Governor Rick Perry and Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst made it the priority of the legislative session. This obsession, plus Democratic efforts to thwart redistricting, occupied the legislature's time to the injury of solutions for significant problems such as public school finance. Bickerstaff does his best to remain neutral through most of the text, and in the end, condemns both political parties and all the players - with a little more condemnation reserved for DeLay. UT Press made it hard to read with little-bitty print, but the yield is worth the effort.

*1001 Greatest Things Ever Said About Texas,* (The Globe Pequot Press, P.O. Box 480, Guilford, CT 06437, $12.95), and *You Know You're in Texas When ... 101 Quintessential Places, People, Events, Customs, Lingo, and Eats of the Lone Star State* ((The Globe Pequot Press, P.O. Box 480, Guilford, CT 06437, $9.95), have much in common, including Donna Ingham as compiler/editor. Both are page-by-page compilations, the first of quotations about Texas and the second vignettes of history and culture. First example: "I feel safer at the race track than I do on Houston's highways," said A.J. Foyt. Second example: "you know you're in Texas when ... you're boot scootin' to
a Willie tune," followed by a one-page bio sketch of Nelson's career. Fun stuff.

"... 'Til the Fat Lady Sings," *Classic Texas Sports Quotes*, by compiled by Alan Burton with illustrations by Kent Gamble (Texas Tech University Press, P.O. Box 41037, Lubbock, TX 79409-1037, $9.95), is a similar work, except the concentration is exclusively on sports. Here are a couple of samples: "Some players would complain if they were playing on Dolly Partin's bedspread," said Jimmy Demaret in *Golf Magazine* (p. 97); and "During my career, I covered four professional teams ... the Dallas Cowboys, the San Diego Chargers, the Denver Broncos, and the University of Oklahoma Sooners," claimed sportswriter Frank Boggs (p. 200).

*New Texas History Movies*, drawings and text by Jack Jackson (Texas State Historical Association, 1 University Station D0901, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX 78712, $9.95), is a reconception of the original *Texas History Movies* published and distributed in the public schools earlier in the last century. Both tell the story of Texas, through the nineteen-century, in cartoon fashion reminiscent of comic books or the "funny page" of newspapers. Jackson's version - and the original as well - do not try to be "funny," or comedic; instead, he relates the familiar and heroic story of immigrants bringing civilization to the wilderness. Gone are pejorative racial references that abounded in the original, but the familiar story of the Texas epic is preserved. You can almost hear the soundtrack with "Giant" or "The Yellow Rose Of Texas" playing in the background.

Since Bob Bowman shed most of his public relations business, his historical activities have increased, including two books published in 2007. The first, with Doris Bowman as co-author, is *The Forgotten Towns of East Texas, Volume 1* (The Best of East Texas Publishers, P.O. Box 1647, Lufkin TX 75902, $25). Years ago Bowman published several collections on ghost towns in our region. "Volume 1" means, says Bowman, that East Texas has so many dwindling or already abandoned communities that two or three more volumes will be forthcoming to accommodate their stories. This first volume presents civic biographies for sixty-four locations divided into sixteen categories, including Earliest, Farmer, Religious, Resort, Oddly-Named, Ethnic, Old County, Teacher, Riverport, Sawmill and Logging, Ferry, Tough, Hard Luck, Fort, Iron-Oil-Coal, and Railroad towns; most are covered in three or four page sketches and a black-and-white illustration. Late in the year, Bowman produced *Making Music For The Snarks: The Story Of The Famous Hoo-Hoo Band of Lufkin, Texas* (The Best of East Texas Publishers, P.O. Box 1647, Lufkin, TX 75902, $25). The Hoo-Hoos originated in Gurdon, Arkansas, a product of the boredom shared by Bolling Arthur Johnson and George Kimball Smith while attending a lumberman's convention in that city. They dreamed up the "Cooncatenatee Order of the Hoo-Hoo" to enliven the proceedings, intending only to have fun; then the organization grew into a separate, national, lodge-style order. Though Lufkin lacked an official connection until the 1950s, members of that city's community band, then known as the "Trib Band" because a local newspaper sponsored it, traveled with Johnny Bonner...
to a national Hoo-Hoo. Hoo-Hooers so enjoyed their music that they named the group their "official" band. Evidently their performances were quite entertaining and for a decade or so the band played in venues throughout the United States. A "snark," by the way, is Hoo-Hooese for president of the organization. The Hoo-Hoos must be the lumber industry's answer to the Shriners.

Looking at House of Plenty: The Rise, Fall, and Revival of Luby's Cafeterias, by Carol Dawson and Carol Johnston (University of Texas Press, P.O. Box 7819, Austin, TX 78713-7819, $21), one expects a standard business history that celebrates an anniversary or some such event. Some of that is here, but co-author Dawson's experience as a novelist incorporates suspense building bridges, murders, suicides, thefts, and family disputes and other dramatic episodes in the corporate life of Luby's and of the Luby family. The other author, Carol Johnston, is a daughter of Charles Johnston, one of the founders of the corporate Luby's and a principal actor in the development of the company's mystique. Patriarch Harry Luby founded the company on the simple formula of providing "Good Food for Good People" with consistent, cooked-from-scratch (and predictable) preparation at a fair price. His son and nephew continued that tradition for much of the twentieth century before the company fell victim to 1990s-style corporate greed, which ruined it. The two Carols hope that the Pappas brothers will restore the company to 'some measure of its former significance. Those who grew up dining at Luby's will find this an interesting story.

Susan Gibler's Texas Wildflower Postcard Collection (Voyageur Press, P.O. Box 338, Stillwater, MN 55082, $8.95), arrived the day Lady Bird Johnson was laid to rest on the LBJ Ranch. A Ben Sergeant cartoon that day featured a field of bluebonnets, and, says one, "Are there bluebonnets in Heaven?" Another bluebonnet responds, "There will be now." Bluebonnets were Lady Bird's favorite wildflower, and no one did more to populate and popularize the Lupinus texensis and all its cousins in the wild world of flora than she. So this book was particularly welcome when it arrived and will be for flower lovers whenever and wherever they find it. The small book consists entirely of postcards that feature a wonderful photograph of Texas wildflowers; these may be detached and used as postcards. This must be a reprint, for its credits claim the copyright was issued in 1989, and I wonder why (even though I know), it was published in Hong Kong. "Whatever," say the young, the pictures are Texas purdy.

More on Wild Texas: A Celebration of Our State's Natural Beauty (Voyageur Press, P.O. Box 338, Stillwater, MN 55082, $31.95) with text and photography by Richard Reynolds and foreword by Victor Emanuel. Must contain 150-200 breathtaking photos of Texas' wild scenes divided into regions, including East Texas Pineywoods, Texas Gulf Coast and Costal Prairies, Hill Country and Edwards Plateau, Panhandle Plains, South Texas Plains, The Trans-Pecos, and Oak Woods and Prairies, plus units on Preserving Our Heritage For The Future. Naturally, I looked over the East Texas chapter closest and found it fine; I also really enjoyed the photos of Palo Duro Canyon,
the other prettiest place in Texas. These photos are spectacular and spectacularly “wild,” as in natural, for there is not a thing of violence in them, only with humans – cowboys driving cattle toward El Capitan in Guadalupe Mountains National Park, plus four with human institutions such as an abandoned adobe, a road, wagons, and a windmill. Beautiful. This one was printed in China.

Finally, a trip to Amarillo and a drive along a preserved portion of Route 66 made me more than ready for Peter B. Dedek's *Hip To The Trip: A Cultural History of Route 66* (University of New Mexico Press, MSC 04 2820, 1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131-0001, $19.95). Dedek claims, and I agree, that Route 66 became and remains the most famous federal highway in our nation's history. We remember the National Road, and especially here in Texas, *El Camino Real*, but what other road had a novel written by John Steinbeck about its use (*The Grapes of Wrath*), a song by Bobby Troup (“Get Your Kicks On Route 66”), and its on television series (“Route 66”), with Buzz and Todd and their classy and classic Corvette? Dedek reminds us that the route followed the rails, especially the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe, and had a ready-made tourist clientele long before Steinbeck’s Okies and Arkies hit the road. Sometimes Dedek almost seems to be saying don’t make too much of it, it was just one more road put out of business by interstates and airlines. Maybe. But even that mile or so in Amarillo makes an old-timer smile, remembering. Good color photos here of some of the route’s artifacts, if not of Buzz and Todd.