BOOK NOTES

By Archie P. McDonald

The Journal publishes thirty or more book reviews each issue, and offers these notices and notes for as many other fine publications as possible. For example....

Scrapbook of Traditions, Annals, and History: Collin County from 1846 to 1880. The George Pearis Brown Papers, edited by Helen Gibbard Hill and Donald R. Hoke and annotated by Houston Mount (North Texas History Center, 300 East Virginia, McKinney, TX 75069-4325, $39), offers a potpourri of all things historical about the north central Texas county from a muster roll of Captain Andrew Stapp's Company of Mounted Volunteers in the Mexican-American War to a description of the Bass House School. Lives touched by that history will enjoy these old pictures and accounts of life in Collin County.

Doug Welsh's Texas Garden Almanac, illustrated by Aletha St. Romain (Texas A&M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4354, $24.95) is a great big book that offers a review of duties and opportunities for Texas gardeners, year 'round. Chapter titles for monthly coverage are descriptive - "February: Hints of Spring, Reminders of Winter" to August: Hot, Hot, Hot, and Dry Too!" Each concludes with a "Timely Tips" section. St. Romain's colorful illustrations are wonderful. The text is full of "how to" and "when to" information, plus such wisdom as "Squirrels - Love 'em or Hate 'em. There seems to be no in between. You either enjoy squirrels coexisting with your feathered friends, or you despise them as selfish pigs in fur coats." Makes a wonderful retirement/birthday/Christmas gift - depending on when you see this notice - for many Texas historians who also like to garden.

Verne Lindquist's blurb suggests that Jim Dent's Twelve Mighty Orphans: The Inspiring True Story Of The Mighty Mites Who Ruled Texas Football (St. Martin's Press, 175 Fifth Ave, New York, NY 10010-7848) "...might be the best sports book ever written." Without going that far, especially since I don't read that many books about sports, I agree that this is a mighty fine book. That judgment depends less on Dent's skills as a writer and more on the power of the story. That twelve - at a time, at least - kids we might smugly call "disadvantaged" accomplished so much over a decade seems little short of miraculous. Better, though, is to recognize it as a triumph of the human spirit. The mainest hero of Dent's history of the several football teams of the Masonic Home and School in Fort Worth is their coach, Harvey Naul "Rusty" Russell, who doubtless made significant financial sacrifice to remain with his orphans so long. But all of the Mighty Mites were heroes, too, and we can thank Dent for telling their story. A word about the book's most enigmatic personality, Hardy Brown, hero with a villainous side. At least the Masons gave him a chance, and so they are heroes, too. Finally, the value of reading the Author's Notes, often skipped, is finding a nugget like this: "Now it will be up to Joe Rinaldi, the best book publicist in the business, to make sure the damn thing

_The Greatest Texas Sports Stories You've Never Heard_, by Al Pickett with foreword by Dave Campbell (State House Press, McMurry University, Box 637 McMurry Station, Abilene, TX 79697-0637, $14.95), is a collection of Pickett’s stories from sports activities he covered for both press and radio. Nearly fifty vignettes range from football to baseball to basketball to track & field to coaches and coaching to...whatever happened to Texas, mostly in Texas, in sports. My initial impression was that women’s sports were slighted a bit, but I decided that that reflects the reality of amateur and professional athletes in Texas and elsewhere until about three decades ago. There is no mention of Mildred “Babe” Didrickson Zaharias, but that could mean that Pickett never met her or saw her compete. Several articles do feature “Slinging” Sammy Baugh, the star quarterback of the TCU Horned Frogs and the (ugh!) Washington Redskins. Fanatics of sports in and of Texas will love the breath and personal involvement of the reporter with his stories.

A tradition continues: _Best Editorial Cartoons of the Year, 2008 Edition_, edited by Charles Brooks (Pelican Publishing Company, 1000 Burmaster St, Gretna, LA 70053-2246, $14.95), thirty-seventh annual collection of wit, barb, and caricature of presidents, Congress, the church, celebrities – anything – newsworthy, and apparently the more pompous the better. As usual, the volume leads with award-winning cartoons from the Pulitzer to the Herblock Award. What follows is categories according to the news of 2007: The Presidential Campaign (pinpricking every candidate); The Bush Administration: Iraq/Terrorism; Immigration (especially “the Wall”); Congress; Crime; The Economy – (is that redundant?); Foreign Affairs; Health/Environment; Media/Entertainment (Brittany Spears and Anna Nicole some more); Society: Sports (mostly about steroids); Space/Travel; Canada; ...and Other Issues; and In Memoriam (the best is about Lady Bird Johnson, with Gerald Ford a close second). A review essay on issues precedes each segment and the cartoons follow without commentary or explanation. Few need any, except I did not “get” some of the fare from “Canada,” but that is because I am provincial. As usual, I smiled at the cartoons that appealed to my bias and wondered what the idiots who created cartoons favoring the “other side” were thinking. That is what makes politics and cartoon books about politics successful – we are never going to be in agreement about much. Good, quick review of the year that was.

_Eckhardt: There Once Was A Congressman From Texas_, by Gary A. Keith (University of Texas Press, P.O. Box 7819, Austin, TX 78713-7819, $34.95), brings back memories of a different Texas, one before Bush and the Democrats’ complete surrender of state and national political officers to born-again Republicans. The subtitle comes from former Senator Ralph Yarborough’s plea that Congressman Bob Eckhardt write his memoirs so people could see “there once was a congressman from Texas.” Keith also calls Eckhardt everyone’s “second congressman,” meaning there once was a Texas where you could just choose Eckhardt to be your congressman if you did not
like the one the electorate in your district selected. That resonated, because I did just that, and with Eckhardt, too, because of his interest in the Big Thicket. Why did a congressman from the Eighth District worry about that? Well, mostly because it was good for Texas, so Eckhardt was for it, and being for it, willing to fight for it. Bob Eckhardt may not have been everyone's choice, especially the developers who opposed his open beaches legislation, or oil and gas executives who disfavored his energy policy positions, or businessmen stung by his practice of labor law, or, for that matter, any conservative. Because Bob Eckhardt was one of the last real, honest-to-God liberals in Texas. Eckhardt believed in people and that government existed for their benefit. Not all congressmen from Texas have agreed.

Saturday morning, February 1, 2003, I was preparing breakfast when a "wump, wump, wump" sound thundered above us and whatever did the wumping left a ziz-zag contrail across the eastern sky. CNN was just telling us that contact had been lost with Space Shuttle Columbia as it reentered Earth's atmosphere; we soon learned that the loss of a heat shield during launching had caused the Columbia to commence disintegration over California. At 17,000 mph, debris rained down on East Texas, the majority of it falling on Nacogdoches, San Augustine, and Sabine counties. Instantly, it seemed, we became the focus of the international media. As it turned out, if Columbia had to come down, that was the best place. Dr. James Kroll's Forest Institute already had the capability of providing maps for debris fields, and Nacogdoches also had Mayor Roy Blake Jr., County Judge Sue Kennedy, Sheriff Thomas Kerss, and above all, Home Land Security Manager Robert Hurst to implement Hurst's disaster plan. Hurst has written of those days in Leadership When The Sky Falls: Leadership Lessons From The Shuttle Columbia Disaster (AuthorHouse, 1663 Liberty Drive, #200, Bloomington, IN 47403). This is a manual for preparing for disaster management, not a history of the shuttle disaster, but that historic event provided the experiences from which those leadership lessons are drawn. Doing so provides historical context for the event itself.

Over sixty years after its conclusion, World War II has joined the American Civil War as the nation's "other" most studied era. Comes now Stanley Coleman Jersey's Hells Islands: The Untold Story of Guadalcanal (Texas A&M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4354, $35), an enormously detailed description of the contest between the Empire of Japan and Allied Forces - especially American Marines - for control of Guadalcanal, the South Pacific, and ultimately the outcome of World War II. Jersey spent forty years researching his subject, including visiting archives and campaign participants in Japan, so the reader gets "both sides of the story." What Franklin Roosevelt called "...the inevitable victory..." on December 8, 1941, did not appear so inevitable from the perspective of the South Pacific islands. Fortunately, suffered hardship and hard fighting did lead to that conclusion.
Clan Donald, by Donald J. Macdonald (Pelican Publishing Company, 1000 Burmaster St, Gretna, LA 70053-2246, $75) has an appeal to anyone named McDonald, MacDonald, or Macdonald, for all who come by that name inherit the proud tradition of Clan Donald. This hefty volume follows the development of the Clan from the twelfth century until near the end of the eighteenth century, when the clan system underwent fundamental change. East Texas existed then, of course, a place of interest primarily to Caddo peoples, and, towards the end of it, to Spaniards. But the Americans who occupied East Texas during the next century were predominantly Scot-Irish, the ethnic backbone of the nation. Their progeny continue as the preponderant population at the beginning of the twenty-first century, even as persons of color gain in percentage of population. We are all curious about our roots, just like Alex Haley’s Roots. In our case, the root rests on Isle of Skye, Scotland, and Cousin Donald J. Macdonald has told the first part of the story in extensive detail. McDonalds, MacDonalds, and Macdonalds, and related peoples, will learn here of their heritage; others may find the traditions of Scotland interesting even if they are named Wojchowitz.