

10-2009

Book Notes

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj>

 Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

Tell us how this article helped you.

Recommended Citation

(2009) "Book Notes," *East Texas Historical Journal*: Vol. 47: Iss. 2, Article 14.

Available at: <http://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj/vol47/iss2/14>

This Book Note is brought to you for free and open access by SFA ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in East Texas Historical Journal by an authorized administrator of SFA ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact cdsscholarworks@sfasu.edu.

BOOK NOTES

By Archie P. McDonald

The Journal provides reviews for as many books as possible and these notes on other publications for which reviewers with appropriate interest could not be found. These notes cover a variety of topics and are entirely subjective and personal.

TCU Press continues its interesting Texas Small Books Series and that certainly is descriptive. Each is 4.5 by 6.75 inches and about a quarter of an inch thick, say eighty or so pages. Each matches a topic with an expert, as with *State Fare: An Irreverent Guide to Texas Movies*, by Don Graham, noted in this column in the issue for Spring 2009. Comes now several more entries, *Texas Country Music* by Phil Fry and Jim Lee, and *Extraordinary Texas Women*, by Judy Alter (TCU Press, Box 298300, Fort Worth, TX 76129, \$8.95). Like this column, Fry and Lee confess that they selected their twenty-five subjectively, except that each must have been born in Texas. So their list includes Gene Autry (Tiago, September 29, 1907), though he preferred Oklahoma, and Buck Owens (near Sherman on August 12, 1929), who made Bakersfield, California, a center of "country." No matter. I learned something about each singer and even more about country music generally. And I forgive them for not including Francis Abernethy and Stan Alexander because their introduction makes it plain that they also lament the omission.

Another Texas Small Book is *Extraordinary Texas Women*, by Judy Alter (TCU Press, Box 298300, Fort Worth, TX 76129, \$8.95). *ETW* contains brief biographical essays of twenty-six individuals separated into such categories as An Early Settler, Women of the Revolution, An Indian Captive, Ranch Women, The Alamo Again, Authors, In the Public Eye, Culinary Entrepreneurs, and Politics on the Distaff Side. One is as brief as a half page, but entries on Barbara Jordan, Ann Richards, Molly Ivans, and Ladybird Johnson are gratifyingly longer. Again, one learns much even in such brief accounts. For example, here I met Bessie Coleman, the first woman African American licensed pilot, and Tad Lucas, Texas cowgirl, for the first time.

Still another in the series is *Texas Football Legends: Greats of the Game* (TCU Press, Box 29833, Fort Worth, Texas, 76129, \$8.95) by Carlton Stowers. Stowers provides eighteen brief essays to explain why those featured are the "best" at what they did in football—high school, collegiate, or professional. And they could excel at the later two stops as long as they were born in Texas. So these are not necessarily the best associated with a Texas college or professional team. Stowers admits critics will argue for more Aggies on the list, and cases could be made for more than one Rice Owl, for that matter, but it is difficult to disagree that Doak Walker, Sammy Baugh, Bobby Layne, Earl Campbell, Tommy Nobis, Don Meredith, or Jerry LeVias should trade places with other nominees. Stowers' essays are not biographies but are sportographies—accounts of athletic achievements and suggestions of post-athletic activity. As to more Aggies, I did think of John David Crow, but he was from Louisiana.

And finally in this series (so far), is Judy Alter's *Great Texas Chefs* (TCU Press, Box 298300, Fort Worth, TX 76129, \$8.95) which features the good eating available at fourteen food places featuring fancy chefs ranging from chuck wagon cooks Bill Cauble and Cliff Teniert of Albany to Chad Martin at Dallas' Hotel St. Germain. I have to confess that I have been privileged to dine at none of these fineries, so I'll trust Judy's judgment. What I like most about this book is the recipes that conclude each chapter.

Truman's Whistle-stop Campaign, by Steven R. Goldzwig (Texas A&M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4354, \$17.95, 2008), is a rhetorical analysis of Harry S. Truman's campaign for reelection against Republican challenger Thomas Dewey in 1948 and an explanation of how and why Truman won despite the nearly universal expectation that he would lose. Goldzwig is associated with the Department of Communication at Marquette University, but he is also a good historian. Truman's success, Goldzwig believes, can be explained by his confidence in his grasp of America's problems and promises and whistle-stop campaigns—there were several trips in the months before the election—and his success in selling his populist message. Truman entered the campaign with Democrats on the Left defecting to Henry Wallace's Progressive Party and Democrats on the Right to Strom Thurman's Dixiecrats, who organized because of Truman's stand on civil rights. Says Goldzwig, the first trip provided a learning experience. Truman abandoned prepared texts, which he usually read badly, in favor of extemporaneous presentations in which he identified himself with the folk who gathered at a railroad depot or crossing—farmers, factory workers, small businessmen and women. All said and done, Truman traveled 30,000 miles and made 356 speeches to twelve to fifteen million people. Goldzwig argues, and I agree, that Truman's victory in 1948 was a one-of-a-kind phenomenon. Success resulted because of Truman himself, the times, and the train. Now, elections run on and by computers and jets are too impersonal and sound-byte driven to repeat the miracle of 1948. Too bad.

Christmas Stories from the South's Best Writers, edited by Charlene R. McCord and Judy H. Tucker (Pelican Publishing Company, 1000 Burmaster St., Gretna, LA 70053-2246 \$15.95), presents twelve stories about Christmas, an annual holiday that celebrates one of two central Holy Days of Christianity, but also one with significant secular aspects to both faithful and faithless—in the South and elsewhere. *Christmas Stories* has a nostalgic foreword by Elizabeth Spencer and each chapter features an illustration by Rick Anderson. Concluding identifiers provided personal and bibliographic information about each contributor. A prospective reader knows what they are getting: it is Christmas every day and every page.

A truly interesting read, especially for any interested in the South, and most especially for anyone from the South, and most of all, for those Southerners who are truly interested in *Eating, Drinking, and Visiting in the South* (Louisiana State University Press, 3990 W Lakeshore Dr, Baton Rouge, LA 70808-4684, 1982, Updated Edition 2008, \$17.95), is Joe Gray Taylor's

classic social history, freshly available with an Introduction by John Egerton. I remember Taylor from visits at the Southern Historical Association and, coincidentally, finding out that his funeral would be held on the same day and in the same funeral home in Lake Charles, Louisiana, as my father. But this is the first of his writing that I have read, and it is good. Most importantly, Taylor knew from first hand experience of that about which he wrote—pork, biscuits, cornbread, collard greens, gumbo, burgoo, corn liquor, molasses, fresh-churned butter, possum, roasting ears, cowpeas, lard, and all the rest of what that folks called “soul food” in the 1960s and 1970s and which sustained those who dwelled in the South from the beginning until the post-WWII Americanization of everything. Taylor imposes his personal experiences with various Southern foods and eating habits right along with some of the best-researched history you will find. This one is not only profitable to read, it is also fun—and may make you hungry for some old fashioned food.

The Kid and The King: An East Texan's Journey with Elvis Presley and the Birth of Rock and Roll, by Norman Johnson (Norman Johnson, Box 635078, Nacogdoches, TX 75963-5078), is the autobiography of a long-time radio personality, promoter, and good citizen of East Texas. Johnson began life in Upshur County and never strayed too far from his roots through several careers, including the ministry, salesman, radio Deejay and interviewer, and the first impersonator of Elvis Presley when Presley still played small-town gigs in Gilmer. Johnson chronicles his journey with honesty, especially about his multiple marriages, but admirably does not descent to “tell all” confession. He provides insight into personal relationships with interviewees such as President George W. Bush, and friendships with just about every country music performer, especially in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. You have to know Norman to know Norman; short of that, *The Kid and The King* is the next best way of learning about this remarkable entertainer and good citizen.

You Gotta Stand Up: The Life and High Times of John Henry Faulk, by Chris Drake (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 15 Angerton Gardens, Newcastle, NE5 2JA, UK), thoroughly examines the life of Texas' own victim of McCarthyism. Faulk was a product of a family who always marched to a different drum, and falling in with J. Frank Dobie at the University of Texas certainly did not make him more conventional. But the funny business of a firm that made money by clearing the accused of alleged communist affiliation—when they themselves were the accusers—tells us how bad things were in the 1950s. Faulk's successful defiance of this racket and fear cost him a career and much more. I remember that John Henry addressed an ETHA luncheon during his later years. Without any doubt, he could present a sermon as well as any preacher whoever rose in a pulpit, glass eye twinkling as he did so. This is a good look at an unusual life from afar.

Did you know that the word “pecan” means “a nut too hard to crack by hand” in the Algonquin language? This and much else about the state's official nut tree awaits you in Jane Manaster's *Pecans: The Story in a Nutshell* (Texas Tech University Press, Box 41037, Lubbock, TX 79409-1037 \$16.95). This

study provides the reader with a history of this nut and everything about its culture and place in our cuisine. My own relationship with pecans is, well personal, dating to the 1940s when I sneaked behind a giant pecan tree in Beaumont to steal a forbidden smoke, to, of course, cracking them one against the other and picking the meat from a handful of chards. Now, I mostly use them to flavor the fruitcake I make each Christmas using Mother's recipe. That one didn't make it into Manaster's concluding chapter of recipes, but you will find good ones for pralines and Texas pecan pie. Good luck with them.

Louisiana Almanac, 2008-2009 Edition, edited by Millburn Calhoun and assistance from Bernie McGovern (Pelican Publishing Company, 1000 Burmaster St., Gretna, LA 70053 \$16.95), will remind you of our own *Texas Almanac*, published by Bclo since 1857. *Louisiana Almanac* is a compendium of just about anything pertaining to Louisiana you are likely to want to know. Sample sections include a General Information portion, followed by Touring and Recreation, Fairs and Festivals, Water Resources, Wildlife, Education, Law, and about twenty other topics. Testifying its significance in the state, New Orleans enjoyed a section all its own. *Louisiana Almanac* contains just about everything an East Texan would want to know about Louisiana except the exact location of all the gaming boats.

While on the subject of neighbors, consider *Call Me Coach: A Life In College Football*, by Paul F. Dietzel (LSU Press, 3990 W Lakeshore Dr, Baton Rouge, LA 70808-4684 \$34.95). Dietzel coached the LSU Tigers football team to a national championship—the school's first—in 1958; shortly thereafter he moved to West Point and then to other schools. The fact that LSU's Press published his autobiography testifies to the significant role the school played in Dietzel's career, and *vice versa*. Dietzel's White, Go, and especially Chinese Bandit units were nationally famous in the era before platoon substitutions enabled players to play only offence or defense. College teams had to play both in Dietzel's time, and his teams did so better than most. Dietzel also writes of Billy Cannon's punt reception that won the game against Ole Miss in 1959, something still celebrated in Baton Rouge each fall after a half century. *Call Me Coach* tells the whole story of Dietzel's life—so far—but his tenure at LSU is the best part for Tigers.

Finally, *Beyond Myths and Legends: A Narrative History of Texas*, by Kenneth W. Howell, Keith J. Volanto, James M. Smallwood, Charles Gear, and Jennifer S. Lawrence (Abigail Press, 2050 Middleton Dr., Wheaton, IL 60187), brings together the talents of several members of ETHA, including board members and officers, to produce a 650+ page, complete history of Texas. *Beyond Myths and Legends* is intended for textbook use, but its narrative may be enjoyed by the general reader as well. An interesting feature is that each chapter concludes with a "test"—an examination based on the material just presented. Questions include standard identification, multiple choice, and matching exercises, plus several essay questions, with lined pages provided for responses. Each chapter also contains a lengthy bibliography. Chapters on Texas' recent past are especially interesting.