BOOK REVIEWS


Jimmy L. Bryan, Jr., has provided us with an interesting and enjoyably readable biography of one of Texas' more curious characters, Walter P. Lane. As the title indicates, throughout his life Lane was a zealous man who sought adventure in the Texas Revolution, the Mexican–American War, the California Gold Rush, and ultimately the Civil War. As if that list were not enough, the author points out that Lane found time to get involved in the tumultuous politics of Reconstruction in his adopted hometown of Marshall, and later write his famous Adventures and Recollections of General Walter P. Lane in the 1880s.

What kind of man could lead such a life? Bryan argues that Lane represented the classic romantic adventurer, always restless with the mundane existence, which most people of his class led. Born in Ohio, the young Lane soon succumbed to the call of adventure and enlisted in the Texas army, serving honorably at San Jacinto. After 1836, Lane made several attempts to settle down and go into the grocery business with his brother in East Texas, but these attempts all proved fleeting.

Bryan uses the latest arguments about gender and masculinity to portray Lane as a man who preferred danger to safety and manly camaraderie over the domesticity of marriage. Each time a new opportunity for adventure arose, whether it was the Gold Rush or the Civil War, Lane quickly abandoned his home in Marshall and set out for a new adventure. In the end, his life represented a series of adventures with no real feminine influence other than his niece, who kept house for him.

This book is an excellent biography of an intriguing character from Texas' frontier past. Read in conjunction with Lane's own Adventures and Recollections, Bryan's work should provide both the scholar and the Texas History buff a solid grounding in the life of Walter P. Lane.

Charles Waite
University of Texas-Pan American


In Confederate Struggle for Command, Alexander Mendoza integrates the unhappy adventures General James Longstreet and his First Corps, experienced in eastern Tennessee and western Virginia in 1863-64, with the peculiar military and personnel problems the Confederates faced in the region. Mendoza admits that Longstreet made his share of mistakes that winter, but
argues that most of them resulted from the difficult circumstances in which he was placed. A lack of resources, difficult terrain, and, most importantly, Longstreet's inability to cope with the toxic command structure out west all contributed to his defeats in front of Chattanooga and Knoxville. Such problems, Mendoza insists, should not however detract from Longstreet's accomplishments at the Battle of Chickamauga and elsewhere.

Mendoza recognizes the importance that personalities played in the Confederate war effort. Longstreet's bluntness, outspokenness, and stubbornness embroiled him in the innumerable personnel disputes that plagued General Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee. Mendoza breaks no new ground in detailing Longstreet's role in undermining Bragg's authority, or in attributing Longstreet's ability to maintain his command to his prestige and reputation. On the other hand, Mendoza offers fresh insight into Longstreet's disputes with First Corps' subordinates such as Lafayette McLaws and Evander Law. Mendoza explains that such quarrels played a role in some of Longstreet's military woes that winter.

Mendoza is upfront and honest about his pro Longstreet biases, but he occasionally undermines his credibility by placing Longstreet in the best possible light based on minimal documentary evidence. He also gives Longstreet more credit for his strategic acumen than is warranted. Even so, Mendoza helps counterbalance generations of anti-Longstreet literature based as much on the general's controversial postwar opinions and positions as on his military record. As such, Confederate Struggle for Command is a welcome and well-researched addition to Civil War historiography.

Stephen Taaffe
Stephen F. Austin State University


During the last election, presidential candidate Barak Obama attempted to draw numerous parallels between himself and Abraham Lincoln. This strategy continued after the election, and included a special train ride to reinforce the political imagery. Symonds' Lincoln and His Admirals is an excellent book for readers interested in the Civil War, naval history, or the presidency of Abraham Lincoln. The attempts by President Obama to emphasize the parallels between himself and Lincoln make reading the book even timelier.

Symonds moves the reader from the beginning of Lincoln's presidency, when he openly admitted that he knew "little about ships", through the end of the War. The reader will enjoy the opportunity to see inside the early meetings of Lincoln and the men who ran the United States Navy of the day. They will further enjoy seeing Lincoln mature in his understanding of the complex bureaucracy, steeped in naval tradition, and develop a command of the men who previously took unbridled advantage of his lack of experience as a chief executive.
Readers will be reminded of the many stories about Lincoln, from his reluctance to enter the War, to his attempts to shorten the struggle through negotiation, and his passion for preserving the Union. These aspects may be enlightening to some readers, who may be less familiar with Lincoln's transformation into an astute naval strategist, as well as his successful direction of the amphibious assaults that led to the capture of Norfolk.

Symonds' work provides a needed insight into an aspect of the Lincoln presidency that is little explored and into the operations of the Navy during the Civil War. Readers may find it amusing when they identify traits in Lincoln's early presidency that remind them of modern concerns expressed by many about President Obama's lack of executive experience.

George R. Franks, Jr.
Stephen F. Austin State University


During the Reconstruction Era in Texas, personal quarrels between factions and families made portions of Texas lawless and sometimes dangerous. Federal commanders supplanted the traditional civil authority across the South by placing their own handpicked men to head these vacant civil positions. In the wake of this abrupt change of power, the perception of justice was undermined and the law fell into the hands of civilians, sometimes at the expense of the innocent.

Chuck Parsons in this book vividly narrates the deadliest and longest lasting civil conflict in the state of Texas, the Sutton-Taylor feud. The Suttons and the Taylors made up more than two nuclear families; the conflict involved hundreds of different people ranging from total involvement to little or none at all. The Suttons and the Taylors were both victims and aggressors in a vicious cycle of violence and revenge. For several years, the state—namely the executive power—remained out of the picture and let the feud turn regional across the Gulf Coast and central parts of Texas. The lack of action by the state led to great problems for the Texas Rangers, who later intervened to help bring order to the chaos while already stretched thin in this region. This feud proved so deadly that not even the law was safe from the treacheries committed.

Parsons writes a comprehensive account of Texas' most deadly feud by constructing an unbiased approach of the events that happened during the late 1860s and 1870s. He examines the different factions through numerous confrontations and takes the reader a step further, by giving insight from various accounts from parties involved in the conflict. Parsons no doubt tells a brilliant account of this historic, yet deadly time in Texas history.

Mike Godfrey
Katy, Texas
Bill Neal, as a public speaker or private conversationalist, is a master storyteller, clever, folksy, and humorous—and always thought provoking. As an author he brings these same qualities to his books. He grew up on a West Texas ranch, and after pursuing the study of law he spent twenty years as a prosecutor, then twenty more as a defense attorney. By the time Neal retired from the legal profession, he had compiled a rich fund of knowledge about cowboy homicide cases, as well as a deep understanding of courtroom tactics and the criminal mind.

His award-winning first book, Getting Away with Murder on the Texas Frontier, was an insightful romp through a series of sensational shootouts and celebrated trials of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His second effort, From Guns to Gavels: How Justice Grew up in the Outlaw West, is even better.

From Guns to Gavels deals with the same time period, but the violent episodes and participants and trials are connected. The central character is Tom Ross, who came to the Texas frontier as an adventurous teenager during the 1880s. During the next four decades Ross (who used aliases for long periods of time) drifted in and out of outlawry, acquired a cattle ranch and a family, engaged in deadly gunplay, and was the subject of important legal action.

Related individuals and events include the 1893 gunfight in Quanah between famed Texas Ranger Captain Bill McDonald and Sheriff J.P. Matthews; the 1895-96 crime spree led by the vicious fugitive Red Buck Weightman; the 1896 bank robbery and lynching in Wichita Falls; the 1912 murder in Paducah committed by millionaire cattle king Burk Burnett and his bodyguard, Tom Pickett; and the audacious 1923 assassination in Seminole of stock detectives Dave Allison and H. L. Roberson. The trials involving these and associated incidents introduce a host of colorful lawyers and courageous judges. Neal carefully, and with revealing insight, develops the theme of his book: “A transition from no law to Winchester law to Lynch law to court-administered law was a bloody trail that progressed, haltingly and painfully, from guns to gavels” [p. 278].

From Guns to Gavels is an exceptional contribution to the field of outlaw and lawman history, culminating in thoughtful conclusions about the rule of law and preservation of civil liberties in today’s age of terrorism and growing domestic power by the federal government.

Bill O’Neal
Carthage, Texas

Originally published in 1989, Watt Matthews of Lambshead has won several awards: Best Nonfiction Book by the Southwestern Book Sellers Association, Western Wrangler Award for Best Art Book by the National Cowboy Hall of Fame, Best Art Book by the Rocky Mountain Book Publishers' Association, and a Citation from the San Antonio Conservation Society. Marvelous photographs combined with interesting text chronicle the history of Lambshead Ranch, a sixty-two square mile spread in Throckmorton and Shackleford Counties, operated by Watkins "Watt" Reynolds Matthews. Born in 1899, Watt was the last surviving son of John "Bud" Alexander Matthews and Sallie Reynolds Matthews, and the youngest of nine children. His parents' families began running cattle on untitled land along the Clear Fork of the Brazos River in the 1850's. Bud Matthews first acquired land in the early 1870's, which was the beginning of Lambshead Ranch. Bud and Sallie married in 1876.

Except for four years attending Princeton, Watt spent his entire life at the ranch. He never married, but considered the ranch hands and their families as his family and treated them accordingly. The ranch and its people were his life, but he also took interest in local affairs. He was well known in Albany, the closest town, where he was active in church and served as a director of the bank.

It took Laura Wilson several years to compile the collection of photographs that are the substance of the book, and by the time she was ready to publish in 1989, Watt was ninety years old and going strong. He arose every morning, spent long days handling the business of the ranch, taking occasional catnaps, and often entertained friends and visitors until late in the evening. Watt Matthews died in 1997 at the age of ninety-eight. Directing the affairs of the ranch for many decades, he prided himself on his ability to anticipate and deal with every detail. He was mostly successful, except that he had never chosen a successor.

The brief afterword in the second edition of this masterpiece deals with family efforts to plan the future of the ranch after Watt's death. Watt's family consisted of more than seventy people with diverse interests, and for a time could not decide what to do. Eventually, they agreed to place Matt Matthews, an experienced rancher and great grandson of Watt's parents, in control of the ranch. He began working in 2005, his presence pulling the family together. Many members with little or no direct interest in the cattle business are now involved in the financial and legal aspects of the ranch, and in the preservation of its buildings, furnishings, and historical documents.

Watt Matthews of Lambshead belongs in the library of anyone interested in the rural heritage of Texas. It is a magnificent testament not only to Watt and the people of Lambshead, but to the importance of the cattle industry to the social and economic history of the state.

Kenneth E. Hendrickson, Jr.
Midwestern State University-
Wichita Falls, Texas
Forgotten Fights: Little Known Raids and Skirmishes on the Frontier, 1823 to 1890
Gregory F. Michno and Susan J. Michno (Mountain Press Publishing Company, P.O. Box 2399, Missoula, MT 59806), 2008.

Following a design that received accolades in an earlier work, Encyclopedia of Indian Wars: Western Battles and Skirmishes, 1850-1890 (Mountain Press, 2003), the Michnos provide accounts of over three hundred smaller skirmishes and Indian fights across the western half of the country. Eighty-five of those are in Texas, but only two of the fights detailed in the book occurred east of the Trinity River. Works on Indian conflict rarely avoid conclusions about the legitimacy of that part in our nation's history. In this work, the authors steer clear of that pitfall by presenting detailed information from a variety of sources in a chronological and geographic format.

The book's strength is its format, although somewhat of an obstacle for researchers investigating a particular region or timeframe. The fights in Texas can be found using a simple map from the book, but it can be difficult to follow any series of conflicts occurring in a particular area over time. For example, the author's excellent summary on page 321 states that Montague County lost forty-three citizens, killed or captured in 1866 alone. However, Montague County is not indexed; therefore the reader must glean that information from separate accounts. This is a minor obstacle for any diligent reader focused on specific threads of local history. The authors have presented a wealth of information about smaller battles, which will support research with varying goals and interests. It was these smaller battles that most impacted settlers and descendants held hostage by fears of death, injury, or capture. By providing the smallest bits of well-researched information for the reader, any researcher can assemble the data collected as they wish. The collection of information and the outstanding bibliography found here effectively serve as a valuable toolkit for anyone seeking insight through facts.

Gary Pinkerton
Silsbee, Texas

Battles of the Red River War: Archeological Perspectives on the Indian Campaign of 1874
J. Brett Cruse (Texas A&M University Press, 4354 TAMU College Station, TX 77843-4354), 2008.

J. Brett Cruse's book brings together history and archeology, shedding new light on the Red River War of 1874, the event that opened up the Texas Panhandle to increased white settlement. Traditionally, archeology and history have remained separate fields, and rarely did either profession reach out towards the other. Over the last few decades that changed, this book reflects the continuing effort to bridge the divide. Through analyzing artifacts, the
author expands our knowledge of the equipment and tactics used by both sides, by which he sets out to test written accounts of the war. In many cases, the findings confirm written sources, but also contribute levels of detail never before recorded. On occasion, Cruse disproves long held assumptions. For example, based on the distribution of artillery craters and spent cartridges, the author concludes that the first battle of the war, the Battle of Red River, did not take place where previous researchers had assumed.

Early chapters provide a good historical background to the conflict, and subsequent chapters maintain a brief narrative of the conflict's twists and turns. The real contribution of the work, however, is in the detailed discussions of archeological findings. Through more than 150 illustrations, readers can follow the process of historical archeology from initial surveys to artifact recovery, to proper interpretation of items such as munitions, brushes, and buttons. The author also highlights some additional difficulties archeologists face when finding and accessing dig sites on privately held lands. Cruse's writing effectively presents the complexity of his team's findings while remaining refreshingly free of overly technical jargon. This book should appeal to any researcher interested in white-native conflicts, historical archeology, or military technology.

Andrew Lannen
Stephen F. Austin State University

The Fall Of A Black Army Officer: Racism and the Myth of Henry O. Flipper

The Fall Of A Black Army Officer is a concise and notable revision of the trial, court-martial, and expulsion from the United States Army of Henry O. Flipper. Charles Robinson's book is an expanded study of his earlier works on the Flipper court-martial. Robinson, who has written extensively on the military in the American West, challenges the long-held interpretation that Lieutenant Flipper, the first black West Point graduate, suffered from a racially motivated witch hunt at Fort Davis, Texas, in 1881. As a result of this witch hunt, Lt. Flipper lost his commission and claimed that the prejudiced tribunal manufactured charges against him and did not give him a fair trial simply because he was African American.

The embezzlement charges against Lt. Flipper stemmed from missing funds from the camp commissary, while Flipper served as acting assistant quartermaster. Once the financial shortage was discovered, Robinson contends that the army provided a capable defense for Flipper, and that both Flipper and his defense attorney accepted the jury's verdict without challenge. As the trial unfolded, however, Flipper began to rely more heavily upon the premise that the army and his commander, Colonel William Shafter, wanted the young lieutenant out of the army.
While Robinson does not argue against racism in the army, he does present ample evidence that the court-martial of Lt. Flipper was not racially motivated. In fact, Robinson goes to great lengths to provide evidence that race was not a factor in the trial. The not-guilty verdict, on charges of embezzlement, tends to support Robinson’s claim, but Flipper’s subsequent dismissal has raised flags of racism over the years. Innocent of embezzlement, the jury did find Flipper guilty of conduct unbecoming an officer, a charge that cost Flipper his commission.

Flipper’s dismissal was not dishonorable and does not appear to have been conducted with malice. The Fall Of A Black Army Officer is solid study of military justice in the late nineteenth century, but it is also an examination of the myth and legacy of Lieutenant Henry O. Flipper. Well-written and with a thorough use of primary sources, Charles Robinson’s study of the Flipper trial and its impact is an important historical contribution.

Steve Short
Collin College


In Yeoman, Sharecroppers, and Socialists: Plain Folk Protest in Texas, 1870-1914, Kyle G. Wilkison, a professor at Collin College, examines the response to modernity from “plain folks” in the later nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. The book focuses on the rural population of Hunt County, and in a broader sense East Texas. Wilkison argues that the rising tide of a cotton-based economy led to a decline in self-sufficiency and land ownership, a rise in tenancy, and the destruction of a social network based on family and community. In turn, displaced yeomen and sharecroppers registered their discontent through political protest, reaching its numerical peak in the 1890s during the Populist era, and then turning to militancy in the Socialist period of the early twentieth century.

Using over 50 oral interviews and census data, the author provides concrete details of the lives of “plain folks,” from their food and pastimes to their family economy and gender roles. He also reveals the yeoman’s “sense of community; its persistence; its character, divisions, and limits” (p 81). As the changing post Civil War economy strained their livelihood, a significant minority of rural poor people confronted the economic assault upon their communities. The debate centered over “the land question” and the morally correct basis for ownership. As more yeomen became displaced, “theirs was the first generation where the angriest and ablest were unable to simply pull up stakes and head off into the vast West” (p. 209). Without a safety valve, many joined the ranks of the Populists and then agrarian socialism.
Wilkison's book is a welcome addition to a growing body of scholarship documenting the nation's transition from farm to city. While much has been written about the economic decline and rural depopulation, among the strengths of the book is the connection identified between socialist voting and "plain folk" protest. Well researched and written, it should benefit students and scholars interested in social, agricultural, and regional history.

Mary L. Kelley
Lamar University


The discovery of oil in Texas helped define a generation of Texans. More than simply filling the empty pockets of poor men, the oil boom engendered a redefinition of what it meant to be a Texan. Men rose and fell in staggering numbers during the twentieth century—over the sweet, crude liquid gold.

In chronicling the history of oil in Texas, Brian Burrough writes with such a personal intimacy that one suspects he experienced all these events first-hand. His use of personal letters and diaries, business ledgers, newspaper and magazine articles, and government documents opens the mind of oil giants such as Roy Cullen, Sid Richardson, H.L. Hunt, and Clint Murchison— the Big Four. He examines the consequences of the oil discoveries that sparked the boom in East and West Texas, and how the Big Four greatly influenced the outsider image people had of Texans.

Burrough succinctly organizes each chapter into shorter subsections which allow the reader to gain insight about the actions of the Big Four and how they represented a break with continuity indicative of a new emerging class. Such organization creates a smooth, free-flowing read. Burrough's language is plain and easy with the minor exceptions of the technical language used in explaining the oil drilling process. The most notable problem with Burrough's book is the lack of in-text citation. While he covers the sources in a superb manner, Burrough does not properly document quotes in text and the reader is left to wonder which sources the quotes are teamed.

The discovery of oil in Texas had both socioeconomic and political implications. Men and their families were now able to purchase everything they had wanted, including in some cases whole islands, such as Clint Murchison's ranch on Matagorda Island. The spendthrift that Texas oilmen portrayed to those outside the state eventually led to the 1950s-stereotypes where every Texan wears cowboy boots and cowboy hats, and spend enormous amounts of money on frivolous items.

Nathan Copling
Wright City, Missouri

Water, too much, too soon, plays a momentous role in the lives of Texans. The state's thirteen major rivers are fed by more than eleven thousand named streams and countless other creek beds that overflow with the least provocation from sudden downpours. As a result, Texas frequently outranks all other states in annual deaths caused by flash floods.

At fault, claims author Jonathan Burnett in Flash Floods in Texas, are features of the landscape, especially the Balcones Escarpment and Edwards Plateau, as well as location, where northern cold fronts collide with warm Gulf moisture. Also at play is a lack of effective flood control and plain good judgment. In documenting major historic Texas floods, Burnett seeks to raise awareness of the destructive power of water in hopes that such information may inspire change and caution. Burnett, a semiconductor engineer and a student of geography, consulted experts in flood studies, hydrology, and weather. His research also includes historic photographs, newspapers, journals, and manuscripts, published and unpublished.

Burnett succeeds in bringing together, in one unique and accessible place, an instructive and visually appealing history of Texas's flash floods over a century in time. The chapters, arranged chronologically, highlight twenty-eight months between April 1900 and July 2002 that witnessed some of the state's most catastrophic flood events. Supporting each account are charts of rainfall amounts contributing to the overflow and maps of the affected river basins. Amazing photographs and eyewitness stories add human interest to the factual data. Chapters on the flood of downtown Houston in December 1935; the deluge of north Dallas in May 1966; and the Houston flood caused by Tropical Storm Allison in June 2001, cover events relative to East Texas. To complete the history, Burnett furnishes an appendix describing the causes and outcomes of 119 Texas floods, many in East Texas, covering a broad period from 1819 to 2006.

Lois E. Myers
Baylor University


Patsy Light's thoroughly researched, beautifully written, and lavishly illustrated work on trabajo rústico craftsman Dionicio Rodríguez (1891–1955) provides a small bonanza for the literature of Texas art and twentieth century history. And for anyone who has seen and touched this master's "faux bois" works—bridges and benches as "wood and bark" imitated in reinforced concrete with fantastic detail and color—Light's documentation answers many questions such as "who?" and "how?" She also provides succinct guidance for anyone who wonders "where?"
Rodríguez came to Texas from his central Mexico origins in 1924, bringing the skills of an accomplished brick mason plus his secrets of cement mixtures and coloring. With these skills, he combined observation of nature's textures and hues, dexterity through special tools, and choreographed timing to complete each final object just before its cement dried. To see his extensive works in Brackenridge Park in San Antonio and Pugh Memorial Park in North Little Rock, Arkansas, is to wonder, "just how old is this?" To learn of smaller works in Houston, Beaumont, Port Arthur, and perhaps Dallas is to journey through the art and business worlds of the 1920s through 1950s, and to marvel at Rodríguez's accomplishments and mobility.

The author knew of Rodríguez's works since moving to San Antonio in the 1960s. Through a series of encounters with more of his works, particularly in Tennessee and Arkansas, in the 1990s Light set upon an inventory not just of the artist's work but also of his elusive life. With the help of fellow San Antonio historian Maria Watson, and accomplished photographers Bob Parvin and her two daughters, Light assembled the incredible story of Rodríguez, trabajo rústico, and a snapshot of the United States in the boom of the 1920s through the Great Depression and World War II.

James W. Steely
Phoenix, Arizona


In this thoughtful, well-paced study, Melissa Kean has crafted an intricate examination of the various ways in which private universities in the South confronted the issue of mandated desegregation. Focusing on the push to end racial discrimination in admissions at Duke, Emory, Rice, Tulane, and Vanderbilt, Kean has produced an excellent examination of the various twisted contours of the Civil Rights Movement as it impacted higher education. An elite story by design, focused mainly on the administrations of top-tier schools, Kean provides a detailed look at the mechanizations of white administrations desperate to maintain their control regardless of the final verdict on the issue of desegregation. Power, as much as race, defines this story as administrators developed plans to reverse decades of racialized admission standards. Kean does a fine job balancing regional and national concerns in constructing this strongly researched study.

Telling a story that spans a large geographic space, Kean wisely weaves her narrative around a chronological rather than institutional framework. This organizational method helps focus the attention on the larger general shifts that were occurring at private colleges and universities across the South, while lessening possible repetition through school reiteration. This system also under-
scores the general similarities between places such as Houston, Texas; Nashville, Tennessee; and New Orleans, Louisiana as proponents of racial separation and consistently posited segregation (an institution a handful of decades old) as ancient and commonplace as the weather. Kean also shows that the fracturing of the status quo came from a variety of pressures and that the splintering of segregation became manifest as uneasy partnerships based on mutual goals—if not mutual motivations—merged in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Although generally focused on the rocky path toward desegregation made by five universities, some of the strongest parts of the book (fortunately for scholars interested in East Texas) focus on the history of desegregation at Rice University. As with the other schools, Kean had a wealth of administrative records to construct her study, but the Rice sections are unique because of the large collection of student newspapers used to provide balance. These sources help illustrate the ways in which the desegregation issue at Rice was unique. Rice, for example, was one of the only schools in this study that maintained explicit racial language in its charter, which allowed the school’s administration to forestall desegregation. In addition, Rice (at least as presented by Kean) was one of the few schools to have active student voices at odds with the administration. With the sources at her disposal, Kean could have easily formed the Rice sections into their own monograph. As it stands though, this five-prong study goes a long way to illustrate the complexities and ambiguities present in the push to desegregate higher education.

Strongly researched and engagingly written, Melissa Kean has produced an astute study of the fight to reform admissions at a variety of public institutions throughout the South. An invigorating study that should spark debates concerning the push to end desegregation in higher education, Kean’s book is a welcome addition to the growing historiography of race in universities.

Court Carney
Stephen F. Austin State University


Concern for the education of its children has been a consistent theme in the history of Texas from earliest times. Then, as now, education was seen as the means of advancing one’s status and prospects in life. The failure of the Mexican government to establish a public system of education was one of the grievances specifically addressed in the Texas Declaration of Independence and setting aside public lands to fund the establishment of primary schools was among the first acts of the Congress of the Republic of Texas. In *Early Texas Schools: A Photographic History*, Mary Black and Bruce Jordan trace in words and pictures the evolution of Texas’ public schools and the efforts of Texans of all ethnicities to educate their children during the state’s first century of existence. Black, a veteran teacher in Texas public schools and a former
professor at the University of Texas at Austin, and Jordan, an “occasional educator” and documentary photographer, teamed with the University of Texas Press to produce a volume that will be of interest to educators, historians, and anyone who ever attended a school like those shown in the illustrations, some of which have housed schools for over one hundred years.

In thirty-four pages of highly readable text Black briefly but thoroughly, traces the development of Texas schools from the earliest beginnings to the middle of the twentieth century, from one room, multipurpose structures such as the Junction school attended by President Lyndon B. Johnson (p. 2), to the elaborate, Spanish Renaissance style Thomas Jefferson High School in San Antonio (p. 157). The narrative introduces Jordan’s photographs grouped into four geographical sections of East, Central, South, and West Texas. A map preceding the text delineates the counties included in each region. The artistically chosen and composed black and white images compliment the text and depict the state’s early school buildings in various states of preservation, from the stark foundation stones of the Fort Davis post chapel school (p. 194), to an impressive view of the twin towers of the Gothic style main building of Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio (p. 146). Views of abandoned buildings with steps overgrown with weeds, leaves blown into corners of classrooms, and torn curtains hanging forlornly in windows that have long since lost their glass panes evoke a strong sense of sadness. Others, such as those of pressed tin ceilings, old-fashioned back-to-front desks bolted to runners, and playground equipment such as swings, see-saws, slides, and merry-go-rounds, recall memories of school days past for those who attended classes in such buildings.

This volume will be of interest to any educator and should prove a valuable reference for students of the history of education in Texas. An index of the buildings shown in the illustrations is a helpful aid to anyone seeking information on a particular school.

Jimmy Partin
Stephen F. Austin State University

Death Lore: Texas Rituals, Superstitions, and Legends of the Hereafter

“Never take life too seriously; after all, you will never get out alive.” We could all do well in remembering that adage at times, as the introduction of this book establishes, “death is universal and occurs without regard to culture, gender, social status, ethnic background, [or] country of origin...it is the focus of more folklore than anything else” (p. 1). Death is a subject closely familiar to us all. For that reason Kenneth Untiedt devoted an entire book, having compiled an eclectic collection of folklore essays on the subject. Delving tastefully into that which many would consider macabre, the general theme throughout speaks to our shared ideas of mortality, as it relates to Texans.
As a publication of the Texas Folklore Society, the book should be identified thusly as a work of folklore rather than purely history. That being said, *Death Lore: Texas Rituals, Superstitions, and Legends of the Hereafter*, nonetheless presents the reader with an interwoven tapestry of essays on the hereafter, fluctuating between folklore and history. Folklore serves integral to the overall historical meta-narrative, and though tales of folklore may be of questionable veracity, and without references, they may provide us some of the richest aspects of our history. This compilation effectively mingles folklore and history in an informative, enlightening and entertaining manner.

Some essays found within are more historical in nature than others, being that these include source citations, indicating effort put forth by the authors at historical research. These include: “Death Behind the Walls: Rituals, Folktales, and True Stories,” covering the intricacies of death as it occurs within the Prison at Huntsville; “Origins and Celebrations of El Dia de los Muertos,” highlighting traditions among Hispanic Texans of honoring their deceased; “Larger Than Life, Even In Death”, which consists of interesting and ironic tales of some of the colorful characters who have lived and died in Texas; and “The Yellow Flower of Death” by Hortense Warner Ward, which outlines the significance of this symbol, from its roots of human sacrifice to Texas cattle brands.

The diverse essay topics included within this book would appeal to historians, genealogists, sociologists, folklorists, or for that matter any reader. Overall, Untiedt has done superbly approaching such a provocative topic, from authoring the introduction to the selection of essays—each adding their own flavor to the theme. Though themed a darker subject, this book is not only thought provoking and contemplative, but in places also humorous and inspiring.

Chris Elzen
Tyler, Texas