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## Book Notes

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**Book Notes**

BY ARCHIE P. McDONALD

*The East Texas Historical Journal* continues to provide reviews of recently published Texana elsewhere in each issue, plus this column of personal reactions of a curmudgeon and notes on various media of interest to East and other Texans.

A case in point is *The House Will Come To Order: How The Texas Speaker Became a Power in State and National Politics*, by Patrick L. Cox and Michael Phillips (University of Texas Press, Box 7819, Austin, TX 78781-7819, \$40). Cox and Phillips narrate the development of the office through biographies of all the white males who have filled the post of Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives from Reconstruction through 2010—Ira Hobart Evans through Joe Straus—and at the same time trace the evolution of the nature and power of the office itself. Speakers served only one term during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, essentially taking a turn presiding over debates and expecting to return to the ranks during the next session. The office—and the man who held it—gained greater power when Coke Stevenson stretched his tenure to a second term, and later speakers (especially Billy Clayton, Gib Lewis, and Tom Craddick) who served even longer reached the pinnacle of power in Texas politics. Conventional wisdom held that the state constitution, in effect since 1876, so limited the governor's authority that the lieutenant governor actually wielded more power through the legislative process. Cox and Phillips believe that the Speaker of the House has surpassed both in determining the direction of state government. One way or another, I have met most of the speakers since Price Daniel the Elder and liked most of them. I judged Clayton most knowledgeable about the state's budget and affairs, Lewis the most fun to be around, but Craddick the most powerful and partisan. I recommend everyone interested in Texas government read this book; it is the best analysis of our public affairs to appear in some time. I strongly recommend page 181: this is the best explanation of why things are as they are that I have ever seen.

And from across the Capitol comes *How Things Really Work: Lessons from a Life in Politics*, by Bill Hobby with Saralee Tiede (Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas

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at Austin, distributed by Texas A&M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843, \$29.95). Bill Hobby served as Texas' lieutenant governor longer, and some would argue better, than any other individual and is unquestionably qualified to teach civics lessons, although Texans—voters and legislators—may continue to experience lapses in judgment. Hobby observes that we don't need any new laws because we already have criminals in sufficiency and that every dollar invested in education saves hundreds otherwise lost to ignorance and poor health. That is so obvious that one wonders why so many people do not understand it. Hobby's memoir includes introductory remarks by former Governor Dolph Briscoe, Don Carleton, and Tiede as well as a personal account of the public service of his parents, Governor William P. Hobby and Oveta Culp Hobby—first commander of the Women's Army Corps and a cabinet officer in the administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower. In other words, public service is in Hobby's genes as well as his jeans. Herein he confesses mistakes—a rarity in political memoirs—and lets a surprisingly sharp partisan side show through. Those on that same "side" will chuckle while others choke. In a word, this book is "delightful."

*Decision Points*, by George W. Bush (The Crown Publishing Group, A Division of Random House, Inc., 1945 Broadway, New York, NY 10019, \$35), is the inevitable memoir of the forty-third president of the United States. Other than "41," President George H. W. Bush, all recent presidents AND first ladies have provided an apologia—if not the "last word"—about their administrations. President George W. Bush, or "43," gives his take on such decisions as quitting drinking alcohol, running for governor of Texas, not to allow certain stem cell research, response to terrorists' attacks, going to war in Afghanistan and Iraq, response to Hurricane Katrina, and the late term military surge and financial crisis. Former President Bush is as partisan and political in print as he was in office, but here he was able to concede mistakes and shortcomings, something he famously declined while still in office. He is more personal and more human in this post-administration revelation than he ever permitted of himself while still in office. He is also loyal to those who served in his administration, finding little if any fault with their performances. President Bush admits *Decision Points* is just that and not a full memoir. He still generates a visceral response from friend and foe, but this is, at least, his side of these arguments.

And now for a memory: *Private Stock* from a celebrated Texas cooking school and restaurant...the Stockpot etc., by Claire Foster and Betty Hurst (P.O. Box 366, Longview, TX 75606 or info@privatestockcookbook.com). This one takes me back to my dark-hair days when Betty Davis of Longview showed up in my graduate classes. After a semester, Betty figured out a way to bring graduate instruction to Longview: she convinced our administration to offer classes there and fifteen friends enrolled in them. Also she always brought lemon squares to the class until her husband, Charley Davis, accused Betty of “cooking her way through school.” The cooking helped, but then Betty was an All-A kind of girl anyway. Judy and I enjoyed Charley’s and Betty’s hospitality at their home and Cherokee Lake house on many occasions. There we met Claire and Henry Foster and Pat and Brew Houston, and learned of their many civic activities—including catering social events as fundraisers for various causes and their attendance at cooking schools in Europe. I don’t know which husband suggested they get some tax advantage from such trips by starting a restaurant (but it sounds a lot like Charley Davis). Result: the Stockpot, named for an essential in a French kitchen, which provided the finest cuisine in East Texas for a while. Betty, Claire, and Pat brought some of the world’s top chefs to Longview—Julia Childs and Wolfgang Puck head the list—to share their recipes and techniques with the ladies’ friends. Even old history professors got to go to the Stockpot on occasion. Pat is gone now, but Betty and Claire keep Longview a lively place. And, yes, the recipe for lemon bars is included, in case you want a master’s degree—and can write a publishable thesis! Lerner and Loew said it best, “Don’t let it be forgot, that once there was a spot . . . called . . . the Stockpot.”

The best-illustrated book to come our way in quite some time is *Gymnosperms of The United States & Canada* (Bruce Lyndon Cunningham Productions, 180 County Road 8201, Nacogdoches, TX 75964, \$75), by Elray S. Nixon with illustrations by Bruce Lyndon Cunningham. Nixon was a former colleague in SFA’s Department of Biology and the region’s foremost botanist, now retired to Utah, and Cunningham is Nacogdoches’ resident nature artist. Nixon tells the reader/viewer what a gymnosperm is (our pines are in that group), and all about plant identification, names, appropriate terminology, and distribution; Cunningham supplies nearly 200 pages of absolutely breathtaking colored drawings that show how the pine tree looks from

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its needles to cones to a cross section of trunk. I can but fall back on Al Loman's claim that "folks who like this sort of thing will like this sort of thing" because I know most East Texas historians would not know a gymnosperm by that term if they ran into one. But we know pines, and some other trees, too, and nowhere will one find them illustrated any better.

Similarly, but without the color illustrations, is Fred Tarpley's *Wood Eternal: The Story of Osage Orange, Bois D'Arc, Etc.*, (Tarpley Books, 4540 FM 1568, Campbell, TX 75422, \$13). Fred, who previously taught us about Texas place names, East Texas words and sayings, and Jefferson, Texas—especially in his *Jefferson: East Texas Metropolis*, part of the Ann and Lee Lawrence Series—brings now his considerable research and narrative skills to teaching us about the infernal and wonderful hardwood that has blessed and bedeviled generations of East Texans. History and folklore are blended here with Fred's usual skill and success.

While we are growing things, let's look at Cheryl Hazeltine's *Central Texas Gardener*, with photographs by Cheryl and Richard Hazeltine, No. 45 in the Louise Lindsey Merrick Natural History Series (Texas A&M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843, \$24.95). So Central Texas isn't exactly EAST Texas, but we claim some of it anyway. As defined by Hazeltine, Central Texas claims Tarrant and Dallas counties on the north, Bexar County on the south, Brown and Gillespie counties on the west, and Leon and Madison counties on the east. Hey, we have a few members in Dallas, anyway. Much of Hazeltine's advice works anywhere, such as selecting the correct plants for sun or shade, soil type, or other variables. Information extends to gardening tools, design, lawns, trees and shrubs, vines, flowers, and vegetables, and a concluding chapter ominously titled "Trouble in the Garden," which turned out to be about pests, not Original Sin. Wonderful color photographs of plants for all seasons.

*An Extraordinary Year of Ordinary Days* (University of Texas Press, P.O. Box 7819, Austin, TX 78713-7819, \$24.95) is Susan Wittig Albert's journal for 2008, her sixty-ninth on the planet but a year of revelation (the energy crisis), celebration (Barrack Obama's political victory), and contemplation (alternating living in the Texas Hill Country and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of eastern New Mexico). The author says her lifestyle is enabled by writing—so far—seventeen

China Bayles mysteries, juvenile books, and books about women and literature. In addition, she writes a daily journal entry on the events of Her Day—from the ordinary to the extraordinary, and claims no felicity of style for them. On the contrary, most are well written, and reveal an active and inquiring mind. This is an extraordinary book.

*The Lincoln Assassination: Crime and Punishment, Myth and Memory*, edited by Harold Holzer, Craig L. Symonds, and Frank J. Williams (Fordham University Press, 2546 Belmont Ave, University Box L, Bronx, NY 10458, \$27.95), contains essays by Holzer, Williams, Richard Sloan, Thomas P. Lowry, Elizabeth D. Leonard, Thomas R. Turner, Edward Steers, Jr., Michael W. Kauffman, and Richard Nelson. Current exploring of the old, old story of the death of the nation's sixteenth president—the first to die in office by gunfire. This collection brings together the thoughts of some of the nation's leading students of Lincolniana, especially Williams, the scholar/chief justice of Rhode Island's Supreme Court, who has been the leader in this field for more than two decades and served as the ETHA's Max S. Lale Lecturer in September 2001. See especially his chapter titled "The Lincoln Assassination in Law and Lore."

*Hers, His & Theirs: Community Property Law in Spain & Early Texas*, by Jean A. Stuntz, with foreword by Caroline Castillo Crimm and preface by Gordon Morris Bakken (Texas Tech University Press, Box 41037, Lubbock, TX 79409-1037, \$35) tells how things came to be in Texas—from who could kill whom and for what to why what's mama's is mama's and what's yours is mama's, too. At least, that is the way some folks tell it, but Caroline Crimm and Jean Stuntz will set you straight on the roots and branches of Texas' legal system and community property. My cutesy deference to chauvinism aside, this is a serious study of a serious subject, done well.

*The Moodys Of Galveston & Their Mansion*, by Henry Wiencek, with foreword by Robert L. Moody, Sr. and epilogue by E. Douglas McLeod (Texas A&M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843, \$19.95), is Number Thirteen in the Press's Sara and John Lindsey Series in Arts and Humanities and is, as expected and appropriately, celebratory. "Moody" and "Galveston" are synonymous. I have been visiting the city for more than six decades, and no visit leaves undone a drive past Ashton Villa or the Moody Mansion on the boulevard. I was even offered the opportunity to stay there when

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presenting a program in Galveston, but declined; what if I had damaged it in some way, even by accident? I did get a personal tour from then curator Pat Butler, and have been back since, too, and always marvel at the period opulence of the place. Good coverage of the Moody family, too, especially Mary Moody Northen. My favorite photo in the book appears on page 69—Northen with John Wayne. The Duke is dressed in fedora, dark suit, and white necktie and holds a handkerchief in his hand. Must have been a humid day on The Island.

Finally, the good folks at Plano's Convention and Visitors Bureau sent along a copy of Robert Lawson's *Ben and Me: An Astonishing Life of Benjamin Franklin by His Good Mouse Amos* (Little, Brown & Co, New York and Boston, 1939, reissued 2010, \$6.99), a juvenile biography which loosely follows Franklin's life but attributes his successes to the advice of Amos, a mouse who lived in Franklin's fur cap. It reminds one of Jeff Guinn's *Autobiography of Santa Claus*. Clever, and like Franklin, the "autobiography" does dispense good advice for an orderly life. If you go to Plano, tell the CVB folks thank you.