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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Allie Victoria Tennant and the Visual Arts in Dallas by Light Townsend Cummins. Texas A&M University Press. Contents. Gallery of Photographs. Foreword. Preface. Introduction. Chapters 1-11. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pages: 283. \$35.00

Former State Historian Light Townsend Cummins, respected widely for his scholarship of and enthusiasm for solid Texas history, has produced an important study of Dallas sculptor Allie Victoria Tennant, whose monumental works (quite literally) spanned from the 1920s to the 1950s. It is at once a detailed and valued biography of an important figure in the state's cultural history, and also a biographical study of the Dallas arts community, which historically had such a profound impact on the development of the visual arts in Texas and the Southwest. An even tighter focus within those contexts is the story of the emerging family of twentieth-century Texas women artists who encouraged each other, and subsequent generations, through their achievements, recognition, and perseverance.

Heavily stratified, the central story draws on a wide range of contributing elements ranging from artistic education, philanthropy, and museum philosophy to political influences, women's clubs, and local interpretations of national trends in art. Tennant played a defining role in the development of the American Scene regionalism that began to take center stage in artistic circles beginning in the 1920s and remained *en vogue* through the 1930s and beyond. Even as it eventually began to give way to abstract expressionism in the years following World War II, Tennant remained a stalwart supporter of change, as well as a tireless opponent of artistic censorship. Most of her works have survived the generational trends, however, to remain important landmarks of the state's cultural landscape that are evocative of a particular time and place. Perhaps most notably, perhaps,

is the one featured on the book's cover—*Tejas Warrior*—that has graced the entryway to the Hall of State at Fair Park since the centennial celebration of the 1930s. Her last major public sculpture, which commemorated the philanthropic work of Louis Calder, adorned new facilities at Lufkin's Memorial Hospital in 1957.

Tennant was in many ways an atypical artist of the time— independently wealthy, gregarious, and socially and civically engaged—and her leadership roles in various institutions, associations, clubs, and causes made her a key player in how Dallas came to view its sizable role in the arts. As Cummins noted, she was one of those pivotal individuals who “helped to shape the contours of both the artistic and the civic development of the city,” which in turn transcended its influence regionally. (p. 208) In that vein, Tennant shared the spotlight with countless others, including the well-known Jerry Bywaters and Frank Reaugh, and those like Vivian Aunspaugh and Katherine Lester Crawford, who richly deserve the renewed attention the author provides.

Significantly, Cummins's book is the first offering in the Women in Texas History Series by Texas A&M University Press. Series editors Nancy Baker Jones and Cynthia J. Beeman made an important statement in that regard, and the author delivered a book that not only makes an important contribution to Lone Star cultural history but also sets a high standard for other works to come. *Allie Victoria Tennant and the Visual Arts in Dallas* is a compelling exploration of how one remarkable artist, with great purpose and quiet assurance, helped her communities—both locally and statewide—develop a distinct and enduring sense of place.

Dan K. Utley
Texas State University

Washington On The Brazos: Cradle of the Texas Republic by Richard B. McCaslin. Texas State Historical Association Press. Contents. Preface. Chapters 1-8. Appendix. Notes. Index. Pages: 171. \$15.00

In his admirable study, Richard McCaslin, Professor of History at the University of North Texas, presents a concise but thorough chronicle of Washington, a town located at the confluence of the Brazos and Navasota rivers. In many cases, studies focusing on a single community are written by lay historians, who possess an emotional attachment to their subject. Frequently, such studies are influenced by local lore, misguided interpretations, and limited historical context. Despite these shortcomings, local histories generally are laden with factual data which often proves invaluable to professional historians. Utilizing existing local histories related to Washington on the Brazos, McCaslin provides a balanced and meaningful account of the historic settlement, highlighting its significance in early Texas history.

Every year, hundreds of visitors come to the Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park to experience the birth place of Texas. If these sightseers were honest, they would probably admit to being a little disappointed, especially as they walk the trail that meanders from the back doors of the park headquarters down a steep hill to a platform built overlooking the old Robinson ferry crossing. Their disillusionment is understandable, particularly considering that no original structures remain at the location. The visitors might initially be enthralled by Independence Hall, but their enthusiasm usually fades when they learn that the building is a replica constructed in the late 1960s and not the original hall where delegates signed the Texas Constitution of 1836. Even the oldest structure in the park, a cistern standing in the middle of the field across from the rebuilt hall, will likely leave the most avid Texas history buff disenchanted. For many, the most satisfying aspect of their trip is that they walked the same ground as some of the most famous figures from the state's past, including Sam

Houston, José Antonio Navarro, Lorenzo de Zavala, Thomas J. Rusk, David Crockett, John C. "Jack" Hays, Anson Jones, Asa Hoxey, George C. Childress, and David G. Burnet. At the end of the day, sightseers, especially those who do not take time to visit the park's museum, will leave the site without fully appreciating its historical significance.

Prior to the publication of McCaslin's study, no single volume was readily available to the public highlighting Washington's role in Texas history. Thankfully, this is no longer the case. Following the chronological development of Washington from fledgling frontier community to a bustling settlement and later a noted state landmark, McCaslin fills a void in Texas historiography and presents readers with a vision of the town that cannot be gleaned from visiting the location today. The author traces many of the important aspects of the community's history, reminding his readers that Washington on the Brazos was the birthplace of the Republic of Texas; that it twice served as the capital of the Lone Star Republic; that it was a thriving commercial center in Washington County for three decades following Texas independence; and that it was on par with other fledgling settlements of its day, including Houston and Austin. McCaslin also reveals how a town with such promising origins ultimately failed and was eventually reclaimed by the wilderness from which it sprang. Though many unfortunate incidents led to the historic settlement's demise, key among them were the failure to advance reliable navigation on the Brazos River; the shortsightedness of local leaders, who failed to see the commercial importance of railroads; the impact of divisive politics during the Reconstruction era; and finally, a 1912 fire that ravaged a majority of its buildings.

The final chapter examines the creation of Washington on the Brazos State Park, revealing how modern trends in historical preservation aided in the construction of the replica of Independence Hall. McCaslin does a commendable job of

examining major developments associated with the park's history and provides key insights on individuals involved in the evolution and expansion of the site over time.

Washington On The Brazos will surely become the most popular book published on the historic town, especially among the many visitors to the state park who are interested in gaining a fuller appreciation of the community that once stood along the trail that ends at the old Robinson ferry crossing. Furthermore, because the study is exceptionally researched and places Washington within the broader context of Texas history, scholars should include it in their Texana collection.

Kenneth W. Howell
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Legendary Louisiana Outlaws, The Villains and Heroes of Folk Justice by Keagan Lejeune. LSU Press, 2016. Illustrations. Acknowledgments. Introduction. Chapters 1-7. Notes. Bibliography, Index. Pages: 247. \$38.00

When power is concentrated in the hands of a small minority, people and events can influence society in unwelcomed ways. If citizens do not remain involved in maintaining order, sanctioned behaviors can become disconnected from the law. In response to pressures to change or to social disorder, groups may rise to protect social systems from attack by “outsiders.” Sometimes those very protections backfire and must themselves be rejected and controlled, or put down entirely.

That may sound like a commentary on current events but it is instead a core premise of this book. Written by a past President of the Louisiana Folklore Society, this work focuses on the legend and facts of seven outlaws from Jean Laffite to Bonnie and Clyde. Though it seemed to be yet another repetition of uncorroborated stories that have been repeatedly exaggerated in their retelling, the author takes significant measures to also explore any available research which supports or disputes each legend. By doing so he elevates the work to become an examination of the turbulent times during which these outlaws had their way, as well as a commentary on the extent to which outlaws were embraced and even protected by segments of society. The author also focuses on our modern-day celebrations of these outlaws in the form of festivals and re-creations. Though the acts of murder, thievery, and arson committed by these outlaws are not celebrated per se, the outlaws themselves continue to be somewhat glorified and given at least a nod of understanding.

The author points out the “logic” of the homespun law, that “the enmity one feels for an outside agent of the law always exceeds the hatred one feels for a personal enemy.” One hundred

years ago or more communities were close-knit and protective of their ways. Isolation led to a need to protect these communities from anything or anyone that would disrupt their way of life. Outlaws often started out as a violent or criminal offshoot of those communities, but when allowed excessive power they ultimately met their end.

The way in which the author uses these stories to explain and interpret the concepts of frontier justice is what makes this a book worth reading by historians as well as folklorists.

Gary Pinkerton
Houston