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Bad Company and Burnt Powder: Justice and Injustice in the Old Southwest

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Bad Company and Burnt Powder: Justice and Injustice in the old Southwest, by Bob Alexander. Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2014. Contents.Preface and Acknowledgements.Endnotes. Bibliography.Index.P.456.Hardcover. 32.95.

This work was a pleasant one to review and an easy read. Bob Alexander has used his talent for writing in a manner which held my attention on the subject of Texas law enforcement, for which I have long had a strong interest. Alexander did not over emphasize the exploits of the law enforcement officers he examined or turn the officers into super heroes or idols. He merely recounted some of their day to day activities in a way that proved appealing to this reader.

I felt as I was reading the book that I was being introduced to some lawmen with which I was unfamiliar, a fact that kept me further engaged. When I first picked up the book, I really thought I might read about some of the more infamous names that I already knew. The actions and encounters of their daily jobs were not particularly thrilling but still entertaining because of the skill of the author. Little of what he shared would have made headlines but the information was enlightening to a layman. I believe that lawmen would have labeled it "routine" and I enjoyed the concise reporting manner that Alexander used to record the story. Perhaps he followed the example set by law officers' reports themselves. I was struck by the short concise reports which were filed by the officers and reproduced in the book when they could have filed much longer, more dramatic and detailed accounts which greatly embellished their accomplishments. Alexander does an excellent job of developing the characters and traits of his subjects in a very subtle way.

His choice of words was native to the region and the times and I came across terms that I had heard before but didn't know their exact meaning. One of those terms was "poor farm". Now I had heard my Dad, my wife's granddad and perhaps others use the term and I understood it meant a lack of money. I did not know that there actually were "poor farms" where people were forced to live when all their resources were dried up. I had several "I didn't know that" moments over the home grown sayings that he used in the book.

Alexander recounted stories of lawmen from all over the state. Most of us realize that Texas is a very diverse place and that when traveling, you can encounter many different cultures in the various counties and towns. Because I have traveled extensively in the state for work and pleasure, I often connected with the descriptions he provided about the region in which the story was taking place. I could visualize from his words and storytelling all that I needed to make the story real for me.

The fact that law enforcement as a career is often a family tradition was a recurring theme in the book. Alexander brought up several instances illustrating this was the case. The Aten family is very good example of a family drawn to law enforcement as three brothers became Texas Rangers and actually served together from time to time. Perhaps another familiar cord was struck with me because various of my own family members made law enforcement their work and one, a favorite uncle, made it their life's work. This uncle served for thirty plus years on the Texas Highway Patrol and later as a town marshall in

Anson, Texas, going on to serve as chief of police there. Still as a rule, those family members who only serve a short time still identified with law enforcement as did several in Alexander's book.

As a whole, the book held my attention and was informative. I have read and reviewed other works on notable law officers and their agencies and in my opinion, some other authors have over-burdened their words with names and dates but not enough story. Alexander does not make this error. I enjoyed his work very much.

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