Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Baronial Forts of The Big Bend, by Leavitt Corning, Jr., San Antonio (Trinity University Press), 1967. 126 pages. Illustrations, appendices, and index. $4.00.

Baronial Forts of the Big Bend offers the reader a unique story of the developing Texas west of the Pecos. The Big Bend area of Texas presented many imposing obstacles in the path of settlement. To this rugged country in the mid-nineteenth century came two Anglo-Americans who would make their mark upon this uninviting area. At a time when such authorities as the United States Census and the Texas Almanac claimed that none except Indians lived in the Trans-Pecos area, Ben Leaton and Milton Faver were there building empires resembling the feudal manors of medieval Europe. Feudal characteristics in the empires of these two persons are effectively described by Professor Corning. Each of these men commanded a number of dependents or vassals who owed homage, obedience and labor to their master. Both Leaton and Faver were strong leaders who could control the respect and obedience of these underlings. Each of these “barons” was settled in a well fortified structure which would afford protection for himself, his family and dependents from the ever-present danger of Indian attack. Leaton’s fortification consisted of one large forty-room adobe building which served as home, fort and trading post. Faver established a much more elaborate system with three well situated forts. Both men were able to command an extensive fief of several thousand square miles. These fiefs were practically self-sufficient with items not produced in these forts being obtained through freight and trade with the Indians or Mexican stores across the Rio Grande. Also characteristic of the feudal pattern was the independent manner in which each of these men was able to fill the gap produced by the lack of civil government and to become a law unto himself. While the activities of these two men, as Professor Corning points out, advanced the settlement into the Big Bend country by thirty years, it is the similarities to the medieval baronial system that make the Leaton and Faver stories so unusual.

The significance of these “Baronial Forts” and their “Lords” goes beyond their interesting resemblance to the medieval feudal system. The strategic location of these private forts on the Chihuahua Trail proved the only protection in the Big Bend area for the freight wagons vulnerable to Indian attack in this hostile country. Protection in this dangerous portion of the Chihuahua Trail is a vital part of the economic contribution that this trade route made to commercial centers such as San Antonio and Indianola that were served by the Trail. The Indian threat representing one obstacle to settlement was alleviated by the existence of these private forts. These strong leaders were able to exert considerable control over the Indian population with their strong-arm tactics. The United States Army eventually found these private forts to be convenient stations on their patrols through the area which aided in their efforts to control the Indians. The easing of the Indian problem, along with evidence shown by Leaton and Faver that
farming and ranching could be successful in such a seemingly desolate area, speeded the slow process of settlement in the Trans-Pecos area of Texas. The stories of the Leaton and Faver empires undoubtedly have an important relationship to the local history of Presidio County. However a large measure of the success of Professor Corning’s book is that he does not relegate these subjects exclusively to the narrow field of local history. A broader perspective is given to the contributions of these men, which are convincingly shown to have been important factors in the development of the entire Trans-Pecos area.

There is much to commend this book which represents the first publication of the Trinity University Press. The book has an attractive format and much of the credit for this goes to Syl Caylor who did the skillful interpretative illustrations. This, along with the scholarship, authority and vitality with which Professor Corning writes, produces an appealing addition to printed Texas history. The research is extensive as indicated by the lengthy bibliography. The documentation should satisfy even the most pedantic scholar but at the same time should not stand in the way of the general reader. Appendices and an index have been thoughtfully included.

Paul M. Browning
San Antonio College


The compiler James M. Day, Director of State Archives, states that this useful handbook was conceived in the Spring of 1966. That the project is consummated and in print by the middle of 1967 is certainly a remarkable accomplishment. The handbook reflects an effort to describe the manuscript and archival holdings of every depository in Texas. Mr. Day sent out a questionnaire to “897 county libraries, college and university libraries and historical museums.” Of these, only ninety-five came up with reports reflecting holdings of manuscripts of greater or lesser degree.

The compiler acknowledges that “this survey is only an elementary beginning,” but the reviewer must acknowledge that the presentation is a fine idea and a worthy start. Not the least of the compiler’s troubles, evidently, was the fact that so many institutions (324!) failed to report at all. Mr. Day states that six state-supported colleges and universities failed to respond to the poll, including the University of Texas. This last omission alone, of course, involves holdings of considerable dimensions.

This monograph is Number 5 in a series originating in the Texas State Library. Each title in the series to date appears to be practical and useful for library and research people in the Southwest. Perhaps a more comprehensive guide can be published at a later date.

James L. Nichols
Stephen F. Austin State College

The author of this short biography of Franklin D. Roosevelt was one of the President's best known advisors who was closely associated with the New Deal for a number of years. Rexford Tugwell first joined Governor Roosevelt as an assistant at Albany and came to Washington as one of the original Brains Trust. He served as assistant Secretary of Agriculture from 1933 to 1937 and later was Governor of Puerto Rico. In these several capacities Tugwell enjoyed a personal acquaintance with Roosevelt and had a role in the making of many New Deal policies. In later years, he resumed academic life and taught Political Science at Columbia, the University of Chicago and other institutions.

With this background in mind, it is difficult to determine why Professor Tugwell should write such a book as this. Though it covers the entire span of FDR's life the volume is a brief, superficial account, based only on the most obvious printed sources. Tugwell consistently writes down to his reader, perhaps aiming the book (though neither the author nor the publisher so indicate) at a juvenile or adolescent audience. Throughout the study he speaks of the Thirty-Second President as "Franklin" although it often appears awkward and it is very unlikely that the Brains Truster ever enjoyed such an intimate relationship to the chief executive.

In his effort to simplify the complex issues of the New Deal and the Second World War, Tugwell occasionally oversimplifies and consequently falls into error. For example, in discussing the problems of the New Deal brought about by a continuing budgetary deficit, Tugwell explains the issue in these terms: "When more is paid out than is taken in, governments simply print money to pay for the difference, and, when the number of dollars is increased in relation to the goods and services to be bought, prices rise." (170). In a later chapter in discussing the growing crisis in the Pacific during the spring of 1941, Tugwell summarizes the situation as follows: "...Japan was carrying out the most rapid conquest in all history. The Dutch and British East Indies fell; China was overrun. Would the Philippines be next?" (206). Obviously Professor Tugwell knows better than this but the uninitiated reader is led to completely inaccurate conclusions.

The volume is well-designed and attractively printed. The numerous illustrations depicting FDR at various stages of his career from infancy to just before his death add much to the interest of the study. The prose, especially in the later chapters, marches along smoothly, carrying the reader to the conclusion. But the reviewer regrets that the prominent Brains Truster did not choose to write a really significant work on the New Deal using personal material from his private files. Or, if a frankly juvenile biography was his aim, he should have devoted greater care and candor to its writing. The present volume is not very useful either to the scholar or to the general reader.

Robert S. Maxwell
Stephen F. Austin
State College

The thesis of this reinterpretation of American political history from Colonial times down to the Civil War is that American political instruments, "first projected in the logical years of the Age of Reason in which the republic was born, have ranged from the Constitution to completed party machine and have included various types of behavioral inventions. Only once ... has this machinery failed to provide the stability, which it was designed to ensure." The American political system, including its traditional two-party decentralized features, is "a product of human ingenuity which it took a millennium of experience on both sides of the Atlantic to invent."

Professor Nichols begins by maintaining that the origins of this American political machinery may be traced back to the oldest sources of British history, especially the age-old English practice of electing their executive and the centuries-old practice of electing lawmakers. He then shows how the tradition was transplanted in America, how British political ideas came over to America on the ships with the English migrants. According to Professor Nichols, these immigrants brought with them "an attitude for political improvisation, always in the direction of more independent self-government, which was typical of the American experience." This spirit of improvisation was at work throughout the colonial period and significantly paved the way for the federal experiment that they launched after gaining independence from Britain.

After 1776 down to the mid-1850's the Americans experimented with various forms of factions operating on state and federal levels; but during most of that period it was the state and local factions that were most influential, most stable, most enduring. Two major parties on the national level with continuing existence, national organization, and some national leadership did not emerge until very nearly the advent of the Civil War. This emergent political pattern was "extraconstitutional, extralegal, and unwritten." It was developed "as a series of devices produced more or less spontaneously to meet a felt need."

This book, which is rather more of an extended essay than a scholarly monograph filled with footnotes and myriad of references demonstrates that its author possesses a wide range of information about the period and process about which he has written. He shows himself as a first-rate political historian. Though it is not possible for me to agree with some of his propositions and some of his interpretations of events, nevertheless, his book is a major contribution to its field. I cannot, for example, believe that George Washington played quite so active or so knowledgeable a part in the formation of the republic nor in the formation and direction of early political factions. Nor can I quite accept the proposition that sophisticated ward politics played by Aaron Burr in New York was primarily responsible for the election of Thomas Jefferson to the Presidency in 1800. But these are minor,
almost petty, reservations. On balance this is a work of great value to those interested in political history, the American political process, or the evolution of American government.

J. E. Ericson  
Stephen F. Austin State College

**Big Thicket: Its Heritage.** By Aline House. (Naylor), 1967, $5.95.

Mrs. House's book contains discussions of the early settlement and organization of Hardin County, the Civil War, the lumber industry, the oil industry, hunting activities of early days, and a brief resume of beginning efforts of various groups and individuals to preserve Big Thicket wild life. The binding and the dust jacket of the book are equally attractive, as are the end papers which map Hardin County. (However, Thicket and some other communities were omitted from the map.)

Mrs. House has been an English teacher in Hardin County for many years and is now librarian of Kountze High School. She has dedicated her book to the youth of Hardin County and has interspersed each chapter with an original ballad type verse which will have a special appeal to many youngsters. Being a teacher and lover of young people, she possibly wrote the book with youngsters chiefly in mind, but it will be an interesting addition for the collector of Texana as well as for natives of the area and "Big Thicketeers." There are eight pages of pictures of old timers and their activities, and ten pages containing brief sketches of present day political leaders.

Lois William Parker  
Beaumont, Texas


With the recent appointment of Thurgood Marshall to succeed Justice Tom C. Clark on the United States Supreme Court, there is much speculation that the liberal bent of the Supreme Court for the past three decades has been strengthened for the future. The seventeen chapters of this book contain the story of the 168 day power struggle which ended with the initiation of the present trend of the Court. This study is not a rigorous investigation, but rather is journalistic in nature to appeal more to the observant layman than to the exacting scholar.

The author, a journalist turned free lance writer, sees the 1937 confrontation between the executive and judicial branches of government as a duel between the President and "nine old men"—between liberalism and conservatism. Just as any properly conducted duel includes seconds, this duel included "... all the powers in the United States ..." as seconds. Without losing contact with the central involvement, the author also discusses and documents many of these secondary power struggles. For example, the
author sees former President Herbert Hoover attempting to "...seize the issue as a ticket back to the White House." Many politicians, businessmen, labor unions and farmers would also seek to fulfill personal or group ambitions. Fortunately, some would see in the issue only the good of the nation.

Brief insights into the lives of the important participants are included as each is drawn into the conflict. Background material on each of the Supreme Court Justices is especially enlightening. The author's perception and illumination of conflicting points of view taken by several of the judges before and after becoming members of the Supreme Court gives insight into the effect of separation of powers. The involvement of Congress brings the whole of government into the fray. In fact, the book may be misnamed, since ultimately Congress became more actively involved in the duel than did the Court—a second seemingly did the fighting for one of the principals.

Absent from this volume is an introduction or a statement of the aims, purposes, or intent of the author; thus the reader is left with only a central story to tie the work together. The author is repetitive, i.e., facts are repeated throughout the book as many as four times; and each time the fact is presented as new material. Another weakness, although admitted by the author, is the anonymity of some sources which may cast doubts on the historical value of the book.

The basic value of this study is that one can here see the interplay between the three branches of government that results from our system of separation of powers.

Charles W. Simpson
Stephen F. Austin State College

Memories of Sabine County Texas. By Helen Gomer Schluter. Center (J. B. Sanders), 1967. 121 pp. $4.00.

Goobers, muscadines, wild persimmons, and "swiped" watermelons—these are some of the things recalled in the letters of Robert Austin Gomer which make up the body of the book, Memories of Sabine County Texas, as compiled by his niece, Helen Gomer Schluter.

Memories of Sabine County Texas will not cause any great excitement in historical circles. It was not written for that purpose, but it is unique in its subject matter. The history of Sabine County has long been ignored by historians.

"Uncle Bob" writes very interesting letters from his new home in Oregon. He manages to convey a good bit of the feeling and atmosphere of the rural life of his childhood when he lived near Sabinetown in Sabine County. This life included everything from stories of steamboats and early Texas legends to poltices of antifugestine and Model T Fords.

Gomer's grammar and spelling were never meant to be seen by an English teacher. One might have trouble finding on a map "Polygotch" Creek that
he mentions, but the natives will understand as they have probably never read the sign on the bridge that says "Palo Gaucho" either.

Mrs. Schluter has done a great deal of work in indexing and identifying names and places mentioned in the book. She has also included the genealogical charts of many of the families mentioned.

*Memories of Sabine County Texas* is a book written for the Gomer family primarily but would be of interest to their friends and all those interested in Sabine County.

Priscilla Pratt Machel  
(Mrs. Albert Machel)  
Nacogdoches, Texas


Robert M. Utley is Chief Historian of the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, and President of the Western History Association. The author of two previous books on western military history, *Custer and the Great Controversy* and *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, his *Frontiersmen in Blue* is the second volume in *The Macmillan Wars of the United States* series, under the general editorship of Louis Morton. In a forthcoming volume, Mr. Utley plans to continue the history of the United States Army and the Indians through the years 1866 to 1890.

Thus, in this context, *Frontiersmen in Blue* explores the army's influential role in the westward movement and in "the process of destroying the freedom and way of life of the western Indians." However, the army alone did not conquer the Indians and make the West safe for settlement. Rather it was but one facet of the "largely uncontrolled and uncontrollable movement" that eventually subjugated a wilderness empire and the American Indian.

During the 1840's, the United States enlarged its domain and became a continental nation making necessary a permanent frontier army. Although exploration, mapping, and construction of internal improvements formed a large part of the army's new duties, protection of the frontier population and travel routes from hostile Indians "placed the largest demand on the Army." During these seventeen years, the army planted the United States flag on the Great Plains, in Texas, the Rockies, the Southwest, the Great Basin, and on the Pacific coast; creating a group of regional defense systems and struggling with a new kind of enemy that had mastered the conditions of climate and geography. The accounts of these "achievements and failures" become vividly alive as a result of Mr. Utley's imaginative presentation. For him, the dominant theme of this period of the army's history was not the many failures encountered but that the army "scored as many successes" as it did considering the unique circumstances in which it operated.

Although the "frontiersmen in blue" passed on to its successor an accumulation of wisdom produced by seventeen years of experience with the
western environment and its aboriginal inhabitants, it also bequeathed certain dilemmas "inherent in the nature of the Army's role on the Indian frontier." The increasing reliance on total war produced a moral dilemma within the army because many could not justify warfare that took the lives of women and children. The division of federal authority over Indian affairs created intense bitterness between military and civil arms of the government. The powerful influence of the vested interests influenced policies and courses of action more than the army could. The western population tended to construe the army's presence as a guarantee of absolute protection and to blame the army for every murder or robbery perpetrated by the Indians. Yet, a later army "owed much to the frontiersmen in blue, Regular and Volunteer alike, who confronted the Indians between 1845 and 1865."

Ben G. Smylie
Stephen F. Austin State College