BOOK NOTES

The following are the editor’s rambling observations about recent publications of interest in one way or another to East Texans.

The first is of a different sort from the usual books one finds noted here; it is a tape titled “Voices of Valor: Words of the Civil War” (Texas A&M Press, College Station, TX 77843-4354), listed as Number 34 in the Texas A&M Military History Series, and is narrated by Frank E. Vandiver. Since I can’t read bar codes, I don’t know how much it costs. Frank delivers a narrative of the entire war that is punctuated with readings of quotations from letters, diaries, speeches, and other written sources on the war, including the Gettysburg Address, Lee’s Farewell, Lincoln’s and Davis’ inaugurals, and the Emancipation Proclamation. Best of all is the voice; listening to the tape while traveling up Highway 59 toward home from Houston, I was carried southward and backward to 1959 and a scene in Frank’s den (that’s what we called them before they became “family rooms”) during our days at the Rice Institute when Judy and I gathered ‘round his big brown leather chair to hear him read from Shelby Foote’s recently published *The Civil War: A Narrative*. That voice was created to tell about the American Civil War, and more than three decades have not robbed it of its resonance or romance. Like the fellow said, you have to hear it to believe it.

A second “different” notice is for “Talk Of Texas,” subtitled “A Newsletter for Texans – Homesick and Otherwise,” prepared by Jack McGuire and published by Eakin Press (P.O. Drawer 90159, Austin, TX 78709 $38). Jack is known to all who have followed Texana publishing for the last thirty or more years; he has published books and hundreds of feature articles in newspapers on the subject, and for quite a few of those years headed the Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio, the enduring legacy of Hemisfair. “Talk Of Texas” provides news of goings on in Our State for the expatriated and a review of the same for the Stay-At-Homes who missed something. As I review the Vol. 1, No. 2 issue, it contains items on state finance, business, celebrities, health and medicine, politics, and sports. Make a good gift for that brother off in Oregon.

I began reading Kyle Thompson’s *A Thousand Cups of Rice: Surviving the Death Railway* (Eakin Press, P.O. Drawer 90159, Austin, TX 78709-0159, $19.95) on December 7, Pearl Harbor Day, so his remembrance of the hardships of four years as a prisoner-of-war as a member of the noted “Lost Battalion” of Texas Guardsmen who participated as forced-laborers on Japan’s railroad construction project in Burma and Thailand had a special poignance. Thompson yet has little regard for even subsequent generations of his captors and reading of his treatment makes for sympathetic understanding of his attitude. As one who narrowly survived bouts with malaria, jungle ulcers, and inadequate food...
and shelter, not to mention beating and the whim of captors who held life
and death in their hands, he has a right to a negative opinion of Nippon.
Thompson writes well, but it was Jim Hightower, not Jack, that he helped
defeat in a latter life as a political consultant.

In 1963, the late Ernest Wallace and the late David Vigness, both
friends and mentors to yours truly, published Documents of Texas History,
a collection of 126 documents associated with our state that ranged from
Cabeza de Vaca’s report to Hurricane Carla. Now, George B. Ward and
State House Press (Box 15247, Austin, TX 78761) have issued a second
edition with the previously published documents in tact and added
materials dealing with the assassination of JFK, the LBJ presidency,
Charles Whitman’s violence, Neil Armstrong on the moon, Roe v Wade,
and much more, even Larry McMurtry and Lonesome Dove – pertinent and
important documents of things Texas. Each document has a brief
introductory comment. I have used the original for years; the second
edition is a welcomed replacement.

An interesting, and possibly provocative new book, is Holly Beachley
Brear’s Inherit The Alamo: Myth and Ritual at an American Shrine
(University of Texas Press: Austin, Box 7819, 78713-7819). Brear brings
an anthropologist-sociologist approach to the controversy over the
appropriate interpretation of events at San Antonio de Velaro, better known
as the Alamo. The two sides: the Daughters of the Republic of Texas
emphasis on “the Alamo,” or the battle in 1936; and Hispanics and others
who wish emphasis to be on the mission, or the period of 1718 to 1835.
Modern political aggendas are involved. Brear’s approach is to articulate
what she calls the Texas Creation Myth (essentially the popular version of
Texas revolutionary history espoused by the DRT and most other Anglos),
then the opposite view, and finally analyses everything about the place. It
probably will not please either side completely, but then we all ought to
know what the other side is thinking.