Book Notes
What follows is the editor’s musings on some of the publications sent our way for review. Sometimes this is the only way, the space problem being what it is, to give notice of these books and happenings.

Madge Thomall Roberts has produced the second volume of Houston: The Personal Correspondence: Volume II-1846-1848 (University of North Texas Press, Box 311336, Denton, TX 76203). This one contains letters to and from Houston, March 6, 1836, through August 11, 1848 – or Houston’s early years in the Senate and during the Mexican War. Letters from his wife at home offer insight into the Texas scene while Houston was away. Roberts projects two additional volumes to complete the series. Her Star of Destiny: The Private Life of Sam and Margaret Houston won the Ottis Lock Endowment Award for Best Book in 1993.

William D. Pederson, Byron W. Daynes, and Michael P. Riccards, The New Deal And Public Policy (St. Martin’s Press, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010), is the sixteenth installment in St. Martin’s Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute Series on Diplomatic and Economic History. Bill Pederson, a member of ETHA, teaches at LSU-Shreveport and sponsors symposia on American presidents there. In 1995 the focus was on FDR; the conference drew 119 scholars and one weenie for a retrospective and evaluation of the president’s leadership during the Depression and WWII. Your correspondent was the weenie; he sang some old songs from the period and was accused of being manipulative by an attendee because of an emotional conclusion, the singing of Irving Berlin’s “God Bless America.” To which charge he pled guilty. Much better are the sixteen articles on Roosevelt contained herein.

Speaking of WWII, comes now William J. Weissinger, Jr., Kitoski, Bakaro! Attention Fool! A Crewman of the U.S.S. Houston (Eakin Press, P.O. Drawer 90159, Austin, TX 78709, $17.95). Weissinger was a seaman, second class, aboard the Houston, which was sunk during the Battle of the Java Sea at Sunda Strait on March 1, 1942. Weissinger and 364 others survived but were separated. He and a few additional crew were captured, imprisoned in Java, and set to work on the Death Railway. Weissinger wrote this reminiscence of his war experiences for his grandchildren prior to his death in 1988. It was prepared for publication by his widow, Eunell Weissinger. Contains some interesting illustrations.

A different kind of book on The Big One is Philip D. Beidler’s The Good War’s Greatest Hits: World War II And American Remembering (University of Georgia Press, Athens, Georgia 30602, $29.95). Beidler teaches English (literature) at the University of Alabama, and it shows. This one isn’t about the war: it is about “remembering” the war through various mediums, especially Broadway plays and musicals, books, films, books made into films, and recordings. Examples of the first are “Mister Roberts” and “South Pacific;” the second, Life’s picture book on the war; the third, “The Best Years of our Lives” and “Sands of Iwo Jima;” the fourth. From Here To Eternity and The Naked
And The Dead; the fifth, “Victory At Sea.” These are only examples. Every book or film you have ever heard of is included. The more significant samples in each category are discussed and dissected against an attempt to show us that what our culture remembers about WWII came more from these sources than the event. Maybe so. I liked most of it, especially when some of his favorites turned out to be mine; but I liked less when Beidler turned from the common language to the jargon on literary criticism and tried to tell me what I was supposed to see in these various works. I’ll bet that rascal was just trying to provoke me into thinking about this all over again.

Every community has a history, and now a great many of them are getting their own history book. Association members Joyce Roach, Buck Young, Dale Odom, and Fred McKenzie have written on Keller, Baytown, Denton, and Avinger (and I immodestly impose my modest offering on Nacogdoches), recently. Julia L. Vargo’s McKinney, Texas: The First 150 Years (Donning Company, 184 Business Park Drive, Suite 106, Virginia Beach, VA 23462), joins the parade with this picture/narrative on the seat of Collin County. Vargo is a resident of McKinney, and a well-published one in such venues as D Magazine and Texas Monthly; she was fashion editor for the Dallas Times Herald and writes for the Dallas Morning News. And it has a foreword by Kate Tom Staples Lehrer, a native of McKinney and the wife of newsman and author Jim Lehrer. The text is sparse but the pictures are aplenty, and that is what many of these community histories are all about.

Texas Places, an issue of Cite: The Architecture and Design Review of Houston, came our way and we are not sure why, but grateful. The truly interested can contact Texas A&M Press, who distributed it for the Rice Design Alliance. Grateful, because the first of the thirteen articles here is the transcript of a conversation with Larry McMurtry, with whom I shared many a lunch in Sammy’s, the eatery at what was then the Rice Institute, while a graduate student. The problem is, I can’t remember Larry saying much—anything, really. At the time he was writing Horseman, Pass By (“Hud” in the movies), though we didn’t know it at the time. Perhaps he was thinking of more important things. Also here are articles by John Graves and Stephen Fox (another friend from a State Board of Review tenure), and other knowledgeable folks about this sort of thing. I always enjoy keeping up with Larry.

Speaking of whom, Don Graham, in Giant Country: Essays on Texas (TCU Press, Fort Worth, Texas), includes his essay “Anything For Larry,” among many others. Don claims that Larry is all about money and relates several stories to prove his point: that Larry makes a lot more money than he does. And the point of that is, this is a personal look by one of the leading contemporary Southwestern writers at a variety of topics divided into Places, Pages, Polemics, and Pictures. Each division contains a half-dozen or more essays written during the 1980s and 1990s, from a lofty perch: Don is the J. Frank Dobie Regents Professor of American and English Literature at the University of Texas in Austin. And Larry lives from payday to payday out in Archer City, trying to sell old books and write new ones.
The newest installment in the Texas State Historical Association’s Fred Rider Cotton Popular History Series (TSHA, 2/306 SRH, University of Texas, Austin, TX 78712) is *Dallas, A History of “Big D,”* by Michael V. Hazel, who tells the history of Texas’ second largest city in sixty-five pages and nearly twenty illustrations, including the front page of the *Dallas Times Herald* on November 22, 1963. That day will always shadow “Big D,” but much more is presented there for those who love, hate, or want an overview of Dallas’ history.

We noted earlier the publication of Wanda L. Landrey’s *Boardin’ in the Thicket: Recipes and Reminiscences of Early Big Thicket Boarding Houses* (University of North Texas Press, Box 311336, Denton, Texas, 77203). It has been reissued in paperback, and we are flattered that one of the blurbs on the back cover came from these pages. So we say again, “[Landrey’s] labor of love became a treasure with a mystique that defies description – like the Big Thicket.”

While we are Down South in East Texas, Kenneth Morgan of Jasper sent two books, *Morgan’s East Texas Tales: A Book of Short Stories* (Dogwood Press, Rt. 2, Box 3270, Woodville, Texas 75959), and *Buna Remembered: The Places*, which is volume one in the Buna Remembered series, a project of the Buna Area Writers Association. The first is a collection of essays, stories, and musings about Southeast Texas; the second is about logging camps, businesses, churches, and other “places” of significance in this community, which is located in southernmost Jasper County.

Friend Bob Bowman has produced another handsome book, but not, this time, on sayings and such of East Texans. This volume, *East Texas Calling: The Centennial History Of The Lufkin-Conroe Telephone Exchange* (Best of East Texas Publishers, Box 1647, Lufkin, Texas 75902), is the story of the business begun by Dr. Alexander Denman and attorney Edwin Mantooth in Lufkin 100 years ago. It is now a major communications company that serves much of East Texas beyond Lufkin. Most pages feature boxed illustrations. The book contains a good deal of Lufkin’s history beyond the company, and considerable biographical information on the founders of the business.

Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Fordham University Press, University Box L, Bronx, NY 10458), is the seventh issue in Fordham Press’ The North’s Civil War series. It is divided into three sections, Learning to be Democrats, Thinking as Democrats, and Behaving as Democrats. It is about the becoming of the senior political party in our nation’s system, and therefore important, though its members in East Texas are or evidently are about to be dinosaurs.

Friend A.C. Greene tickled a few and offended many by inclusion or exclusion in his list of the Fifty Best Books on Texas, published initially in *Texas Monthly* in 1980 and as a book by Pressworks Publishing of Dallas in
Texas. Greene has mused some more on the subject and produced *The 50 + Best Books On Texas* (University of North Texas Press, Box 311336, Denton, TX 76203), and added McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* to the list – *Horseman, Pass By* was on the first and remains on the second list. The selections are personal; Greene says he is embarrassed that some book dealers have used his original list as a guide to Southwestern literature. He also disclaims interest in converting anyone who would have included other works or excluded some of these. It is Greene's list, he insists, and he invites dissenters to compose their own. O.K. I'd have put *Travis* on the list, but then I'm biased, since I know the wife of the author so well.

If anyone is still awake, we conclude with *Robert E. Lee Slept Here: Civil War Inns and Destinations—A Guide For The Discerning Traveler* (Balentine Publishing Group, 201 East 50th St., New York, NY 10022), with text and photos by Chuck Lawliss. Since many of us are interested in the The War and also in B&Bs, we include it here. Typical entry: Llewellyn Lodge in Lexington, Virginia. It contains a brief description of the facility and its address (street, FAX, and e.mail), tells you it has six rooms with private baths, is air-conditioned, etc., and rates. Sorry: no children, pets, or smoking.