BOOK NOTES

By Archie P. McDonald

This section takes note of the publication of recent books relating to our area. Sometimes books are so noticed because they attract the editor’s attention, because we fail to receive a review from a reviewer, because we fail to locate an appropriate reviewer for a particular book. We value all books sent to us, and both thank and encourage publishers of Texana, especially general and East Texana, to continue to send us the yield of your labor so we might take notice of it.

We begin with a remarkable little book by James E. Crisp titled *Sleuthing The Alamo: Davy Crockett’s Last Stand and Other Mysteries of the Texas Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 198 Madison Avenue, New York 10016 $20), which is part of Oxford’s New Narratives in American History Series. Crisp has been at the center of Alamo-related historiographical disputes for more than a decade but until now his arguments have been delivered through articles, oral presentations, and media appearances. Crisp begins with an autobiographical account of dealing with racism in his hometown and state, including his years as a student at Rice University. He is the leading contemporary authority on the history of the Alamo despite a teaching career spent in North Carolina, and is a marvelous historical detective. Disputes over the authenticity of Enrique de la Pena’s diary is at the heart of many historiographical arguments about events at the Battle of the Alamo, and Crisp, after decades of research, accepts the diary as creditable. Because I came to that same conclusion many years ago while doing research for a biography of William Barret Travis, naturally I agree with him. But more, this is a well-written book filled with illustrations of how to do analysis of primary sources. Texans need to read this book, but graduate students everywhere could profit from learning its lessons about research.

Monte Jones, *Biscuits O’Bryan: Texas Storyteller* (State House Press, McMurray Station, Box 637, Abilene, TX 79697-0637, $18.95), is the fifth entry in State House’s Texas Heritage Series. Previous publications in the series are by Elmer Kelton, James Bruce Frazier, Dock Dilorow Parramore, and Glenn Dromgoole; the first three feature tales of growing up in West Texas but Dromgoole’s work is based on his experiences in Sour Lake, Texas. Jones is an Episcopal priest who created an alternative character named Biscuits O’Bryan, camp cook for the I.O. Everybody Ranch, for a covered wagon dinner, only to have Biscuits take over his life. Jones’ account assumes the Biscuits character only in the eighteenth, or last chapter, of this collection. The “tall tales” in the first seventeen segments are redeemed by our recollections of similar scrapes and escapades with firecrackers, bicycles, kits, and childhood friends.

Charles Brooks’ annual *Best Editorial Cartoons of the Year, 2005 Edition* (Pelican Publishing Company, 1000 Burmaster St., Gretna, LA 70053) continues a tradition of over two decades. The collection begins with Pulitzer,
Herblock, Scripps-Howard, National Headliner, and Fisschetti awards for political cartoons that usually appear on editorial pages in newspapers. The remainder of the cartoons are arranged into categories that reflect the preponderance of what concerned us in 2004 – the presidential campaign, Iraq and terrorism, the Bush Administration, politics, foreign affairs, media and entertainment, the economy, health and the environment, military affairs, education, society, sports, space and air travel, a miscellany of “other issues,” and a special section on Canada that is best understood by Canadians. One might say that the first five divisions are pretty much the same issue. Some of the cartoons bear biting criticism of the Bush Administration and its policies, others pander to it. And even four years after his presidency ended, poor old Bill Clinton still stars in some critical cartoons. These collections have several values: they identify what was what in a particular when; they draw our approval or disapproval all over again depending on our own political orientation; they bring evidence to the argument that the “vast conspiracy” really is on the right, which controls most media; and that, basically, we all like cartoons.

Michael A. Jenkins, *Playbills and Popcorn: True Tales of Theatre, Tourism and Travel* (Eakin Press: Austin, 2004) is Jenkins’ personal history in show business, especially as manager of Dallas Summer Musicals and president of LARC (Leisure and Recreation Concepts), planners and promoters of over 1,000 theme and amusement parks in approximately thirty-five countries and forty-four of the United States, including 400 or more in Texas. Jenkins manages an international business and a national entertainment enterprise that requires travel all over Texas, the Americas, and what is left of the world. I expect he will be responsible for the first Ferris Wheel on the moon. Naturally, those professions and travels have produced some marvelously interesting and sometimes funny anecdotes, which Jenkins relates in a warm, engaging way. Since I share most of his attitudes and manners about people, I’ll recommend his book to anyone wanting to read something pleasant about a Texan.

A.C. Greene, *Chance Encounters: True Stories of Unforeseen Meetings, with Unanticipated Results* (Bright Sky Press, Albany, Texas and New York, New York, 2002; re-released 2005), is a delightful collection of biographical essays by Old Friend A.C. Greene worked for several newspapers, including dailies in Abilene and Dallas (*Times Herald* and *Morning News*), as entertainments, books, and managing editors, which yielded many of his celebrity meetings, but some, resulted just from A.C. being A.C. A few of the famous folk presented here became life-long friends; others moved through his life only briefly, and I swear the mysterious, unidentified young oil man from Midland who lured A.C. to the Petroleum Club has to have the initials G.W.B. Apart from his two wives, reading these essays lead me to think that A.C. loved Natalie Wood longest and best; and probably Judge T. Whitfield Davison the least. The best part of this is realizing (again) how great a master wordsmith A.C. was. So good, in fact, that I am going to forgive him for writing that FDR ran against Republican Wendell Wilkie for his fourth term in 1944. Wilkie ran in 1940; Roosevelt defeated Thomas E. Dewey in 1944. There, I finally discovered that A.C. was human and not just mortal. R.I.P., Old Friend.
Quotable Texas Women, compiled by Susie Kelly Flatau and Lou Halsell Rodenberger (State House Press, McMurry Station, Box 637, Abilene, TX 79697-0637), is a square book – literally. It measures 6" X 6", and is filled with "sayings" attributed to approximately 250 ladies associated with Texas – they weren’t all born here, in other words, but became important to political, economic, and social Texas. The organization follows the alphabet – what quotable things these notables said about Adventure through Writers & Writings. Flatau and Rodenberger collected these hundreds of statements because “Texas women…have a long tradition of saying things that should be remembered.” I agree. Here are three examples: first, “The first rule of holes: when you’re in one, stop digging” (Molly Ivins); second, “It’s an honor to be the first woman of the Supreme Court, but it will be even better when we get the second cowgirl on the Supreme Court” (Sandra Day O’Connor); and third, “It’s not just enough to swing at the ball. You’ve got to loosen your girdle and let'er fly” (Babe Didrikson Zaharias). Reviewing the yield, it may be concluded that Betty Sue Flowers, director of the LBJ Library, is the most quotable woman in Texas – she tops in this collection with twenty quotations; Barbara Jordan has thirteen, and former Governor Ann Richards has only four.

Marion Stegeman Hodgson, Winning My Wings: A Woman Air Force Service Pilot In World War II (Bright Sky Press, Box 416, Albany, TX 76430) is an autobiographical account of one woman’s service during WWII. Marion Hodgson qualifies for membership in the Greatest Generation. A native of Georgia, she took a preliminary course in flying because it was free. Hooked, when the war began she abandoned a career in stenography to enter the women’s flight service, which was intended to release men pilots from ferrying duties for more martial roles. Hodgson trained at a service field located near Sweetwater, then was stationed at Love Field in Dallas, but she flew all over the United States ferrying new aircraft from factories to duty stations. She tells her story with a narrative that accompanies scores of letters. In the beginning, she wrote monthly to her mother in Athens, Georgia; later most letters were addressed to a Marine pilot from her hometown, Ned Hodgson. They married before the end of the war, and later made their home in Texas. Though Hodgson and other Women Air Force Service Pilots (WASPs) dressed and operated under military discipline, they remained civilians and were denied veteran’s recognition and benefits until the 1970s, which they achieved largely through the efforts of Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona and Congresswoman Lindy Boggs of Louisiana. Boggs also wrote a foreword for Winning My Wings.

A couple of unusual items for noting are 100 Great Things About Texas, compiled by Glenn Dromgoole (State House Press, McMurry Station, Box 637, Abilene, Texas 79697, $6.95), a pocket-sized book that lists one great thing about Texas per page. My favorites are, #16 - “The horned toad, like some other native Texans, puffs itself up to twice its normal size;” #40 - “If you say you’re an Aggie, a Longhorn, a Red Raider, or a Horned Frog, no one has to ask where you went to college;” and for the benefit of my wife and granddaughter, #74 - “The first shopping center in the county was built in
Texas (Highland Park)." If more than ten minutes are required to get through this little book, the reader is stopping to chuckle a great deal.

We also note a Historic Fashions Calendar for 2006 titled *Western Wear, 1850-2000*, designed by Lindsay Starr with introductory addresses by Laurel Wilson and Dennita Sewell (Texas Tech University Press, 2903 4th Street, Lubbock Texas 79409). This is a bonafide calendar which offers something practical, but the real point is to show off Western fashions: January – chaps, boots; February – a fancy show suit, trimmed in red; March – dresses and accessories made of rattlesnake skins; April – leather coats; May – costumes; June – women’s wear; July – hats; August – fringed jackets; September – Native American dress; October – *vaquero* costume; November – beaded wear; and December – “Rhinestone Cowboy.” The calendar is useful, the photos colorful, and the accompanying narrative interesting. I might wear one of the featured hats.

*Aggie Savvy: Practical Wisdom from Texas A&M*, by Glenn Dromgoole (State House Press, Box 637, McMurry Station, Abilene, TX 79697). Dromgoole ('66), adds commentary to over fifty photographs by Dave McDermand, Allan Pearson, Sharon Aeschbach, Glen Johnson, Butch Ireland, Adam Beaugh, Kati Barrett, Jim Lyle, Larry Wadsworth, Dromgoole himself, and items from the Texas A&M Archives. McDermand, who receives credit for the cover photo and nineteen others, contributed the most photographs. Most concentrate on student activities, especially leisure, athletics, and the Aggie marching band, all focusing on that fabled Aggie spirit. Even the opening photo features “HOWDY” on the T-shirts of five Aggies. My old prof Frank Vandiver, who ended up an Aggie despite starting out at the University of Texas and spending a spell at Rice, used to say that there was an Aggie in the heart of every Texas girl. Frank may have gotten that correct. Dromgoole’s introduction is brief but good. Here’s my favorite sentence: “Graduates do not become ex-Aggies after they leave Aggieland but rather ‘former students.’ They are expected to be Aggies the rest of their lives.” And so they are.