BOOK NOTES

By Archie P. McDonald

The *East Texas Historical Journal* publishes reviews of as many works on Texana as possible, with space availability and the ability to locate willing reviewers providing limiting factors. We attempt to provide notices of most other books received, even when the match between book and reviewer proves elusive.

A case in point is Bill Wittliff’s *A Book of Photographs from Lonesome Dove*, with Foreword from Larry McMurtry and Introduction by Stephen Harrigan (University of Texas Press, P.O. Box 7819, Austin, TX 78713-7819, $45). Wittliff was co-executive producer of the CBS miniseries based on McMurtry’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *Lonesome Dove*. The novel was published in 1985 and the television series broadcast four years later, and each is a classic of its genre. As executive producer, Wittliff, a gifted photographer, was on the set daily and so determined from the beginning to document the experience for his own pleasure. The project had an official set photographer who made photos for publicity and documenting the proceedings, so Wittliff’s work, at the time, was personal. Some photos are of scenes in the movie, which Wittliff shot simultaneously with the cinematographers; others show the actors or sets in candid reality. McMurtry’s foreword and Harrigan’s introduction set the tone for the collection and the photos are magnificent, but Wittliff’s anecdotes at the end of the book about the experience of making the movie that captured me most — that, and seeing again why we all fell in love with Laurie Darlin’ in the first place.

*Bob Bullock: God Bless Texas*, by Dave McNeely and Jim Henderson (University of Texas Press, P.O. Box 7819, Austin, TX 78713-7819, $27) is a biography of Texas’ most persistent — and powerful — politician of the last part of the twentieth century by two journalists who reported on his activities for decades. “Persistent,” because he held more offices — legislator, secretary of state, comptroller, and lieutenant governor — and longer than any other. McNeely and Henderson are still “reporting” here. Their coverage overflows with anecdotes about Bullock’s volatile personality, but they also capture his devotion to the improvement of Texas within the boundaries of state politics. Accounts of Bullock’s role in improvements to the state cemetery and construction of the historical museum in Austin are examples. Also cited — frequently — are profane outbursts against friends and employees and foes — including McNeely when Bullock took exception to one of the reporter’s columns. Bullock also had a soft side, so their anecdotes also include many kindnesses. What comes through is Bullock’s devotion to Texas, but many Democrats will never forgive Democrat Bullock for embracing Republican Governor George Bush, which enabled Bush’s success with the Texas legislature on his way to the White House. Still — good book.

*Reel Rangers: Texas Rangers in Movies, TV, Radio & Other Forms of Popular Culture*, by Bill O’Neal (Eakin Press, P.O. Box 21235, Waco, TX 76702, $22.95), sums up its substance in the title. O’Neal could have added “over the last century” to that title because he writes of popular entertainment por-
traits of Texas Rangers by decades, beginning with silent motion pictures produced in the second decade of the twentieth century. Additional chapters address the same subject for subsequent decades with one exception: John Wayne receives a chapter just for himself, though he played only a few Ranger roles, testimony to his long dominance of the Western genre into which most Ranger portraits fall. Generous illustrations, mostly what Show Business calls "stills" of actors in Ranger roles, enliven the book and remind the reader of the appearance of say Clayton Moore as TV’s Lone Ranger, or Robert Duvall as former Ranger Captain Gus McCrae. Chapter endings also presented O’Neal’s judgment of the “best” – movies, actors, TV series, etc. – of a decade, and a summary of real Ranger happenings in that decade. O’Neal enjoys good relations with the Rangers, their official museum in Waco, and with Bobby Neiman, ETHA member who maintains a website on Rangers, so he is the best person to compile, and evaluate, how Texas’ mythical AND real Rangers have been presented in popular culture.

A Letter to America, by David Boren (University of Oklahoma Press, 2800 Venture Dr, Norman, OK 73069, $14.95) expresses concerns of former U.S. senator, governor, and president of the University of Oklahoma about America’s future. Boren begins by relating an experience while serving on the Rhodes Scholarship Selection Committee. He asked finalists for this prestigious award, “How long do you think the United States will be the world’s leading superpower?” According to Boren, all the young scholars, who had responded to difficult academic questions, faltered on this one; most had never entertained the doubt that our country would remain supreme, always. The question poses the opposite, and reflects Boren’s concern that the U.S. is already on that slippery slope. So he wrote this “letter” to Americans, lamenting the intense partisanship of our domestic politics – especially since 1992; campaign corruption, especially the power of money in its process; and dangers inherent in rising deficits and a falling middle class. In the end, Boren cannot answer the question, either, but neither can he let go of the hope that it could still be Morning In America if the nation sheds the philosophy that popularized that slogan. This is a pretty clear statement of opposition to the direction and consequences of the last seven years of American leadership, but not quite an announcement of a return to the political arena.

Sometimes, really pretty books come our way. A case in point is Finding Birds On The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail: Houston, Galveston, & The Upper Texas Coast (Texas A&M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4354, $23) by Ted Lee Eubanks Jr., Robert A Behrstock, and Seth Davidson. This is the part of the Texas coast from which we draw members and likely the part the rest of us visit most often. The authors do not claim this as a field identification guide, but it does include 175 photos of birds and their habitat in full color, plus maps to areas where specific birds most likely can be found. Early chapters provide general information for finding birds, followed by sections on such specific locals as the Bolivar Loop or the Anahuac Loop, with sidebars on finding specific birds. For example, if one wishes to find Prairie Warblers, one is advised to look in “young pine plantations” (p. 45).
If you are a birder and can get to the coast, this is a useful book; if not, you still have all those wonderful pictures.

*Presidential Diversions: Presidents At Play From George Washington to George W. Bush* (Harcourt, Inc., 6277 Sea Harbor Dr, Orlando, FL 33287-6777, $25), by Paul F. Boller Jr., is the latest in his series of works on presidential and congressional personalities. Folks my age remember Harry Truman and Richard Nixon playing piano, FDR and Herbert Hoover and Jimmy Carter fishing, and of course IKE and many others of our age playing golf. We may be surprised to learn of Washington's fondness for dancing, Lincoln's devotion to Shakespeare and the theatre, or that the 300-pound William Howard Taft and LBJ were our best presidential ballroom dancers. Jefferson's, John Adams'. JFK's and Bill Clinton's love of books is well known, and reappreciated here, and Boller also tells us that John Quincy Adams enjoyed swimming in the Potomac River in the buff and sometimes got caught doing so. Boller takes no partisan view of the politics of these forty-three presidents; this is completely about their recreation, PG on the motion picture industry rating scale.

*The Earl of Louisiana*, by A.J. Liebling (Louisiana State University Press, 3990 W Lakeshore Dr, Baton Rouge, LA 70808-4684, $18.95) with foreword by T. Harry Williams and a new introduction by Jonathan Yardley, is not a biography of Earl K. Long, three-time governor of Louisiana and brother of the state's Kingfish, Huey P. Long. What it is, however, is a magnificent literary snapshot of Louisiana in 1960, when Earl Long failed in his bid for a fourth term as governor but succeeded in winning a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives that only a heart attack prevented him from occupying. Liebling came to Louisiana to report on Long's brief and bizarre incapacitation and occupancy of what he called a "nut house," literally psychiatric hospitals in Galveston, Texas, and Mandeville, Louisiana, for *The New Yorker*. *The Earl of Louisiana* is a reworked version of articles prepared for that magazine and retained the flavor of its Big City condescension toward and condemnation of Southern and Louisiana backwardness. Liebling began his investigation of the flamboyant, crude, eccentric, and always interesting Earl of Louisiana, and became something of an admirer. I lived some of 1960 in Louisiana as a doctoral student at LSU; I'd have to say that this Yankee observed well, learned much, and recorded accurately the bizarre state he likened to a Mediterranean country. That fall I stood in the gallery of the capitol that Huey built and watched the legislature attempt to stop racial integration with interposition. Interposition did not work when Thomas Jefferson proposed it in the 1790s and failed again when Jimmie Davis resurrected the tactic in 1960. Some folks never learn.

Don Graham's latest look at movies about Texas, *Slate Fare...an irreverent guide to Texas Movies* (Texas Christian University Press, P.O. Box 298300, Fort Worth, TX 76129-8300, $8.95) is a big bargain in a small book, in fact, the first I have seen in TCU Press' Texas Small Book series, self-advertized as "pocket-sized, illustrated, and priced under $10...to show why we value the customs, events, and places in the Lone Star State." Graham's credentials as Texas' major-
movie-critic-reporter-in-residence date from his *Cowboys and Cadillacs: How Hollywood Looks At Texas* (1983), so we have a good idea of how he looks at Hollywood – which is with a critical and skeptical eye. *State Fare* starts with a short (think even briefer) sketch on movie making in Texas BEFORE commercialization, then provides synopses *a la* Graham for four silent movies, a handful of "B" movies, five major movies that defined Texas and twenty-three "also ran" movies, all focusing on Texas. I agree with Graham's evaluations of most of the thirty-seven films included, which is acceptable to him — "Readers may easily supply their own list, for film, more than any media, is a subjective parlor game. One's dogs are another's thoroughbreds, and so on" (p. 46). Mostly, I liked *Places In The Heart* (1984) more than Don did.

*A Life In the News: Harry Reasoner*, by Douglass K. Daniel (University of Texas Press, P.O. Box 7819, Austin, TX 78713-7819, $29.95), is part of the Focus On American History Series edited by Don Carleton for the Center of American History and the University of Texas. It is about a fellow from Iowa who grew up in Minnesota and lived most of his adult life in New York. This life was important to East Texans because many of them saw his face and heard his voice daily, then weekly, for thirty-five years when he broadcast the news for CBS and ABC networks or on the time-honored television magazine "60 Minutes." Daniel's biography of Reasoner is as good a biography as I have ever read. It is balanced — euphony for telling the story honestly, faults and all. I remember Reasoner's television persona generically, career-long, rather than individual appearances that stand out such as Walter Cronkite telling us that JFK has perished. Reasoner always seemed such a pleasant sort, blessed with hint of a smile even when he wasn't smiling. At least we always thought he was smiling. Said Daniel, "Irony attracted Harry and was prime materials for end pieces [commentaries]. His twinkling eyes and wispy smile probably told people watching him on their television sets that he, too, thought something was ridiculous" (p. 117). Reasoner's rich baritone voice and pleasant, All-American look made him a trusted newsman for millions. I remember Reasoner visiting our campus to deliver a speech and being among those invited to lunch with him while in Nacogdoches. The voice, the face, so familiar, made for an enjoyable experience. Daniel's book kindles memories of days we were both much younger.

Finally, we conclude with *The Race for the 2008 Republican Nomination* and *The Race for the 2008 Democratic Nomination* (Pelican Publishing Company, 1000 Burmaster St., Gretna, LA 70053-2246, $16.95), both by Eric Appleman. These collections, which focus on each party's primaries, are similar to Pelican's annual publication of the best editorial cartoons for each year. The books are divided into units that reflect specific candidates, primaries, or issues pertinent to each party, so they are not identical in organization. Each contains short, explanatory essays between units, but, as always, the cartoons are the point. I am reminded that political cartoonists, like other news folks, must "feed the beast" daily. In an effort to make a point they are sometimes unkind to the persons they characterize, and sometimes they puncture hot air bags nicely. Naturally, one's own political leanings determine that interpretation.