BOOK NOTES FOR SPRING 2010

By
Archie P. McDonald

The East Texas Historical Journal attempts to review or take notice of as many newly published works of Texana, with admitted preference for East Texana, as possible. If received from publishers or authors, each receives a full review if a reviewer can be obtained, and the remainder are noted in this column. Sometimes the editor simply assigns new arrivals to this booknote writer, and sometimes he asks for them. The latter is the case with True West: An Illustrated Guide to the Heyday Of The Western, by Michael Barson (TCU Press, Box 298300, Fort Worth, TX 76129. 2008. $29.95), because of my well-known affection for the very movie and television Westerns that constitute Barson's subject; and because I used to teach a course on the West using John Wayne films to illustrate such themes as transportation and careers ("Stagecoach"), the cattle frontier ("Red River"), and manifest destiny ("The Alamo"). In other words, like Barson, I, too, am a Western nut. So, assuming one nut can evaluate the work of another, I asked Scott for this one. I am pleased that he agreed. Barson's review is divided into chapters on how a native of Massachusetts became interested in the West, to units on early stars in Western film and television, Western literature and music, and even Western comic books and costumes. I took particular interest in Barson's list of most significant Western films. I agree with most of it, but must assume a gremlin made him claim that Wayne played the "wise commander of the post" in "She Wore A Yellow Ribbon" (1949). Wayne played Captain Nathan Brittles, commander of C troop; George O'Brien played the major who commanded the post. One thing is certain: the excellent color reproductions of movie posters, book covers, and such, are magnificent. I strongly recommend True West to all western "nuts."

The gardeners among us will find the photos in Texas Public Gardens, by Elvin McDonald, photography by Kevin Vandivier and Earl Nottingham (Pelican Publishing Company, 1000 Burmaster St., Gretna, LA 70053. 2008. $35.), spectacular. From bluebonnets and Indian paintbrush in snow, to azaleas in Nacogdoches and roses in Tyler, these vivid pictures will interest you in horticulture even if you can't stand dirt under your fingernails. Of course, Texas has bunches of such gardens, and the author and picture takers have visited thirty-three of them. Of
that number, four in Houston and Galveston, a couple in Dallas, plus the Tyler Rose Garden and the Stephen F. Austin Mast Arboretum and Native Plant Center in Nacogdoches, are East Texas' share, though the table of contents mistakenly assigns Harlingen's Hugh Ramsey Nature Trail to Nacogdoches as well. I'm sure David Creech, who runs Stephen F. Austin State University's arboretum and native plant center would be happy to add it to his responsibilities if Harlingen would pay travel expenses. No matter; the illustrations in this special book will make you forget where you are except in these special gardens.

To Save A City: The Berlin Airlift, 1948-1949 (Texas A&M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4354. 2000. $34.95), by Roger G. Miller, recounts the brief but significant effort of American and British airmen, mostly military but some civilian, who flew near 300,000 flights into blockaded Berlin to save that city from starvation. Tensions between Western powers and the USSR after their successful effort to defeat Adolph Hitler's attempt to rule the world focused on a divided Germany, with the United States, England, France, and the USSR each in charge of former Germany homeland, and within the Soviet sector (East Germany), of Berlin, the old capital and Germany's largest city. With Josef Stalin's plan for control of all of Germany in abeyance, the Soviet premier closed down all surface access to Berlin. Western powers responded with the Airlift and placed General William Tunner, who had coordinated Allied efforts to "fly the Hump" in the China-Burma-India Theatre during WWII, in charge. The narrative is heavy on logistical explanations, but humanized by the story of the pilot who parachuted candy to German children, and humorized with cartoons from the Task Force Times, the official newspaper of the Combined Airlift Task Force. One might have to be of a certain age to understand the apprehension of that Cold War time, but modern students of military affairs can learn much here, and marvel, as did my generation, at the determination of President Harry Truman and the compassion of thousands of aviators who risked lives—and some surrendered them—"to save a City" and turn Stalin's tough stand into a major blunder.

Remarkable Plants of Texas: Uncommon Accounts Of Our Common Natives (University of Texas Press, P.O. Box 7819, Austin, TX 78713-7819, 2009. $29.95.) by Matt Warnock Turner claims it differs from previous publications about Texas' native plants in that they are mostly field guides. Turner judged that understandable, since there are over 6,000 species of plants in Texas and the first thing one needs to know is their
names. What makes his *Remarkable Plants of Texas* remarkable, then, is his concentration on less than 100 species and wealth of information far beyond botanical data through the use of archeology, history, folklore, medicine, culinary arts, and other fields. Turner cites, for example, the live oak, which provided not just shade but food, tannin, and ink, but because of its sturdiness, was also a favored material for ship construction. When appropriate, Tanner reports on real or supposed medicinal, psychotropic, or toxic properties, and also, right up front there is a press disclaimer that the book is not meant as guide to such use and “by no means replaces professional medical advice.” The narrative is informative and the pictures of plants are spectacular. East Texans likely will find an interest in: Trees—Pecan, Flowering Dogwood, Loblolly and Longleaf Pine; Shrubs—Yaupon and Sumac; and Herbaceous Plants, Cacti, Grasses, Vines, and Aquatics—Wild Onion, Sunflower, Bluebonnet, Mistletoe, and Wild Grape. I think I have all of those on the place in East Texas where The Bank lets me live.

*Echoes of Glory*, by Robert Flynn (TCU Press, Box 298300, Fort Worth, TX, 76129, 2009. $19.95), is a disturbing but fun fictional look at a factual reality of modern Texas—our gun-loving, Bible-pounding, hero-worshiping, media-dominated, rumor-loving selves. The setting is a made-up county located in central Texas and the protagonists are a genuine hero who doesn't believe he is one and a wannabe hero locked in an election for sheriff, with all the community's self interests and personal lives on the line. Unless one has been involved in political campaigns, one might mistake Flynn's characterization for tall tale or myth; not so, unfortunately. Flynn's story involves an aging sheriff come home a hero, the sole survivor of the town's reserve unit otherwise wiped out in the Korean Conflict. It might has well have been the Alamo. Flynn, being Flynn, can't resist using the town's evangelist to show what's wrong or right (depending on one's view), with modern mega-religion. Like I said, this is fiction, but it hits pretty close to home anyway.

I'm a setup for publications like *Sundays With Ron Rozelle*, by Ron Rozelle (TCU Press, Box 298300, Fort Worth, TX 76129. 2009.), because it is a compilation of his Sunday column in the *Brazosport Facts*. I did the same with my radio commentaries (and would like to do so again). Beyond that, I enjoyed similar collections of the columns of Leon Hale and Lewis Grizzard, and before that of the *Dallas Morning News*' Paul Crume. Rozelles' columns contain more references to literature than the others, which is fitting for a teacher of English, but cover such multiple
topics as a tribute to his father and especially memories of growing up in Oakwood, a small community located in central East Texas. Rozelle is younger than I am, but otherwise many similarities appear in his columns, such as a partiality to John Wayne, fruitcakes, and coffee, to name only three among many. I hope to meet Mr. Rozelle one day to learn of possible other interests we share. Meantime, you will enjoy these columns—none take longer than a few minutes to read and you get to start over ever third page—and it is well worth the effort.

We've all wondered who should be the Mother of Texas if that bachelor Stephen F. Austin is the Father of Texas. Jane Long and Kiamata have their advocates, and with good cause, but after reading Light Townsend Cummins' *Emily Austin of Texas, 1795-1851* (TCU Press, Box 298300, Fort Worth, Texas, 76129. 2009. $27.95), no doubt remains: this daughter of Moses and sister of old Stephen himself, leads the field. Emily Margaret Brown Austin was the child and sister of wanderers, and like her mother, ever conscious of the need for "place" in society, a good education, and a good helping of old fashioned noblese oblige. So father Moses Austin started out in Connecticut, then moved to Virginia and Missouri, and only death kept him from continuing to Texas. Brothers Stephen and Brown took up the cause, and finally sister Emily followed—but not before marrying James Bryan, and when widowed, James Perry. Cummins makes plain that Emily, despite two marriages and eleven children, remained, always, an Austin. Perry reluctantly moved to Texas to please his wife and with her built a prosperous plantation at Peach Point, even if he remained a Missourian at heart. Together, they were also the caretakers of Stephen Austin's legend in Texas during that inevitable dip between his actual life and the lore that sometimes enhances an important person's stature. Emily remained through all of it a Southern aristocrat, and this is no where better illustrated than in this line about fearing a seizure of daughter Eliza while traveling, and why: "I am kept it a state of excitement for fear that she will have a spasm. It would be intolerable for such a thing to happen while we are among strangers." I think my mother would have understood that concept of public behavior. So Emily Margaret Brown Austin Bryan Perry is my candidate for Mother of Texas and Light Townsend Cummins' for Biographer of the Year.

*One Man's Music: The Life And Times Of Texas Songwriter Vince Bell*, by Vince Bell (University of North Texas Press, 1155 Union Circle #311336, Denton, TX 76203-5017. $29.95.), with foreword by Kathleen Hudson, is Volume 3 in the North Texas Lives of Musicians Series. Bell's
writes in stream-of-consciousness mode with irony thrown in. The book of words is accompanied by a CD of Bell's compositions, including “100 Miles from Mexico,” “Pair of Dice,” and “Hard Road.”

Just in time for readers to begin planning for planting time in East Texas, comes What Can I Do With My Herbs? How to Grow, Use & Enjoy These Versatile Plants, by Judy Barrett (Texas A&M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4354. $19.95.), with art by Victor Z. Martin. Barrett's book contains forty brief chapters, each devoted to an herb. Each entry is divided into titled paragraphs that vary according to that particular herb. For example, for dill (Anethum graveolens), contains sections on “Learn About It”—history of the plant; “Grow it,” “Eat it; “Get pretty with it”—basically, crushed dill is good for appearance and health of fingernails; “Soothe with it”—tea made with dill calms colicky babies; “Stay healthy with it”—good source of calcium, fiber, and various minerals; and “Save it”—drying so dill can be used later. And so forth for thirty-nine other herbs that can be grown in Texas. A concluding chapter discusses such additional uses as landscaping with herbs.

Finally, for all those who miss The King—Elvis, of course—comes now The Genuine Elvis: Photos and Untold Stories about the King (Pelican Publishing Company, 1000 Burmaster Street, Gretna, LA 70053. 2008. $14.95), by Ronnie McDowell, Edie Hand, and Jew Meador. This square (6” x 6”) and spare (111 pages) memorial is filled with photos and memories of Elvis—mostly an early Elvis before sequined jumpsuits and doctors and pills. According to reports, McDowell sounds more like Elvis than Elvis when performing songs associated with the King of Rock and Roll; Hand is a relative of Elvis; and Meador is a manager of entertainers and entertainment projects. These, plus a score or more of Elvis' relatives and friends, share memories of their association with him. The most interesting offerings are prints of McDowell's interpretive paintings of Elvis. Anyone who remembers the 1950s will love those paintings.