Between 1826 and 1853, Jean Louis Berlandier participated in several journeys of exploration in what is today the southern half of Texas and northern Mexico. His journals, sketches, maps, statistics, samples, and personal observations have provided scholars of science and history with an indispensable resource detailing the natural history of the lower Rio Grande border region in the decades prior to the admission of Texas into the union.

Born in France but trained in Geneva as a botanist, Berlandier received an invitation in 1826 to travel to Mexico in order to take part in an important expedition into Texas being organized by General Manuel Mier y Terán and Lucas Alamán y Escalada, the Mexican minister of foreign affairs. Like Berlandier, Alamán had studied under Augustin Pyramus de Candolle and Candolle apparently arranged for one former student to assist the other. Berlandier accepted Alamán’s offer, and in the fall of 1826 traveled to Mexico City to join the Mier y Terán expedition (the so-called Comisión de Límites) as a life scientist or biologist.

Over the course of the next two decades, Berlandier “used his pen, pencil, and paintbrush to record his experiences” and very little of the natural world of northern Mexico and southern Texas escaped his notice and examination. (xix) A veritable renaissance man, Berlandier’s background in botany led to extensive experimentation in medicine and research into what plants worked best to cure certain ailments. He was also an amateur zoologist, physicist, astronomer, geologist, meteorologist, hydrologist, and oceanographer. In the latter fields, he developed theories about the movement of rivers and streams as well as impact of the sea and tides on coastal areas. As a member of the Comisión de Límites and other scientific-oriented expeditions, Berlandier met and (more often than not) befriended the various indigenous peoples of southern Texas and northern Mexico. According to author Russell M. Lawton (Bacone College), Berlandier’s primary importance was his ability “to see the natural environment of America when the land was still wilder-
ness, when nature was largely untouched, little altered by human curiosity and industry.” (xxi)

Lawson bases Frontier Naturalist upon Berlandier’s extensive writings and reports housed at Harvard’s Gray Herbarium Library, at Yale’s Collection of Western Americana, and at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. While the general reader may get bogged down in the many detailed discussions of rivers crossings, weather conditions, and plant samples, the author offers several interesting anecdotes (eg. fish dropping from rainclouds during storms, Berlandier’s efforts to train wolves and coyotes) and personal observations about Berlandier’s character and personality to provide color to the travel narrative. The two chapters that offer relatively extensive coverage about Comanches, Kickapoos, and other indigenous peoples were particularly well done. Readers interested in Berlandier’s adventures in east Texas will be disappointed. When the Comisión de Limitas arrived at the Trinity River in May 1828, several of the men in the expedition were so sick that General Terán ordered that they turn around and retreat to San Antonio. “Here ended Berlandier’s pursuit of knowledge of east Texas; he would never return to the region again.” (77)

Thomas A. Britten
University of Texas at Brownsville


Faded Glory is divided into seven eras of Texas military history: the Mexican War, 1846-48; the Indian Wars, 1848-1875; the Civil War, 1861-1865; the Spanish-American War, 1898; the Mexican revolution, 1910-1920; World War I, 1917-1918 and World War II, 1941-1945. The epilogue is “A Call for Preservation” providing a listing of terms and entities to assist historians in the preservation of important historic sites.

An initial glance reveals to the potential reader that this is a high quality publication with color as well as black and white photographs showing views of “then and now” images of the various sites discussed
The reader will further appreciate the authors’ style of writing. It is informative, and the material is presented in a manner the non-historian will easily comprehend, and the professional historian will appreciate.

Each chapter describes various military sites which played a significant role in the seven conflicts in which Texas was an important player or else contributed mightily to the eventual outcome. A few pages provide a survey of the conflict, then the various sites, “chosen using various criteria”; each site represents “a key facet” in Texas military history. These sites range from a relatively minor exchange of gunfire between Mexicans and Americans, to others which contributed to the winning of a world war. Few historians outside Mexican War enthusiasts know any details of Thornton’s Skirmish, that engagement on April 25, 1846 where Capt. Seth Thornton and 62 dragoons were attacked by Mexican troops. The exact location of the skirmish is now lost, but there is a small roadside park on US 281 with a state historical marker informing the traveler that it happened near that spot.

In contrast to this relatively minor incident is a consideration of the USS Texas, which now must be considered unique among Texas military sites. This ship which bears “our” name was begun in April 1911 in Virginia – not Texas - and christened in May 1912. This early 20th century ship with its significant profile and overall design has been altered through the decades and its appearance is now quite different from how it looked originally. Today this site, restored to its World War II appearance, is berthed adjacent to the San Jacinto Battleground State Historical Site.

Between the illustrations and text discussing sites and actions of the Mexican War and the end of World War II are aspects of the Indian Wars, the Civil War, the Spanish American War and the Mexican Revolution which could be interpreted as a preview both in political intent and military technology of the Second World War.

To many readers Faded Glory will be simply a gem of a book to sit back and read for general information as well as enjoying the numerous illustrations (on nearly every page) and maps. To others the work will inspire the reader, such as many East Texas Historical Association members, to check their calendar to determine when to go and visit these sites in person. Whether as an “armchair historian”, content to read about events, or one who feels compelled to walk on the ground where history happened, this is a required book. A challenge may be to visit the lonely
spot where the Battle of Adobe Walls took place, where a handful of buffalo hunters held off a superior number of Comanches intent on destroying them. But that adventure will be balanced in visiting the USS Texas. The authors have provided directions to each of the sites, and perhaps locating Adobe Walls is the most challenging.

It may be a difficult goal to achieve, to visit each of the 29 sites discussed within these flexbound pages, but it would be a worthwhile endeavor and gratifying to accomplish. To accomplish you will see much of the state driving from Brownsville to Stinnett, then from El Paso to Sabine Pass, and points in between. If impossible to visit them all, the book will provide a suitable substitute merely to enjoy and reflect upon the events described.

Chuck Parsons
Luling, Texas


As Laura Lyons McLemore, the contributing author of the final chapter, so eloquently stated, "...false teaching cannot reverse the facts of history" (222). This anthology not only fills the need to correct history by including women, but it serves to show how their roles during the Revolution were no less heroic than the men more commonly associated with the event.

The common stream throughout the book is a focus on how everyday life did not stop while the men were away fighting. Women not only had to tend to the daily activities of domestic chores and child-raising, but they were also handed the tasks the absent men were unable to perform. Many were used to sharing these responsibilities with their spouses, fathers, and brothers, but others had to learn and adapt on the fly. Either way, they had to deal with uncommon situations with limited help.

Aside from also writing a chapter, Mary Scheer brought together seven authors, Lindy Eakin, Jean A. Stuntz, Angela Boswell, Dora Elizondo Guerra, Light Townsend Cummins, Jeffery Dunn, and Laura Lyons McLemore, to produce a book born from a roundtable panel at the Texas State Historical Association’s Annual Meeting in 2010. The result
is a needed, educational, and enjoyable anthology that can be used in a variety of studies – women’s history, that of the Revolution, or early Texas. This book will be equally as attractive to the non-academic world, as it contains all the ingredients in a great book - love, death, turmoil, survival, defeat, and victory.

Due to the nature of each chapter, the reader gains more than a study of the seven month military action of the Revolution. Pre and post-war inclusions make the fighting stage just one period of the overall event, and explain the long term consequences experienced by the many different women who lived in Texas. These additions are important to gain a better perspective of the consequences of the rebellion, and to understand its impact on so many different lives.

The women in this study came from all walks of life. Included were Indians, Tejanas, Anglos, slave and free blacks, Alamo survivors, women in the Runaway Scrape, and women who experienced the final battle at San Jacinto. The final chapter focuses on the contributions of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, the Woman’s Press Association, and other organizations. Because of these women’s dedication, memories of the Revolution, its heroes, the Alamo and convent, and much of the history associated with this turning point in Texas history, were preserved.

Photographs and illustrations compliment the narrative, and an explanation of the book’s intriguing cover, complete the book. The only thing that could have added more substance would have been a few maps, so that the reader could place the succession of events in a geographic setting. The use of some of the same sources in different chapters made some of the information repetitive, but at the same time it highlights the lack of available resources available for this period, and makes the overall work more important.

Scheer’s objective was to fill the need for a study about the effect of the Texas Revolution on the lives of women; she achieved that. The organization flows nicely, and each chapter compliments the next. Because this was the effort of eight authors, the resources used were mostly varied, and effectively supported the arguments of each contributor. Additionally, each of the chapters was highly readable and well written. Women in the Texas Revolution is a long overdue study that will be an asset in the balance of Texas history.

Debbie Liles
University of North Texas

Most Confederate units from Texas all shared similar qualities, but Granbury’s Texas Brigade arguably emerged as the premier fighting force in the Army of Tennessee. Several scholarly works about the unit already exist, yet John R. Lundberg sought to explore and question why in particular Confederate soldiers in the western theater, deprived of battlefield victories and effective leadership, fought for so long? He also addressed the role the common soldier played in the larger Confederate war effort.

Lundberg’s investigation not only offered distinct social demographics about Texas troops, but it also provided detailed insight about how average Texans viewed themselves. He showed that regional dynamics definitely impacted and influenced the psyche of the common soldier. Because of an overwhelming sense of southern narcissism, Texans believed they maintained superior fighting capabilities over Yankees and that the war would be a complete route. Lundberg also explained how religion and the “ole Confederate cause” coalesced to shape rebel attitude, behavior, and future outlook. He maintained the soldiers “consistently saw God as being on their side.” (23)

Lundberg examined the brigade’s evolvement by noting key periods which impacted the unit’s composition and eventual reputation. Take, for instance, the first phase began with the unit’s formation and ended with the capture of the 7th Texas at Fort Donaldson. For the regiments that eventually became Granbury’s Brigade, Lundberg deemed the first phase as the most pivotal moment in the unit’s development. He insisted the initial trials in Arkansas that “helped winnow the ranks down to a hard core of men who remained devoted to their original regiments, officers, and above all the Confederacy” made a significant difference in the unit’s makeup. (52)

Another noteworthy aspect Lundberg attributed to the brigade’s overall morale involved the leadership of Commander Hiram Granbury and Army of Tennessee Major General Patrick Cleburne. Lundberg credited each commander for his ability to motivate embattled troops and convince them to remain steadfast, continue the fight, and stay the duration of the war rather than desert for the home guard. For discouraged
Texans who fought far from home under poor leadership, desertion became a justifiable alternative. As one dissatisfied Texan decreed, "If we could have our camp and field officers and men which is west of the River brought to this Department and be mounted, we would be content over hear." (130-131)

Rebel esteem diminished after Atlanta fell yet the resilience of Granbury’s brigade in the larger Confederate war effort remained strong. Lundberg linked larger than life field commanders Granbury and Cleburne with the effort to keep troops devoted and loyal to the Confederate cause; even when chances for victory looked awfully dim. He related an occasion where Cleburne earned the esteem of the entire Texas Brigade, whose rations had run extremely low, after he confiscated a cache of stolen apples and distributed one to each soldier. (191-197)

Lundberg supported his argument with sound research. He proved Confederate field cadre directly supplied the necessary guidance needed to influence morale and convince common soldiers to stay the cause. Lundberg also showed that religion and the “rebel creed” greatly swayed the core of the unit. After all, at least with Granbury’s Texas Brigade and the Army of Tennessee, devotion to regimental commanders and Confederate nationalism rested on an important principle; keeping diehard soldiers in the ranks of the Confederate Army.

Norris White
Palestine, TX


In the history and lore of South Texas one name rises above all -- King. What Texas history student doesn’t have at least a passing knowledge of Richard King, riverboat captain and father of The King Ranch?

The Ranch had its beginning in 1853 when Richard King established a cow camp on the Santa Gertrudis Creek. By 1881 when the young Corpus Christi lawyer Robert Kleberg was a guest of Captain King the cow camp had grown to half a million acres and Richard King
was known all over Texas.

Robert Kleberg was a member of the law firm of Stayton, Lackey and Kleberg that had been retained in a lawsuit against Richard King. Robert impressed King in the way he handled himself in court. King invited Robert to the Ranch so he could get to know the man who had bested him in court. It was during that five-day visit that Robert met the lovely Alice Gertrudis King, youngest daughter of Captain and Mrs. King and his life was changed in more than one way.

*Letters to Alice* is the correspondence from Robert Justus Kleberg to Alice Gertrudis King that is housed at the Special Collection and Archives Department of the Mary and Jeff Bell Library at Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi. Fortunately for readers interested in the King Ranch history Jane Monday and Francis Vick were approached to edit these letters into a readable book. These two ladies were the perfect choice because Monday and Vick had done extensive research into the King family when doing *Petra's Legacy: The South Texas Ranching Empire of Petra Vela and Mifflin Kenedy*.

Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy had been river boat captains and cotton smugglers together during the Civil War. You cannot study the history of one family without the other. King and Kenedy came to Texas in 1846 and quickly established ties to South Texas. After the war they began acquiring land holdings that continue to this day. In 1881 young attorney Robert Kleberg came against King and Kenedy in court and won. Captain King recognized the talents of Kleberg and invited him to that fateful visit at the Ranch. Not only did Kleberg find a new job but he found a new life. These letters give us a glimpse into Victorian courtship, a very proper way of courting the woman you love. We see how the relationship between Robert and Alice grew but also how his relationship with the King family grew deep roots.

Years later Alice and Robert would both tell their children that it was “love at first sight” at that 1881 meeting. But theirs was not a romance of impulsiveness but a proper slow getting to know each other and their family and friends. The first letter in this cache is dated April 18, 1884, three years after their first meeting and reflects the love between the two. Robert addresses Alice as “My Dear Little Heart.” Kleberg and King became husband and wife on June 17, 1886, after five years of friendship and courtship. Who among us would be willing to wait that long to be married today?

The authors have done excellent service in annotating the letters
with explanations of the various places and people named in Robert’s letters. In addition to looking into the personal lives of these two young people, we gain an understanding of how the King Ranch was developing during those years and the role Robert played in that.

Pat Parsons, Independent Historian
Luling, TX


Disasters have besieged mankind from the beginning of time. The tragic outcome often raises the shattering question, “why?” especially when the victims are children. On March 18, 1937, the East Texas oil-field community of New London confronted disaster in its most painful sense. Minutes before the final afternoon bell, an explosion ripped through the two-storied New London school, leveling the building, and burying hundreds of students and teachers in an enormous pile of wreckage and debris. The likely cause involved a massive build-up of natural gas underneath the school, ignited by a spark in the manual arts shop. The results left a community devastated. The accident claimed over 300 lives, mostly children in the fifth through eleventh grades. Many more were injured. To date, the episode at New London remains the deadliest school disaster in U. S. history. Whether they were child survivors, terrified and desperate parents, rescue workers or journalists covering the episode, what happened at New London haunted those who witnessed it. It was a story most could not bear to repeat for decades. Families moved away from the community to escape painful reminders. Parents repressed unfathomable grief, carrying it with them to the grave.

The silence left an indelible mark. As the years progressed, individuals living within and outside the New London community became increasingly unfamiliar with the tragic events that happened there. However, as the shock of the New London disaster faded over time, survivors recognized the need to reunite with each other and share their stories. Community-sponsored reunions began to take place,
starting with the fortieth anniversary in 1977. At these events, survivors realized that giving voice to their experiences brought emotional relief, healing, and served to legitimate the historical record. More reunions followed, and a degree of closure finally arrived in the small East Texas town.

Bobby Johnson was one of the first to commemorate the tragedy at New London. Although he was an infant in 1937, Johnson grew up in the shadow of the explosion. Johnson’s older brother, Joe Mack, a first grader at the New London school, fatefully escaped death or injury. His father, Harold Johnson, a young oil field worker labored in the rescue effort, his rock-solid faith threatened by the terrible things he saw. By the 1970s, Johnson sought to make his own peace with the disaster and the deep emotional effects it had upon his family. But he also had another objective: to create a narrative that would resonate with contemporary students the same age as those who suddenly lost their lives over seventy-five years ago. Using his skills as both journalist and oral historian, Johnson attended the community reunions, interviewed survivors, conducted extensive historical research, and began to create his own story.

The year 2012 marked the publication of several historical narratives honoring the seventy-fifth anniversary of the New London explosion. They include the meticulously documented, Gone at 3:17 (Potomac Books, 2012) by David Brown and Michael Wereschagin, and Ron Rozelle’s, gripping narrative, My Boys and Girls Are in There (Texas A & M Press, 2012). Johnson’s work, published the same year, is uniquely different. Written in dramatic format, A Texas Tragedy: The New London School Explosion is a two-act play designed for production by school groups and little theater organizations. Inspired by Thornton Wilder’s “Our Town,” Johnson play weaves a variety of personal accounts into a factual tale full of emotion and insight. A cast of over twenty-five characters offers an effective sampling of witnesses to the tragedy at New London, ranging from students and teachers to oil field workers and journalists. The central narrative is provided by the characters of Bonnie and Harry Jones, a young couple closely modeled after Johnson’s own parents. Another lead character, “Preacher,” is used to address a community’s religious search for meaning in the midst of the catastrophe. By assuming the role of playwright, Johnson hoped to keep alive the exceptional history of a community that once fled from its past. In this he has succeeded.

Heather G. Wooten
Kemah, TX

Elliott West can write—superbly. He writes with imagination and intelligence, care and craftsmanship. All of his books are characterized by such literary mastery. The collection of essays offered here is no exception. Not only are the essays engaging and thoughtful, but also they are carefully selected, soundly researched, and gracefully presented. They represent a serious but often surprising and mostly delightful historical read, although, granted, they are occasionally disturbing, as in the “Bison R Us” essay.

The fourteen essays are divided into three parts: Conquest, Families, and Myth. All but four of them have been published previously in books or in such historical journals as the Western Historical Quarterly and Montana: The Magazine of Western History. In terms of time and space they cover much of the American West, from well before Lewis and Clark to a recently renewed interest in western films and from the Mississippi Valley to the Pacific Coast. Non-lineal, they can be read in any order and they represent a cross-section of traditional western topics. That being the case, the gifted author is having fun with the title, a double entendre: Elliott West’s essential work and/or essays that cover essential western topics—or both, if you will.

The essays are modern. That is, in their topics and in their themes and exposition they fall firmly among the best current interpretations of American western history. Women, racial and ethnic minorities, and children are all subject to one or more essays. Some essays treat the West as symbol and myth, some the environment, and one the imperial struggle among Spanish, French, and English-American leaders for control of the Southwest and the Great Plains. There is an essay that represents an extended review of Larry McMurtry’s now classic Lonesome Dove, an essay on western films, one on outlaw Jesse James, and one on transportation and communication.

Each essay is full of mature ideas, and often the essays contain a new twist on a familiar subject, including the first essay, which compares the Lewis and Clark expedition with an expedition in Africa led by Mungo Park, a Scot physician, adventurer, and explorer. In short, the essays are new and fresh, and they demonstrate once again that the history of the American West remains dynamic, vigorous, and important.
In addition, they show clearly that the writing of American western history, at least in this case, remains in able and effective hands.

Paul H. Carlson
Lubbock, Texas