

Book Reviews

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Carpetbaggers, Scalawags and Others. Traylor Russell. The Marion County Historical Survey Committee, Jefferson, Texas, 1973. \$8.50.

Intriguing to those who love local and oral history is Texan Traylor Russell's **Carpetbaggers, Scalawags and Others**. Handsomely bound and printed in a limited first edition, the book is indexed and furnished with a useful bibliography. Most works credited are rare, long out-of-print books with which the reader may have no previous acquaintance. Many of the thirty-six short chapters are as colorful in title as they are in content: "The Diamond Bessie Murder," "The Axe Is a Deadly Weapon," "He Killed the Wrong Person," and "You Ain't Dead Yet."

As these headings suggest, the work is concerned chiefly with violent crimes, and mostly those having been tried in the Courts of Marion County, Texas, over the past century. The author, a former District Attorney serving northeast Texas and past Director of the State Bar, is qualified to write such a book. A small number of the most unusual stories are, indeed, concerned with the Reconstruction **Carpetbaggers** and **Scalawags** of the title; however, the greater number of tales prove to be concerned with **and Others**.

A physical setting and social milieu as lively as this one could hardly have produced dull materials for stories. Created in 1860, Marion County has had its economic and cultural activity centered in its county seat at Jefferson, a steamboat shipping port for northeast Texas since Captain W. W. Withenbury piloted the **Lama** up Cypress Bayou and the Red River from Shreveport. That was 1844, seven years after the river town's founding. Even earlier in the century, desperados escaping into east Texas had given the Jefferson area the sobriquet of "Bad Lands." Violence as a way of life had produced by the 1840s rival clans of vigilantes vying for the enforcement of their own versions of law and order.

With a population peaking around 12,000 in the boom and bust days following the Civil War, Jefferson had become the state's second largest city, recording 226 steamboat arrivals in 1866. In the same year settlers required the shipping of almost 10,000 bushels of bois d'arc seed, one of the area's chief exports, planted for hedge fences on the prairie. Steamboats were plying Caddo Lake and Cypress Bayou with names like **The Swamp Fox** (Revolutionary War General Francis Marion, after whom the county was named), **The Lizzie Hopkins** and **Music**, some vessels carrying up to 6000 bales of cotton. A great many, replete with ornate cabins, luxurious bars, dining facilities, orchestras and dancing, catered to an elite passenger clientele. In their wake came not only the affluent visitors such as the Rothchilds and Jay Gould but also the carpetbaggers, the opportunists and gamblers, with a proliferation of horseracing, cockfighting, and patronizing of saloons like the Lady Gay, Charlie's Palace and the Rosebud with their orchestras and dancing girls. Homegrown pineknobs cooked under pressure pro-

duced the gases that, captured and piped throughout the town, sparked one of the most unusual systems in the nation for gaslighting public streets. Other ingenious Jeffersonians were concocting Texas' first manufactured ice, and then, as some believe, the first brewing and bottling of carbonated soft drinks in the nation. Marion County had produced a pleasure city.

But in 1877 rail magnate Jay Gould, riding in his rented hack and heralded by a hired black brass band, failed to stampede city fathers into making a donation toward bringing the bounties of his Texas and Pacific Railway Company through the town. On checking out of the posh Excelsior House, he is said to have written in the guest book, "This is the end of Jefferson," predicting that bats would become the denizens of its vacant business houses. The late Tex Ritter, a native of nearby Panola, Texas, recalled in an interview he gave me in 1969 that Gould's prediction that grass would grow up in the streets of Jefferson did not prove far wrong. Gould's railroad and progress not only bypassed the prosperous Old South city; Gould was believed to have finaggled the U. S. Corps of Engineers into clearing the mouth of Cypress Bayou at its confluence with the Red River. With dam-like obstructions dredged out, the plug was pulled on Cypress Bayou navigation. Its water level fell eight feet the first year, leaving Jefferson dry and rotting as a steamboat port. Russell writes, "For many years after steamboat traffic had ceased, the decaying hulks of ships could be seen protruding from the surface of the water in Cypress Bayou and Lake Caddo."

Water and wealth may have dried up, but hardly the town's violent ways. There was the county's one legal hanging, the executed — one Thomas Hart — whose "neck God made for other use/ Than strangling by a string," or so ran the folk song growing up around the hanging. Or bluff badman Ab Allen, almost decapitated by discharges from a deputy sheriff's double-barreled shotgun, as unarmed, the drunken man stood and challenged all comers to remove him from the top of a pool table in Kahn's Saloon. Ward Taylor, acquitted of killing a rival publisher in a street shootout, was tried and fined three years before his election as Marion County Sheriff for playing cards in a Jefferson house trafficking in games of chance and "spiritous liquors." As late as 1923, a sheriff and constable killed each other in a street shootout. Gambler Robertson and blacksmith Rose, murdering each other on another Jefferson street are buried side by side, an iron post sunk into each grave and these posts connected by an iron chain. Mariah Smith, whom Wash Chancellor "struck with a smoothing iron on Saturday . . . bled a great deal and went to bed sick on Thursday." The inquest laid the woman's death to old age and natural causes. There is the District Judge who threw out most rape charges unless "blood and hair scattered over an acre of ground" could be produced. "Whenever traps are set and baited with that which the trap in this case was baited," wrote the judge in one of his decisions, "there is no telling who might get caught. The law does not look with favor on entrapments."

Chronicler Russell, the author of a two-volume history of Titus County, Texas, and several other books and articles on Texas history, depreciates himself as historian, referring to his writing as "purely

amateurish and without hope of monetary reward or public acclaim." But the author writes with a relish and flair, producing hardly a dull page.

If the book has a serious flaw, it is one of subjectiveness. Although Russell states that his history "is recorded without known or conspicuous exaggeration or prevarication, and certainly without bias or prejudice to any person . . ." the writer seems unaware of the chief objects of his prejudice. He does admit that he "found it somewhat difficult to present the Yankee soldiers, Carpetbaggers, and Scalawags without scorn, bias, and prejudice." And as he promises, Russell's outsiders come off as villains generally; but the real brunts of the book seem to be its blacks, of whom he writes, "Even to this day, there are probably more Negroes in the county than there are whites." Blacks, he believes, "are rather volatile; and, when aroused, will sometimes react quickly resulting in the commission of crime." Of a black couple who are courting, Russell rhapsodizes — perhaps innocently — in pre-Civil Rights days stereotypes: "Mary was beginning to think about marriage and dreaming of a cabin on the lake, and of having catfish and hush puppies on Saturday for her and Bobby Joe." There are blacks, man and woman, going banjo-eyed at the appearance of danger. ("Those who examined his tracks said that he was really running" or "Sarah stated very vehemently that she did not stay at all, but left in a walk. Some remarked that it was a good bet that it was a running walk.") Step'n' Fetchit cliches will not wear as well in the 1970s as they may have in the twenties. Or this rather obvious scorn for Womens Rights organizations: "The Women's Lib is a rather militant and vocal group, and there are a few Texas laws that really get them to clattering. One of their pet peeves is a penal law that says a husband is justified in killing a man found committing adultery with his wife . . . but does not extend this same right to the wife. Just try this out on one of these liberated women and see the sparks fly."

Even with these not infrequent lapses into cornpone and collards points of view, Russell's **Carpetbaggers, Scalawags and Others** should prove to be a useful, readable book for the many who will not otherwise experience a unique part of the South the historian brings to life.

Kenton: Folklore and Fact: The History of Kenton, Tennessee, in Words and Pictures. Dorothea O. Norton. The Kenton Jaycettes. Kenton, Tennessee: 1972. \$4.00.

Between August 15 and September 15, 1972, the author with the assistance of some of her friends in Kenton, Tennessee, compiled and wrote this centennial book for that northwest Tennessee town located in both Obion and Gibson Counties.

Concluding with sixty-seven pages of historical photographs of the town and its generations from the early 1850s through 1972, Mrs. Norton's work is an interesting guide to the town and its own unique distinctions.

Among the twelve chapters is a treatment of Chickasaw Indian occupation of the area, the earliest white settlement, Kenton's incorporation as a town, its Civil War role and post-war progress. A second chapter is devoted to the town's progress in each decade of this century. Various other chapters outline community services, businesses and institutions. There is a chronological history, for instance, of the public schools of Kenton. Perhaps the most interesting chapter, "Aspects of Life in Earlier Years," gives interviews, newspaper excerpts and scrapbook items fleshing out the personality of the town and its citizens over the years.

Although the book's publication deadline did not allow time for the inclusion of an index or bibliography, Mrs. Norton does credit in her text a number of important books and articles which she found of assistance in compiling and writing this history.

The author, an assistant professor of English on leave from the University of Tennessee at Martin, is presently pursuing graduate studies in speech at Murray State University, Murray, Kentucky.

Kentucky Birds: A Finding Guide. Roger W. Barbour, Clell T. Peterson, Herbert E. Shadowen, A. L. Whitt, Jr. The University of Kentucky Press. Lexington: 1973. 306 pp. \$9.75.

Of the approximately ten million persons in the United States who enjoy birdwatching, a good many either reside in or come to Kentucky to study their subjects. There is good reason, too. Around 275 species are reliably reported in the state, and now here is a book for Kentucky birders everywhere.

This attractive book is indexed and furnished with almost 250 color plates. There are explicit maps, road and trail directions for the best viewing of all species in the state as well as listings of camping and picnicking areas and other accommodations available to those who would like to study Kentucky birds.

The work opens with an introduction of physiographic regions, ranging from the state's lowest elevation (257 feet above sealevel) near Hickman to the Kentucky Appalachians. A discussion of endangered species is followed by a helpful survey of earlier studies published on Kentucky birds and by a brief history of scientific ornithological studies in the state since Audubon.

Herbert E. Shadowen covers central Kentucky species; A. L. Whitt, Jr., the birds of eastern Kentucky. Professor Clell T. Peterson of the Murray State University Department of English is in charge of that portion of the book dealing with the birds of western Kentucky:

East of Kentucky Lake is the Jackson Purchase (2,569 square miles), so called because it is part of the land bought by General Jackson and Governor Shelby from the Chickasaws in 1818. The land is low but rolling, and the loess (wind accumulated dust) soil is cut by meandering creeks and small rivers.

Roger W. Barbour is the writer of the book's first section, "A Guide to Kentucky Birds," a description of Kentucky species. Delbert Rust, coordinator of photography for the project, is to be congratulated on providing the excellent color photography of Kentucky birds in this section of over 100 pages.

The final third of the book is a "Guide to Bird Finding Areas." Purchase areas highlighted include Columbus-Belmont Battlefield State Park, where the reader is advised he can view, among the winter visitors, an occasional bald eagle. The nearby Hickman Bottoms are "almost certainly, the best place to view Fish Crows and Mississippi Kites." The Land Between the Lakes, "220,000 acres of manmade lakes . . . 4000 miles of shoreline," is described as the place to see wild turkeys, Hooded Mergansers, Bald Eagles, Ring-billed Gulls, Cliff Swallows, Great Blue Heron, Mallards and Black Ducks and several species of Tern among the plethora of birds using this area as breeding grounds. A roost of perhaps 100,000 starlings under one of the lake bridges is described as an impressive sight flying across the waters at sunset.

Kentucky Birds is not only a solidly scientific work of ornithology; it is eminently readable and useful to the experienced or neophyte student of Kentucky birds.

Oak Hill. William R. Draffen. Draffenville, Kentucky: Calvert City, Kentucky Lions Club, 1974.

On January 3, 1972, a century after the second incorporation of Calvert City, the author sat down at Oak Hill to write this book about his home and his town. Just the day before, Mr. Draffen had seen his only daughter married in the one hundred and twelve-year-old antebellum mansion. The mansion is a work of excellent craftsmanship. Its appointments and furnishings have shown, with hardly a lapse, the evidence of good taste and gracious living from generation to generation. It is, in fact, these concrete details of architecture, decor, and social events that are among the book's best features. One can feel after this century-plus tour that he has come to know an ageless and well-bred personality, Oak Hill.

Not so with the book's writing or with many of its people. And yet with all its irregularities in form, diction, tone, and point of view, the chronicle of **Oak Hill** — if not so symmetrical and well unified as its eponym — engages the attention. Perhaps the book's writing style is more analogous to the Topsy-like growth of Calvert City, the small town on the make, than it is to the mansion's reminder of an all but vanished way of life.

Mr. Draffen's book begins like historical fiction but then vacillates between that genre, oral history, and a kind of wordy sentimentality: "Here in her most private sanctuary, with fingers occupied with the current needlework project, her prayers for her family, the sick of the community and for those in trouble, would ascend to the very throne of heaven."

Almost lost amongst the wordiness and malapropism, there is the occasional delight of an anecdote, almost folksy in its laconism: "Each new shipment of coffins was a special occasion for Uncle Sy and his cohorts. Tucked beneath the frilly satin pillow of each casket was always a pint of the best Kentucky bourbon." The book would be brightened by more folk humor like this.

While the **Oak Hill** author avows, "It has always been my personal feeling that simplicity denotes dignity whether in a car, dress, or decorating for Christmas," he can obfuscate pretentiously until a simple idea is all but unintelligible: "Nevertheless, the repercussions which resulted from the introduction, however nonchalant its intention, was to transcend all bounds of prudent circumspect."

It is when the would-be antiquarian-historian turns gossip that his interesting book is at its best. He has warned the reader early that "there never was a place on earth more responsive to the spreading rumors than in Calvert City." With the materials of hearsay, the author warms to his work. It is then, as if against his better judgment, that Draffen does his most realistic character delineation. He seems to relish Calvert City canards: those suspicions about newcomers who settle without the credentials of known family nearby; doubts that superior intelligence, proved competence and personal attractiveness could be recommendation enough.

For instance, there is the mysterious John Tichenor, "norated around" to be a gentleman even though "his neighbors had eyed him with a feeling of uncertainty at first." (This report from a Calvert Citizen who is to observe later in his book that the town "received an influx of new citizens . . . both welcome and unwelcome" during the years of World War I.) Hardly an outrider, Mr. Tichenor, lately of Beaver Dam, is an eighth grade graduate of a one-room Ohio County, Kentucky, school. Tichenor, it develops, becomes one of the town's most respected and most enterprising businessmen. However, the reader is made aware in an aside that Tichenor "would meet secretly in the stock barn behind Oak Hill where (Dr. Little) would treat Mr. Tichenor for a disease which he had contacted [sic] about a year before Calvert was born." John Calvert Tichenor is the final child born of John Tichenor's marriage to Williford (Willie) Calvert, daughter of Oak Hill's first owner and founder of the city named for his family, Potilla Calvert.

The not overly subtle inferences to be drawn from such implications might fit more appropriately into the thinly disguised materials of a novel: that the child born marked by his father's alleged (and unspeakable) disease is the curse that will end the Calvert-Tichenor dynasty. It is enough to revivify the dry bones of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Ironically enough, according to Draffen's first page, it is Oak Hill's earliest mistress who considered "long-tongued gossiping to be unchristian." Whether the author is recording raw, oral history or indulging in a proprietary kind of scandal mongering, it becomes apparent as the Calverts and Tichenors lose the palatial mansion and their economic clout on the town, Mr. Draffen's book becomes the story of the economic ascendancy of the Draffens, "up-and-coming" merchants

and investors. The mercantilism of other families may be suspect and ungenteel, but the enterprise of the Draffens is not questioned. It is praised.

On the other hand, a land developer receives a drubbing: "The Calvert Heights section of town was the result of his ingenuity in subdividing hills and gullies into small building plots and then enticing people, sometimes quite underhandedly, into buying them."

The second generation of Tichenors installs "slot machines, pin-ball machines and every kind of 'chance' games . . . to entice men and boys of the community to 'Tichenor corner.'" The teenage John Calvert Tichenor of the withered arm and leg is described as being notorious for shortchanging his soda fountain customers and later for gambling away and misinvesting the family's dwindling fortune, finally serving a term in a penitentiary. If the reader has not so far believed that the alleged sins of the boy's father are being visited upon not only the boy but upon all the surviving family, the writer delivers what is perhaps the book's most startling piece of information. On June 6, 1933, "the F.B.I. had captured the nation's most wanted killer — 'Machine Gun' Kelley [sic] in Memphis, Tennessee, harboring in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Calvert Tichenor, formerly of Calvert City, Kentucky." Somehow Mr. Draffen's villain has become more interesting and believable than the town saints and monuments he has failed to bring alive.

Future historians of Calvert City and Marshall County will need to study this and other sources as they winnow out the reliable from that which has only been noised abroad. In the meantime, what **Oak Hill** does best is to stimulate interest in subjects that should send local scholars scurrying for additional documentation.