

Book Reviews

Walter Darrell Haden, Editor

Ballard's Brave Boys. M. Juliette Magee. Wickliffe, Kentucky: **The Advance-Yeoman.** 1974. 252 pp. \$5.00.

Of general interest to those studying the history of the Jackson Purchase region and of particular interest to those interested in tracing Kentucky ancestry is this book by the editor and owner of the Wickliffe weekly newspaper. The book is composed of three introductory chapters that, though brief, help to give a perspective for the biographical sketches of Confederate and Union veterans that follow. As Mrs. Magee explains in her preface, the large majority of sketches included are of Confederate veterans, for, because of its link with the South, most of Ballard County's citizens were either Confederate activists or sympathizers. To gain information about both the Confederate and Union veterans, Mrs. Magee relied most heavily on documents provided by descendants of these men, many of whom still live in Ballard County.

A serious problem for the citizens of West Kentucky was the confiscation of property, particularly cured meat and horses, by Union brigades, though General Lew Wallace, commander of the Second Brigade stationed at Paducah, reported success in preventing his men from taking supplies from the farmers in the surrounding area. Most will associate Wallace with the authorship of **Ben Hur**, rather than with the command of the Second Brigade. Another literary reference occurs in Mrs. Magee's sketch of the Confederate veteran Judge William S. Bishop, the prototype for the revered though eccentric arbiter in Irvin S. Cobb's novel **Back Home** and in several other Cobb novels. Judge Bishop served as Common Pleas Judge of the First Kentucky Judicial District. As a young man, Cobb admired Judge Bishop.

Mrs. Magee's first chapter reminds us that General Forrest's raiders, many of whom were Ballard County men, captured Union City, Tennessee as late as March, 1864, on their way to attack the Union installations at Paducah. Most of the Ballard County men who died during the war were killed in the disastrous assault against the Union troops at Harrisburg, Mississippi. An excerpt from a letter written by Confederate C. P. Newman from a camp near Corinth helps to show the horror experienced by many:

As the Yankees first retreated, we [that were] in charge of the horses was [sic] ordered to advance. As we advanced, I soon began to see dead men and wounded men on every hand. No one can imagine how awful a battlefield does look that has never seen one.

It is a tribute to Mrs. Magee's persistence and diplomacy that she was able to collect as much genealogical information as her book pro-

vides, though the style of the introductory chapters lacks polish. Although we appreciate the alliteration the title provides, **Boys** hardly seems appropriate as a referent for the men of Ballard County who experienced the "hell" of the "bloodiest conflict." This book's merits as a record of local history, however, far outweigh its flaws.

Robert G. Cowser

Old Fort Jefferson. M. Juliette Magee. Wickliffe, Kentucky: **The Advance-Yeoman**: 1975. 90 pp. \$7.50; \$5.00.

For students of Western Kentucky history or those who would trace their lineage to George Rogers Clark, Mrs. Magee has compiled a little book of useful dates and names. Beginning with its establishment in 1780, the history of the lands around the fort is given up to and including background on land now the site of the Westvaco Paper Mill in Wickliffe, Kentucky. The reader learns that what was originally Chickasaw territory was established as a bulwark against the British at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. What was originally referred to as new Fort Jefferson was used for a union camp in 1861. Then the account goes on to show what descendants of George Rogers Clark have inherited up until the present of the various pieces of this vast tract.

If the reader is looking for a compelling historical account of the Revolutionary War in Kentucky or a portrait of George Rogers Clark's "dauntless courage," as the book's jacket suggests, he should not look here. There is no story of the General's exploits or of the trials, struggles or successes of the settlers of the fort. There is only a list of those who settled, and later inherited or purchased the lands. One can even learn the amount of acreage owned or inherited and what present county it is a part of.

There are reproductions of original land maps and pictures of the fort. Of course, there are several likenesses of George Rogers Clark and his descendants.

Perhaps western Kentuckians and members of local DAR chapters will find this compendium of facts and figures very helpful, but the average reader who yearns for some vibrant flesh on the bones of historical figures — or even bark on the cabin's logs — will decide that county or state records might serve his purpose just as well.

George Robert Brengle

The Creek. Victor Depta. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1976. 64 pp. \$5.50.

Three poetic tendencies have become more and more influential in what has come to be labeled the post-Modern literary period. Deriving primarily from William Carlos Williams and Charles Olson, the first is commitment to freer, more open forms and rhythms which, it is believed, can better capture the spontaneous, exploratory acts of imagination and moments of imaginative insight available to the poet through the process of language. The second is the turning away from poetic imagery as mere surface description or metaphor toward what has been called "the deep image," an influence stemming from Robert Bly and the surrealist poets Federico Garcia Lorca and Pablo Neruda. The third is the "confessional" mode in which the poetic voice and the voice of the poet are one and the same, and in which personal experience predominates as the subject matter, as typified in the works of Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, and Sylvia Plath.

In this volume of thirty-eight sequence poems by Victor Depta all three influences are apparent. The forms of all thirty-eight are loosely structured, avoiding assiduously traditional techniques of meter and rhyme, relying more upon image clusters, tone, and dominant metaphors as organizing principles. Each poem exists separately in its own right, yet has connection with the others to form a sequence in which the poet explores familial relationships and the relationship with some previous lover, unnamed, which has ended in estrangement and disconnection. Frequently mentioned are father and mother, grandfather and grandmother, aunts, cousins, and the estranged lover, who is described in one poem as being

dead or speeding or crazy because somebody
told you that you don't belong here.

Treading the poems is the sense that love, whether between a man and a woman or between members of the same family, is unequal to the burden of overcoming emotional short-circuiting, and attempts through speech (and through writing poems) to bridge and to heal are only partially successful, if at all. Depta's wit and humor, an important feature of his work, can be brought to bear even on so serious a subject, as illustrated in a poem entitled "Disguising poems." Here Depta voices the problem explicitly, saying that "Disguising poems so the family doesn't think/I'm a freak sure is hard"; a few lines later he speaks of putting "shells around the poems," and then dyeing and waxing them until his cousins exclaim "**my my my**". Both the surrealist imagery and the colloquialism which characterize the entire volume are revealed in the biting wit.

The dominant metaphor around which the poems tend to cluster and which provides the title of the volume is the creek, though in my reading I'm not sure the value of the metaphor is clearly established.

Also, there is another metaphor almost as powerful, in some way competing as the organizing image around which the poet's experiences are grouped. This competing image, or metaphor, is that of the road, suggestive of the poet's heading out beyond the limits which are explored in individual poems. Both are, of course, suggestive of flux and change, though at times the poet seems to employ the creek as an image of stasis, the one place of quietude and focus amidst the constant modifications of emotion and human community.

The surrealistic quality of Depta's imagery is both one of his sources of power and also a hurdle he sometimes trips over. To describe a bout with pneumonia as having "**shut the cold in and blue lizards went/scampering over my ribs**" both startles and delights, but Depta sometimes overreaches, as he does with this image when he, self-consciously it seems, describes the lizards as having "**found my/navel and poked their heads inside a/Frisbee of forelegs hindlegs and tails,**" and then playfully manipulates the Frisbee and lizard imagery throughout the rest of the poem.

Depta is obviously aware that to find an authentic voice, even for the most personal of themes, the contemporary poet is hard pressed to utilize verse techniques and diction which have become trivialized because of eroded value systems, mawkish sentimentality, jingling advertising, and the sloppy imitativeness of fourth and fifth rate versifiers. Breaking away from the tinkertoy paradigm of what poems ought to be and how they ought to sound, exploring new shapes on the page catching the flavor of contemporary experience with colloquial rhythms, tapping the energies embodied in slang and even vulgarisms, and breaking up the well-formed or evenly paced line by enjambments of syntax and dropped punctuation — these are strategies of many working poets, and all of these Depta has resorted to.

I have reservations about several of the poems Depta has included here and suspect that the overall organization of the poems is too cloudy, too broken, for the poems to work as a sequence. As readers we are too often left outside the experience, and are left wondering what stage of the poet's progress (poems numbered in sequence do imply some type of progression, emotional if not narrative) we are asked to share.

Many of the individual poems do work, however, painfully and powerfully so. Two poems, particularly, come to mind. "And when I think of love" centers around the poet lying in a lawnchair, reflecting on love. Observing bugs crawling on the chair, the poet is mindful of the interdependence of life forms. The poem suddenly closes with the emotionally controlled but ironically resonant lines:

**I think immediately of life and death and
cooperation and swipe swipe before
I say anything there goes my grandmother
telling my My goodness
look at all those bugs!**

Another, referred to earlier, accepts or at least admits of the broken circuit of love, with the pain being quietly yet fully enunciated. The poem concludes with an image of termination; any possibilities of reunion are cancelled:

**Finally I say too that you don't belong here.
I give you up.
I give my life away.
The wind stops.**

Depta is far more than a mere versifier, as this work indicates. At his best, the images and diction crackle, the rhythms create and don't just carry emotion; energies gather and expend in a charge. As he somewhat self-justifyingly testifies, "My poems have the appearance of photographs/with deliberate faults . . ." As he continues to develop his own distinctive voice, which he is already well on the way toward doing, and becomes more willing, hopefully, to forego the more excessively strained images and metaphors, the less we will be conscious of the faults. In the meantime, the photographs are here, and despite the faults, deliberate or not, are more than worth the look.

Reed Sanderlin, Ph. D.

Marks on the Land: The Story of Obion. Polly Stone Glover. The University of Tennessee at Martin: 1975. 144 pp. \$6.50.

As a history, Mrs. Glover's book has certain shortcomings. It needs a table showing the parent counties of Obion County and the dates of the various county divisions. Statistical tables showing **county** population decade by decade from the beginnings to 1970 would allow the reader to compare Obion's and the Obion County's population patterns. Similar information on other county communities would be useful. A table showing all Obion newspapers and the years they were published would be desirable, and an index, though not essential, would be a help.

Perhaps the book needs most of all a few clear maps. A reader would be enlightened by a clear sketch of the county showing all the communities mentioned, with dates of settlement and distances between them. Such a map could also pinpoint county schools and churches. The map of Obion itself, printed on the back cover of the book, is not adequate. The book needs a larger version of the map with family names identifying the homes on the various blocks. As it is, the reader often finds it very difficult to follow Mrs. Glover's discussion of the location of family homes in Obion.

The historical background is too sketchy at times. On page two, for example, there is a rather abrupt jump from "one thousand years ago" to "the early 1800s." It would be more enlightening for the reader if

more were said about the original Indian inhabitants, and if the author gave some historical specifics about Indian — white contact in the period before the Revolution and before white settlement in the area. One wonders, too, why the script for the historical pageant (pp. 125-143) begins with "The Cherokee People," but no mention of the Chickasaws, who claimed the area and sold it to the United States.

The sources for some of the historical statements are mentioned in the text, but such references are too few. Many more could have been handled in this manner, much to the reader's convenience. And the author is too frequently imprecise in the dating of the events she refers to. Some events are not dated at all; others are placed rather loosely in an entire decade: something happened in "the 1870s"; something else occurred in "the 1920s" or "1930s." One wonders **when** the bad wreck at Moffatt Station occurred (p. 9). One wonders when Billy Wilson founded the town which became Obion. One finds this out later on in the book, but why doesn't Mrs. Glover give the specific date on page eight? Surely the book is not meant to be of use except to persons who are Obionians.

The proofreaders sometimes drowsed. There are a fair number of typographical errors. And one is confused once or twice. For example: a statement in the fourth paragraph on page eight seems to contradict one made in the third paragraph. Who **was** "the first passenger on the train going through Obion," Mark Cunningham or Alexander Smith?

But, despite the criticisms made here, this is an admirable little book. In the section allotted to the township's history, the author is crisp and precise and the dates of town business are carefully noted. The discussions of Obion schools, and of leading town businesses are also well done. The other sections of this well-written account, particularly those dealing with community activities and local idiosyncrasies, help the author achieve her apparent purpose. One experiences a not unpleasing nostalgia as he senses the quality and texture of small town life in west Tennessee. Mrs. Glover also manages to convey to the reader a sense of the continuity of community values in the twentieth century. All in all, this chatty, impressionistic little book is a success.

Jerry A. Herndon, Ph. D.

A Picture History of Hall-Moody, UTM's Parent Institution. Neil Graves. Martin, Tennessee: **The Spirit** and the University of Tennessee National Alumni Association: 1975. 32 pp. \$2.00.

From one building at the beginning of this century to its present status as a respected institution of higher learning, Hall-Moody Institute — the University of Tennessee at Martin — has been clearly described in what must be termed a scholarly and entertaining book.

Published jointly by the University of Tennessee National Alumni Association and the University of Tennessee at Martin and written by Neil Graves of the UTM English Department, **A Picture History of Hall-Moody, UTM's Parent Institution** is a concise nostalgia piece which exceeds in quality of appearance and content what might be expected from a project of this size, scope, and nature.

Over one hundred illustrations and photographs, and their accompanying texts, display the author's meticulous research in an engrossing, insightful manner. These remarkably well-preserved photographs depict more than physical surfaces. They are more than chemically etched glimpses of an instant in an unfamiliar bygone era. Thanks to the combined efforts and skills of author, editors, and publisher, they are a colorful life tapestry of a simpler time at the cornerstone of UTM's present.

Although the tendency in institutional histories is often toward sterile disinterment of dusty records and interminable lists of faceless names and detached dates, Mr. Graves has successfully injected the flavor of human nature and the spice of politics to make reading this work an enjoyable sojourn into the past.

Throughout this perhaps too brief account, Mr. Graves has judiciously drawn from correspondence and interviews as well as from local newspapers, Baptist archival records, and early scholastic catalogs to reveal the philosophical structure of Hall-Moody as well as its sociological strictures. For example, one mid-twenties catalog dictated that "Young men and young women are not allowed to waste time by constant association." Recollections, reminiscences, and anecdotal contributions of Hall-Moody alumni have given this piece the color and life that make it an outstanding example of what an institutional history can and should be.

In conclusion, I would assess this monograph as an extra-ordinarily fine publication, adding that for the historian, the educator, the student, and the nostalgia buff, it offers interesting and informative reading.

Robert G. Zimmerman

River Region Monographs: Reports on People and Popular Culture. Neil Graves, ed. Martin, Tennessee: UTM Press, 1975. 56 pp.

River Region Monographs is a collection of six studies by three members of the faculty at the University of Tennessee at Martin, dealing with various aspects of the cultural heritage of the rural Jackson Purchase area of northwest Tennessee. It is, as Editor Neil Graves explains in his "Preface," one result of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, whose purpose was to involve humanist scholars from

UTM and local citizens in a variety of projects designed to promote a general awareness of the "rich and diverse cultural base of the area." Since some of the projects enlisted the aid of local "interest groups," a majority of the articles focuses almost as much upon their activities and enthusiasm as upon the stated topic of investigation. Each of the articles is generously illustrated.

The volume includes two historically oriented studies by Professor Marvin L. Downing. "Davy Crockett in Northwest Tennessee" brings together information supplied by a number of informants, including Crockett descendants, in an interesting account of the Crockett legacy. The greater part of the study recounts the endeavors of several dedicated individuals over a number of years to preserve the popular memory of the frontier statesman. Certainly the most remarkable effort was that of one Fred Elrod, who in 1934 saved a surviving Crockett home from destruction, dismantling the cabin carefully, and storing and moving the logs several times until a reconstruction was eventually possible some twenty years later on a site in Rutherford. To add to the "authenticity" of the reconstruction, the remains of Crockett's mother were also reinterred at the new cabin site. Dr. Downing's research demonstrates that there was and is, both before and after the passing of the Walt Disney-inspired Davy Crockett "fad," considerable interest among northwest Tennesseans in the Crockett legend.

"Christmasville and Its Origins" chronicles the progress of a study group organized to explore the beginnings of a present-day rural community in northwestern Carroll County. Some field research at the State Library and Archives in Nashville produced the original incorporation act of 1823, pinpointing the original site of the town and identifying the owner of the tract of land, one John C. McLemore, land speculator and onetime state Surveyor-General, related by marriage to Andrew Jackson's wife. As Professor Downing states: "Likely these two associations kept him attuned to the land and political developments in Tennessee." Some early deeds were also discovered, as well as records of a store, tannery, cotton gin and other early commercial enterprises.

An intriguing but unsolved puzzle was the source of the town's name. Of the several theories entertained, the most likely would seem to be that the town was named in honor of William Christmas, McLemore's uncle, whom he succeeded as Surveyor-General.

The chief value of the Christmasville project seems to lie, as Professor Downing concludes, in its generation of considerable historical awareness and community pride among the residents of the Christmasville area.

Professor Robert G. Cowser is the author of three studies dealing with several creative writers native to the northwest Tennessee area. "Peter Taylor and Trenton" discusses in a chatty fashion that author, who is presently a teacher of creative writing at the University of Virginia,

against the background of his birthplace. Actually, we learn relatively little about the likely influences of Taylor's hometown upon his work; Dr. Cowser relates only that (1) the name of the fictional town "Thorn-ton" is an acronym for "Trenton," (2) one or two local variations on the ubiquitous, devoted "black mammy" figure, which some southern white people like to recall affectionately, may have inspired the central character in one story, 3) the characterization of one figure in another story may have been based on an eccentric relative of Taylor's, and that (4) Taylor, who was seven when his family moved from Trenton, was told many stories about Trenton and its people by his mother and the mother of a Trenton neighbor.

We do learn the names of a number of people in Trenton; indeed, the article is largely a tribute to the Trenton Book Club, which presented a program on Taylor, and to the enthusiasm of the group members who organized an exhibit of display materials on Gibson County writers, including Taylor. Although the fostering of such local activities is a part of the overall concept of the NEH project, in this case, unnecessary and tedious reports on the details of proceedings of a book club and discussion group do not contribute tangibly to the presumed main emphasis of the paper — the influences of Peter Taylor's hometown milieu in his fiction. Almost half the space of the article is taken up by photographs, which (aside from a portrait of Taylor and a picture of his birthplace) have more to do with the Trenton study group than with Peter Taylor.

"Robert Drake and Ripley" is more interesting and informative in at least one respect: Dr. Cowser was able to arrange a personal interview with the writer during a summer visit by Drake to his hometown from Knoxville, where he is a professor at the University of Tennessee. During the course of a drive through the town, Dr. Drake pointed out some of the landmarks which figure prominently in some of his stories — among them the high bridge from which the chief character of one Drake short story commits suicide. Dr. Drake called attention to the town cemetery, where many of the Ripley prototypes for some of his fictional characters are buried.

Interesting as such observations are, the article is somewhat superficial. Professor Cowser might have made it more interesting by describing briefly some of the local characters alluded to, along with a treatment of their fictional counterparts. Perhaps because, here again, the author's attention is divided between his subject and the members of a study group, the sketch of a writer lacks breadth. The expressive photograph of Dr. Drake which accompanies the article suggests that he has a warm, vibrant personality; if so, an informal interview might have been expected to reveal it.

"Roark Bradford and Bell Irvin Wiley" offers some notes on two writers native to the rural Nankipoo community (named for the character in Gilbert and Sullivan's **The Mikado**) of Lauderdale County. Some per-

tainant information about Bradford's and Wiley's adolescence was furnished to Professor Cowser by two sisters of the writers, still residing in the area.

Apparently the main source of Bradford's well-known **Ol' Man Adam and his Chillun** (upon which Marc Connelly's **Green Pastures** was based) was an illiterate black preacher, Uncle Wes Hawthorne, who drew upon his vivid imagination for his sermons. The Halls group formed to study Bradford all knew of uneducated ministers who in the same way have been a mainstay of black folklore. Interestingly, one major point of concern in the group was the question of whether or not Bradford's informal treatment and imaginative dialectal descriptions of Old Testament figures (David, for instance, was "drunk as a biled owl") constituted sacrilege. The general concensus was that Uncle Wes' interpretations had been the most appropriate to convey the Bible's essential truths to his unsophisticated audience.

A primary influence in Dr. Wiley's choice of career as writer and Civil War historian was, as the writer acknowledged at a program honoring Bradford and himself, his maternal grandmother, a "deeply religious woman who loved all of God's creatures, Yankees excepted," who entertained her grandson with first-hand accounts of the Civil War and the Reconstruction era.

In "Old Time Singing Schools in the River Region," Professor Robert L. Todd reports on a socio-religious phenomenon once popular in the west Tennessee area and in the rural South generally, but now in a state of decline. The itinerant "singing master" taught (and still does in some parts of the South) the rudiments of harmony and the art of singing religious songs, utilizing the "fa-so-la," or shape-note system of notation, to his musically unsophisticated pupils. The article supplies, along with appropriate illustrations from some old gospel songbooks, an informative sketch of the basic concepts of "fa-sol-la" singing and the conventions and regional idiosyncrasies which the schools fostered. Although the author implies that some members of groups devoted to the more generally familiar "gospel song" received their early musical training in the "singing schools," he does not elaborate upon the kinship of "fa-sol-la" and Stamps-Baxter "gospel" singing; hence, a number of photographs of various gospel groups among the article's illustrations seem irrelevant.

Professor Todd laments the passing of the means for expression of communal culture which the old "singing schools" represented; he ascribes its demise to the easy availability of commercially recorded music.

This little volume, in spite of the occasional tiresomeness of several pieces, is on the whole an informative collection of studies about aspects of the historical, literary and musical traditions of the River Region. Its greatest appeal will be local, but anyone with an interest in the culture and people of the area should find it enjoyable reading.