

# Thorndike, Wheeler consolidate large-print lines

## From Staff Reports

Cengage Group, the corporation that runs Thorndike Press Large Print, has announced more changes. Last year, the company said it would cease its Five Star hardcover line of Western novels effective at the end of March 2023.

In a news release e-mailed February 3, Bonnie Simcock, Thorndike's manager for acquisitions, said that the Wheeler Publishing imprint of large-print books will be consolidated into

the Thorndike Press Large Print line, effective after March 2023.

"This change simplifies contracts and copyrights," Simcock wrote.

Thorndike will also close its office in Waterville, Maine, and employees there will move to a virtual work environment.

"Thorndike Press, and our corporate parent Cengage Group, have put the principles of employee wellness, connectivity, and community at the heart of decision-making while re-defining how we work since the start of the

pandemic," Simcock wrote. "Our approach to working models and use of office space has evolved."

The address to use for contract purposes, Simcock said, is 27555 Executive Drive, Farmington Hills, MI 48331.

"This change does not impact any people or positions," Simcock wrote in the e-mail. "Thorndike Press has had a very strong year with library customers 'back-in-business' with an uptick in foot traffic and increased circulation of large print."



## NONFICTION

**T. LINDSAY BAKER**

*Eating Up Route 66: Foodways on America's Mother Road*

University of Oklahoma Press  
Hardcover, 409 pages, \$34.95  
OUPress.com

Want to jump in a 1930 Ford station wagon and eat your way across what remains of the historic Route 66 – the pre-interstate path to the West? Well, if the idea is appealing but you don't have the time or money to do it, let T. Lindsay Baker do the driving for you. This engaging travel tome honors the history of the many restaurants, cafés and food joints along the old route – modern-day stagecoach stops where passengers could feed their stomachs while dreaming of a new life somewhere down the road. Baker presents a state-by-state, city-by-city food ledger on the many places that stood out for their unique charm, homey food or unusual structural designs. He includes relevant recipes, historic photos and some amusing and insightful anecdotes about the people who ran these places. And if you ever wondered how the Big Texan Steak Ranch in Amarillo ever came up with the idea of offering a 72-ounce steak free to anyone who could eat it, Baker provides the backstory.

– Robert Nott

**ELLA CARA DELORIA** (author) and **RAYMOND J. DeMALLIE** and **THIERRY VEYRIÉ** (editors)

*The Dakota Way of Life*

Bison Books  
Hardcover, 440 pages, \$36.95  
BisonBooks.com

Ella Cara Deloria, or "Beautiful Day Woman" (1889-1971), was the aunt of author Vine Deloria Jr., and a novelist, educator, linguist, ethnographer and anthropologist who was associated professionally with Franz Boas and Margaret Mead. A perfectionist and "a pre-eminent expert on Dakota/Lakota/Nakota cultural, religious, and linguistic practices,"

Deloria used her kinship connections and spent many years meticulously researching and detailing the Dakota language and way of life. "Her constant goal was to be an interpreter of an American Indian reality to others." This book, edited and published long after Deloria's death, is an extensive ethnographic and linguistic "study of the Sioux," a comprehensive cultural exploration and a literary preservation of the Dakota way of life.

– Jean A. Lukesh

**LAWRENCE A. DWYER**

*Standing Bear's Quest for Freedom:  
The First Civil Rights Victory for Native Americans*

Bison Books  
Paperback, 210 pages, \$19.95  
BisonBooks.com

Omaha, Nebraska, attorney Lawrence Dwyer authored this readable book, using clear, understandable language, short chapters, clippings from the news and more, to lay out the history of the Ponca people, describe how they came to be dispossessed of their Nebraska lands, explain why Standing Bear risked everything to bring his surviving family back to Nebraska and tell what happened after that. Although Standing Bear is, of course, the true hero, this story proves to be a great interplay of many fascinating and historic people who all contributed to "the first civil rights victory for Native Americans" and tells how that led to other important precedents in history, as well. Judi M. gaiashkibos – who is a Ponca woman, executive director of the Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs and a descendent of the Ponca leader Smoke Maker – wrote the foreword for this interesting book.

– Jean A. Lukesh

**JON K. LAUCK** and **PAULA M. NELSON** (editors)

*The Plains Political Tradition: Essays on South Dakota Political Culture, Volume 4*

South Dakota Historical Society Press  
Paperback, 227 pages, \$34.95  
SDHSPress.com

South Dakota politics is thoroughly Midwestern, but unique in character when compared to its neighboring states. This edited volume builds on the three previous volumes in this series and contains 10 essays by academics, public historians and political professionals, which explore the influence of immigration and immigrants, agrarian conservatism, populism and progressivism, and the unique qualities of a number of political leaders. Taken together, they offer a revelatory picture of the nuanced and complex political culture of South Dakota and its broader influence in national affairs. Specific topics include the unique impact of the German-language press on political culture, the influence of and reactions to the state budget process, and the modest origins of many of the state's political leaders. The political/biographical profiles of William H.H. Beadle, Peter Norbeck, William J. Bulow, Karl Mundt, Francis Case and George Mickelson encompass the broad political history of the state between 1870 and the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

– Robert Clark

**TADEUSZ LEWANDOWSKI**

*The Life of Sherman Coolidge, Arapaho Activist*

University of Nebraska Press  
Hardcover, 358 pages, \$50  
NebraskaPress.unl.edu

Tadeusz Lewandowski puts Arapaho leader Sherman Coolidge in the spotlight he has long deserved. As a boy, Coolidge was captured from his Northern Arapaho tribe and, after being passed around between military families, was adopted by Lieutenant Charles Coolidge and his wife,

Sofie. They called him Sherman, after William Tecumseh Sherman, and saw that he was baptized into the Episcopal church and educated. He attended divinity school, returned to the Wind River Reservation as a priest/schoolteacher and a unilateral supporter of mostly unpopular government policies. In 1911, Coolidge became involved in the Society for American Indians, a national organization similar to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Eventually, his position of unwavering support of government policy began to mature. Lewandowski has done a remarkable job of research but goes down some tempting rabbit holes to tell the reader almost too much about some things – Grace Coolidge's relationship with her friends, for instance, and the organizational minutiae of the Society of American Indians. Recommended for libraries and those interested in Native American politics and studies.

– Nancy Curtis

**MICHAEL J. MAKLEY**

*Imposing Order Without Law: American Expansion to the Eastern Sierra 1850-1865*

University of Nevada Press  
Paperback, 239 pages, \$24.95  
UNPress.nevada.edu

Michael J. Makley presents a captivating story of a time period and geographical locations frequently ignored in traditional studies of the history of the West. Following the Gold Rush, Carson Valley, in present day Nevada, and Honey Lake Valley, in northeastern California, were hosts to growing communities that sat astride the principal travel routes climbing the eastern face of the daunting Sierra

**CALLING ALL AUTHORS!**

**NOW ACCEPTING PROPOSALS FOR NON-FICTION BOOKS.**

**GUIDELINES AT: FARCOUNTRYPRESS.COM**

Nevada Mountains. Makley documents the feuds between Mormons and Gentiles as Salt Lake City tried to retain as part of Utah Territory what would become the state of Nevada. The author describes the troubling history of how the immigrants took the land away from the Washoe Indians in the Carson Valley and the Northern Paiute Indians in the Honey Lake Valley. The intrigues of numerous domineering individuals provide fascinating tales of lynchings and murders among the white settlers who used vigilante committees to enforce unwritten laws based on personal prejudices and outright lies.

– Robert Lee Murphy

### **BRENNEN MATTHEWS**

*Miles to Go: An African Family in Search of America along Route 66*

University of New Mexico Press  
Paperback, 280 pages, \$24.95  
UNMPress.com

*Miles to Go* chronicles a family's sublime cross-country journey along Route 66. Brennen Matthews is African by birth. However, he has a unique perspective on the United States, in that he used to live here. His wife, Kate, is integral in the travelogue, as is their son, Thembi. Together, the family does a thorough investigation of America's main street, exploring attractions well off the beaten path. Attitudes from another continent sometimes collide with predictable American mind-sets, providing fabulous storytelling. *Miles to Go* is less of a travel guide and more of an insider's take on the Mother Road. Time takes its toll on everything and everyone and that, too, is a topic that receives attention on this trip down Route 66. Outside of a few grammatical and map errors, *Miles to Go* provides a wonderful opportunity to travel across the United States without ever leaving your home.

– Peter Bruce

### **PAUL R. MISENCIK**

and **SALLY E. MISENCIK**  
*With George Washington in the Wilderness: The Frontier Life of Christopher Gist*

McFarland & Company  
Paperback, 225 pages, \$39.95  
McFarlandBooks.com

Christopher Gist (ca. 1705-1759) was the guide who led George Washington – representing the royal governor of Virginia in 1753 – through the Virginia

and Pennsylvania wilderness on his mission to demand that French authorities at Fort LeBoeuf vacate the region. Again, the following year, Gist steered Washington and a group of Virginia militiamen to defend the Pennsylvania frontier against a recently arrived French army. At Great Meadows, Washington surrendered his command to the French, touching off the French and Indian War. This well-written book describes this detail and many more from Gist's adventurous life as a fur trader and scout. Largely forgotten by the history books, Gist's activities in the exploration and settlement of the "first West" are carefully documented here and place the 6-foot-tall, 200-pound frontiersman in proper perspective with his more-remembered peers.

– James A. Crutchfield

## **FICTION**

### **JOHNNIE BERNHARD**

*Hannah and Ariela*

TCU Press  
Hardcover, 166 pages, \$21  
PRS.TCU.edu

Tensions with Mexican drug cartels near the Texas border shape the story of 73-year-old widow Hannah Durand. Despite her son's urging that she move into town, Hannah refuses to leave the ranch she and her husband built. Ariela, a 15-year-old Mexican girl kidnapped by a drug cartel, is destined to become a Houston prostitute. She escapes to Hannah's ranch. Hannah protects her, then delivers Ariela to her family in Mexico. Much is omitted. The first two-thirds are character development. Off-screen action works well. When Ariela returns home, readers fail to see the reunion. Following the demise of the drug cartel, the story continues with Hannah setting up a home for women escaping cartels. This story has great potential.

– Melody Groves

### **KRIS BOCK**

*The Billionaire Cowboy's Christmas: An Accidental Billionaire Cowboy Romance*

Tule Publishing  
Paperback, 272 pages, \$10.99  
TulePublishing.com

Josh Tomlinson's life changes significantly when his widowed mother buys a winning lottery ticket worth \$1 billion just before Christmas. The

oldest of four boys, Josh has been the responsible one who has kept the Last Stand, Texas, family's ranch going. Suddenly he finds he's a celebrity, and his simple life is in danger. Josh seeks advice from Carly Garza, an old friend of the family who grew up riding but has become an attorney. Sparks fly, but Josh is sure that Carly isn't interested in becoming a rancher's wife, and Carly's sure he'll think she just wants him for his money. If you're a fan of Hallmark Christmas movies and sweet romance books with a Western theme, this is the book for you.

– Jennifer Bohnhoff

### **C.J. BOX**

*Storm Watch: A Joe Pickett Novel*

G.P. Putnam's Sons  
Hardcover, 368 pages, \$29  
PenguinRandomHouse.com

Wyoming game warden Joe Pickett sets out into a snowstorm with the intention of euthanizing an elk with a broken leg. As the storm intensifies, he follows the elk's tracks onto private property, where he finally manages to do the job. However, he also runs onto a mysteriously sited building that resonates with a strange hum. But that's not the real problem. The problem is the discovery of a dead man with his face whacked off. This set-up has Joe, with wife Marybeth, daughter Sheridan and friends Nate and Geronimo, battling crooked lawmen, local drug dealers, white supremacy cults, politicians – and snow. It's always surprising how much trouble Joe Pickett can run into. A C.J. Box thriller always has plenty of action and provides the reader something new to learn. This story has two such opportunities: the hot topic of cryptocurrency mining and falconry.

– Carol Crigger

### **C.K. CRIGGER**

*Ault's Heir*

Wolfpack Publishing  
Paperback, 251 pages, \$9.99  
WolfpackPublishing.com

Knox Burdette, a ranch hand, aids a neighbor being attacked by a band of cutthroats. As the old man is dying, Knox promises to deliver important documents to the man's lawyer. The same gang of men follows Knox as he journeys to make good on his promise and nearly kills him. Lucky for him,

Tinker O’Keefe comes to the rescue. Tinker is a young woman with lots of baggage. Together, Knox and Tinker deliver the documents. C.K. Crigger reinvents a tired storyline. Her well-developed characters and crisp dialogue create a novel both compelling and original. Well done, C.K. Crigger. I stayed up half the night to find out what happened.

– Candace Simar

**PATRICK DEAREN**  
*Grizzly Moon*

Five Star Publishing  
Hardcover, 217 pages, \$25.95  
Gale.com/five-star

Rancher Wash Baker is given a chance to bring closure to an incident that has torn his insides out for 19 years. With several neighbors, Wash sets out to kill a rogue grizzly, just as he had with tragic results years before. It’s a mixed group. Each person has issues and nightmares that threaten to shatter the party before it even finds the monstrous bear. And unknown to the hunters, other individuals stalk the same quarry but for a far different reason. Patrick Dearen paints a vivid setting, bringing the flora and fauna of

the region into precise focus, perhaps overdoing it at times. He does a good job developing characters with deep psychological wounds and bringing them to final resolution.

– Loyd Uglow

**GERALD ELIAS**  
*Roundtree Days: A Jefferson Dance Western Mystery*

Level Best Books  
Paperback, 278 pages, \$16.95  
LevelBestBooks.us

An old Utah mining town has been resurrected by the contemporary Western TV series being filmed there. As production shuts down for the season, actors and fans gather to celebrate with a weekend of *Roundtree* (from the title of the show) Days. Things immediately go awry. A stable falls victim to arson, an elderly man with dementia disappears, and one of the stars of the TV show is found murdered. Jefferson Dance, acting sheriff for the weekend, has only until the weekend is over to tie up all these loose ends. The story is broken into two first-person points of view. That of Dance as he works through the mystery, and that of Conrad Michener, the actor who plays the fictional sheriff

Roundtree. A well-plotted mystery with a lot of extraneous side activity.

– Carol Crigger

**W. MICHAEL GEAR**  
*Fourth Quadrant: The Wyoming Chronicles, Book Two*

Wolfpack Publishing  
Hardback, 330 pages, \$28  
WolfpackPublishing.com

In this contemporary Western, a cyberattack destroys the world’s financial system. The plausible way that this attack occurs and the sudden apocalyptic threat to society are chillingly dramatized. Wyoming collapses into chaos, with massive range-war violence and modern versions of traditional Western tropes such as a cattle drive under attack and a cavalry outpost repelling invaders with the last of its ammunition. W. Michael Gear first explored this theme in *Dissolution*, a 2021 Spur Award finalist in the contemporary Western category. *Fourth Quadrant: The Wyoming Chronicle, Book Two* stands alone, introducing new characters, especially a young female bank teller who becomes a hardened, haunted combat veteran. With masterful action scenes, vivid characters and troubling implications

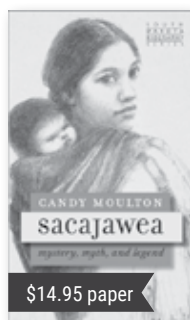
## South Dakota Historical Society Press 2023 Spring Books



**Bighorn Visions**

Tempe Javitz has compiled over one hundred of her grandmother Jessamine Spear Johnson’s photographs for this volume, the first publication to showcase her work in such detail. Essays and captions by Javitz, along with an intro by historian Mary Murphy, situate Johnson’s life and career in relation to broader shifts in ranching, tourism, and photography.

\$34.95 cloth



**Sacajawea: Mystery, Myth, and Legend**

Myth, mystery, and legend surround Sacajawea, one of the few American Indian women whose name and singular significance have not been lost to history. Without Sacajawea’s knowledge and assistance, the Corps of Discovery’s venture to explore the furthest reaches of the 1803 Louisiana Purchase may well have failed. In this biography of Sacajawea, Candy Moulton reads between the lines of Lewis and Clark’s journals and letters written by members of the Corps of Discovery to provide a fascinating portrait of the Shoshone woman who made possible the success of the venture.

\$14.95 paper



**Pioneer Girl: The Path into Fiction**

When Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote her autobiography, *Pioneer Girl*, she had no idea that children across the United States would be reading about and falling in love with Laura Ingalls and her family just two years later. *Pioneer Girl: The Path into Fiction* traces the evolution of Wilder’s matter-of-fact memoir of her girlhood in Wisconsin into a bestselling novel for children. Along the way, editor Nancy Tystad Koupal discloses previously unknown aspects of this story as she examines the various drafts of *Little House in the Big Woods*.

\$39.95 cloth



**SOUTH DAKOTA  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESS**

Order online at [sdhspress.com](http://sdhspress.com)  
or email [orders@sdhspress.com](mailto:orders@sdhspress.com)

900 Governors Dr., Pierre, SD 57501 | (605) 773-6009 | [info@sdhspress.com](mailto:info@sdhspress.com) | [sdhspress.com](http://sdhspress.com) | [pioneerproject.org](http://pioneerproject.org)

about the fragility of civilization, this book demonstrates why Gear (along with wife Kathleen O'Neal Gear) received an Owen Wister Award for lifetime achievement and was inducted into the Western Writers Hall of Fame.

– David Morrell

### JENNIFER GIVHAN

#### *River Woman, River Demon*

Blackstone Publishing  
Hardcover, 319 pages, \$28.99  
BlackstonePublishing.com

Eva Moon is a Chicana glass sculptor and avid practitioner of the *bruja's* mystical arts who's haunted, sometimes literally, by the drowning death of her girlhood bestie Karma in Calxico. Now living in Los Lunas with her husband, Jericho, a University of New Mexico professor and "conjurer of all trades, professor of roots and bones, of Hoodoo and mojo and herbs," Eva awakens, as the story begins, to the sounds of a struggle in the Rio Grande bosque behind their home. Rushing to investigate, she stumbles upon her friend Cecilia's limp and bloodied body in Jericho's arms. When Jericho is arrested for Cecilia's brutal murder, Eva must deploy a combination of her Magickal powers and some old-fashioned sleuthing to solve not only Cecilia's murder, but Karma's as well, in this engaging psychological thriller.

– Chuck Greaves

### ALMA KATSU

#### *The Fervor*

G.P. Putnam's Sons  
Hardcover, 309 pages, \$27  
PenguinRandomHouse.com

In an Idaho internment camp for American citizens of Japanese descent during World War II, Meiko Briggs and her daughter Aiko wait out the war and the return of Meiko's white, fighter-pilot husband from the Pacific Theater. But when a disease that makes those who contract it turn angry, then violent, starts to spread – and Meiko comes down with it – mother and child are separated. In Oregon, a preacher and his wife take the daughters of friends out for a picnic in the woods and that turns horrific. And in Nebraska, a reporter stumbles upon a major story that will tie these disparate threads together. Part history, part horror, Katsu's novel is scary and compelling, albeit slightly marred by some wild coincidences.

– Jeffrey J. Mariotte

### PRESTON LEWIS

#### *Outlaw West of the Pecos*

Wolfpack Publishing  
Paperback, 247 pages, \$10.99  
WolfpackPublishing.com

In *Outlaw West of the Pecos*, the Spur Award-winning Preston Lewis places H.H. Lomax, his long-running character, in the position of facing two of the most notorious people in the West: Judge Roy Bean and John Wesley Hardin. Lomax's encounter with Bean and his legendary pet bear adds humor as Lomax is required to stay in the cage with the bear, fulfilling the sentence placed on him by the judge. Lomax's encounter with Hardin, the notorious gunfighter, keeps Lomax on his toes as he tries to find writers for the life stories of Bean and

Hardin and get those stories published. This is a good read that kept me entertained.

– Lowell F. Volk

### LAURIE LOEWENSTEIN

#### *Funeral Train: A Dust Bowl Mystery*

Akashic Books  
Paperback, 320 pages, \$18.95  
AkashicBooks.com

When I read Laurie Loewenstein's first novel in this series, I put it on my "best of 2019" novels. Her second novel, *Funeral Train*, follows onto my "best of 2022" list. In this deep, stirring novel of the tragic Dust Bowl years, Sheriff Temple Jennings and deputy Ed McCance join forces with the railroad detective in charge of investigating a horrific deliberate derailment. Many people, most of them Black, are killed. The sheriff's wife, Etha, is also terribly injured in the wreck and when a distraught Jennings is called to a murder, he soon suspects the two events are connected. Insights and character depictions make this novel memorable. More than a simple mystery, the reader will be caught up in the lives of the people of Vermillion, Oklahoma. Fictional, yes, but they could be your nearest neighbors with all their foibles. As a historical note, the book is based on the 1929 derailment of a train in Henryetta, Oklahoma.

– Carol Crigger

### MILANA MARSENICH

#### *Beautiful Ghost*

Open Books  
Paperback, 209 pages, \$19.95  
Open-Bks.com

*Beautiful Ghost*, Milana Marsenich's sequel to *Copper Sky*, takes place in Butte, Montana, as the Great Influenza reaches the mining town in 1918. The story picks up on the lives of two young women and their families and friends – one a former prostitute and the other a doctor's assistant with dreams of becoming a physician. Against the backdrop of Butte's harsh mining conditions, the struggle to maintain decent lives and concern for loved ones fighting in the Great War, the influenza strikes. Who will live and who will die? Hiding under the cover of the disease is a murderer who has his sights on making one of the women his next victim. *Beautiful Ghost* will keep you riveted to the end.

– Bill Markley

### DEVON A. MIHESUAH

#### *Dance of the Returned*

The University of Arizona Press  
Paperback, 306 Pages, \$16.95  
UAPress.arizona.edu

There is so much good about Devon A. Mihesuah's novel, it's hard to know where to begin. Detective Monique Blue Hawk is called to investigate the disappearance of East James, a young Choctaw man. This leads her to the ceremonial Dance of the Renewal and the discovery that James isn't the first to disappear while attending the dance. Another man disappeared years before. Monique is on it, determined to find out what happened to both men. The mystery that unfolds before her is both profound and life changing. With the dreamlike quality of a mystic, Mihesuah

# WESTERN MUSIC



## THE RENFREES

*97 Acres*

Renfree Music, \$19.99  
Renfrees.com

Husband-and-wife team Peter “Ren” and Andrea “Andi” Renfree recently moved to New Mexico from Nashville, Tennessee, so I was not astonished that the opening cut

on this 11-track CD, “Good Morning Teardrops,” written by Andi and sung by Ren, is a classic and well-done honky-tonk number, something you’d play on the juke box when you are sure your abused heart will never heal.



**OLLIE REED JR.**

But any notion that this was a country-music album had been dispelled by the time I got to the title track, a song about brothers divided over what to do with 97 acres of Texas farmland left them by their late father. Written by Andi and Ren, it’s a poignant piece most of us can relate to.

There’s plenty of Western flavor here. “Las Vegas,” by Andi, Ren and William Di-

Luigi, is about leaving Nashville for Vegas – but not that Vegas. And “The Banks of the River,” by Andi and Benjamin Davis Corley, laments the Southwest’s most enduring challenge –

*Seems like water ought to be, alongside life and liberty,*

*On the list of things no one should take away.*

Good stuff.



## PHOEBE WHITE

*UnXpected*

PoetMan Records, \$15  
MichaelJohnathon.com/Phoebe/

Phoebe White, a young girl (12 when she recorded this CD) from Kentucky was the big surprise of the International Western Music Association gathering at Albuquerque

in November.

She’s still growing into her style and her sizable talent, but she has a vibrant voice that will stop you in your tracks and a way with yodeling that’ll set your hat spinning.

A tribute to her ability and potential is the fact that she’s backed on this 10-cut CD by Western music favorites Riders in the Sky, the bluegrass McLain Family Band and folk singer-songwriter Michael Johnathon.

Her yodeling tracks, such as “I Want to be a Cowboy’s Sweetheart,” are a treat, but my favorite cut is the yodel-free “Cowboy Hat,” in which the lyrics advise –

*Live a simple life, work hard and wear a cowboy hat.*

\*\*\*

E-mail Ollie at [olreed.com@gmail.com](mailto:olreed.com@gmail.com) and send CDs to him at P.O. Box 2381, Corrales, NM 87048.

weaves Choctaw history and traditions into a novel that is a delight to read. *Dance of the Returned* is beautiful, thought provoking and surprising.

– Milana Marsenich

## ROD MILLER

*Black Joe and Other Selected Stories*

Five Star Publishing  
Hardcover, 278 pages, \$25.95  
Gale.com/five-star

Rod Miller has lived the cowboy life, and it shows in the 16 short stories collected here, two of which won Spur Awards. With the exceptions of digital technology and pickup trucks – both of which appear in the collection – many aspects of the cowboy’s life haven’t changed a lot since the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and Miller’s experience on the range and in the arena bring a powerful sense of been there, done that to his fiction. The stories mostly center on the realities of cowboy-ing, with only a few tales of outlaws and lawmen. Even if one has read most of Miller’s work, two of the best stories, “Ben Colton’s Downfall” and “Drowning in Riches” – though it’s hard to pick “best” in a collection this good – are published here for the first time. Miller can turn a phrase, wrangle a plot and spin a yarn.

– Jeffrey J. Mariotte

## JOHN MORT

*The Ballad of Johnny Bell*

Cornerpost Press  
Paperback, 266 pages, \$14.95  
CornerpostPress.com

In 1974, John Mort submitted a document for his master’s thesis. In the subsequent years, he expanded and polished that manuscript, which resulted in *The Ballad of Johnny Bell*. Part fact, part fiction, this book follows young Johnny as he and his grandfather journey from Texas to the Ozarks. It is here in this land of fundamentalist Christians and chicken houses that the teenage Johnny is reintroduced to his past as he struggled toward maturity. You may have read a dozen books with a plot similar to *The Ballad of Johnny Bell*, but few as detailed and from the heart. This is a great read.

– John Neely Davis

## JOHN D. NESBITT

*Bright Skies and Dark Horses*

Five Star Publishing  
Hardcover, 234 pages, \$25.95  
Gale.com/five-star

Most readers of Western fiction are already fans of award-winning John D. Nesbitt’s writing. His newest release will solidify that base. This compilation of flash fiction, short fiction and a novella makes for an entertaining read. Sited in Wyoming, the stories portray the lives and adventures of rustlers, avengers and not-so-common ranchers. Nesbitt’s character descriptions and his scene depictions introduce the reader to a time when cowboys operated on the thin edge of respectability and raw emotions could easily erupt into violence. Although full of action, this writing is also a strong study of the personalities and thought processes of the characters. I found this book highly readable and somewhat atypical of many of today’s Western-themed novels.

– John Neely Davis

## RICHARD PROSCH

### *Pony Boys*

Five Star Publishing  
Hardcover, 239 pages, \$25.95  
Gale.com/five-star

As a teenager near the Niobrara River's "rough country" in Nebraska, Richard Prosch grew up hearing stories of the region's 19<sup>th</sup> Century outlaws Doc Middleton, Kid Wade and other "Pony Boys." Prosch mixes those stories with history while throwing in fictional horse thieves and miscreants to ride with actual outlaws. John Augustus, Prosch's fictional narrator, reflects on his late 1870s introduction to those Pony Boys and, eventually, vigilantes. Prosch's prose is, as usual, delightful – "My tongue was a dead gopher, the roof of my mouth a cement urn." – and he seamlessly blends history, legend, romance and action with believable characters, not all bad, but certainly never saints. Prosch plans to bring back these characters for further adventures. I'm ready for the next ride – providing those boys don't steal my horse.

– Johnny D. Boggs

## JASON STONE

### *The Beauty of the Days Gone By*

Saudade Press  
Paperback, 460 Pages, \$22  
SaudadePress.com

Intriguing plotline, lyrical prose and multiple cameos by numerous historical figures make this an exceptional historical novel covering more than six decades of Texas frontier history. The novel traces the sweet-and-sour relationship between Texas Panhandle pioneer Charles Goodnight and his acquaintance Robert Lee Terry, whose two sons are captured by Kiowas, sparking a hunt for the missing boys. One son is found, and the author skillfully reveals the fate of the second boy to the reader without the novel's characters ever learning. Ultimately the search for the boys and the conscience of an aging Goodnight reveal hidden secrets between him and Terry. Unconventional punctuation (no quotation marks for dialogue) detracts from an otherwise praiseworthy novel.

– Preston Lewis

## JULIE WESTON

### *Moon Bones: A Nellie Burns and Moonshine Mystery*

Encircle Publications  
Paperback, 228 pages, \$16.95  
EncirclePub.com

Nellie Burns, now working for the sheriff's department in Idaho as the official police photographer, has become acquainted with a varied group of people. This includes the few Chinese remaining in the area after many were deported or killed. But while it's the 1920s now, it seems some folks believe the old ways were the right ways. When Nellie's friend Sammy Ah Kee is accused of murdering a fellow Chinese, she determines to help him prove his innocence. What she finds is a conspiracy to steal gold, enslave Chinese and murder anyone who stands in the way. Nellie's fiancé, Sheriff Charlie Asteguitoiri, is tortured and would have died if not for Nellie's dog Moonshine. Weston's research regarding the Chinese in Idaho comes to the fore in this vibrant, historical tale.

– Carol Crigger

## MILES WILSON

### *McKenzie Rising: An American Frolic*

University of Nevada Press  
Paperback, 227 pages, \$21  
UNPress.nevada.edu

MegMax is on a mission to turn the McKenzie Valley into an upscale development. Only a rag-tag group of hapless and often hilarious locals can stop them. Purposefully unconventional and at times outlandish, *McKenzie Rising* satirizes and skewers familiar facets of American culture, politics and industry. With zany dialogue and an irreverent plot, Miles Wilson creates a picaresque novel populated with over-the-top personalities (complete with a chalk-eating president) that only seem fantastical until we turn on the nightly news. Part environmental ode, part roasting of soulless priorities (including a glorious take-down of the mainstream fiction formula), the book is whip-smart and a worthy read despite some occasions of heavy-handedness.

– James Wade

## REAVIS Z. WORTHAM

### *The Texas Job*

Poisoned Pen Press  
Paperback, 397 pages, \$15.99  
SourceBooks.com

In Reavis Z. Wortham's newest effort, a Texas Ranger thriller set in the East Texas oilfield boom of 1931, we find Ranger Tom Bell confronting corruption on a grand scale – a local circle of murderous swindlers with ties to a higher-up criminal element that itself takes orders from mob bosses. Here, Bell is a younger version of the character that Wortham, a Spur Award winner, featured in his "Red River Mystery Series" set in the 1960s. Evocative of the real-life exploits of Rangers like "Lone Wolf" Gonzauillas, *The Texas Job* comes alive with Depression-era people, realities and motives. The tension ratchets and the body count rises as Bell thwarts mounting efforts to waylay him. Wortham is, as always, a master of the vernacular in this crafted, efficient, plausible tale.

– Jesse Mullins

# POETRY

## SHERL CEDERBURG

### *Wisdom in the Wind*

Ranger Station Studio  
CD, 18 tracks, \$15  
SherlCederburg.com

Sherl Cederburg's *Wisdom in the Wind* is reminiscent of a trip to a favorite aunt's house. Her style of poetry is brimming with nostalgia and lovely surprises, dashed with vignettes of wisdom and humor. She shares from her heart and her life, without pretense she talks of faith and hope, love of old horses, nature and values. Cederburg recites with meadow-lark-in-the-morning crispness her concise, crafted lines that honor the art of poetry. Subtle background music by Butch Hause ebbs and flows seamlessly, adding another layer of enjoyment. Cederburg has a good handle on the art of storytelling. By completely avoiding the quicksand of introductions,

she exhibits confidence in her words and delivery – and carries you into each poem with your own thoughts and emotions intact, allowing your mind an engaging experience. I chuckled, I wiped a tear, I loved it. *Wisdom in the Wind* is the definition of entertaining Western poetry.

– Betty Lynne McCarthy

### RIK GOODELL

#### *Why We Cowboy*

CD, 14 tracks, \$20  
Saddle-Borne Lessons  
CD, 14 tracks, \$20  
Allegro Sound Lab  
YonderinTales.com

You can tell a lot by a man's saddle -- post or Guadalajara, bells or oxbows. The rig in Rik Goodell's CD cover pictures hasn't left the dude pen. He states he has never cowboied. I salute his honesty. In *Why We Cowboy*, while talking to a pretty city girl at a bar (groan, always hoping for an original theme), he says: "I'm 'bout as Cowboy as can be." This is a boast never found in our cowboy culture. "... During calvin' season last spring/When I'd come upon a dead cow/and her new calf that was bawling/... took him to the herd/and we

got him mothered up..." Wait. What? The cow is dead. *Mother up* is a specific action in cow country. These CDs might draw accolades from greenhorns who don't know what Goodell doesn't know. For the rest of us, the reckless treatment of our language and traditions is a plastic bag to a third-ride colt. If Goodell would shorten, tighten, inject a metered rhythm, all in respect to the craft of poetry, the contrived and superficial themes would be more acceptable, accompanied by the input of a savvy copy editor.

– Betty Lynne McCarthy

## JUVENILE

### CURTIS CONDON

#### *Wish Upon a Crawdad*

Heart of Oak Books for Young Readers  
Paperback, 235 pages, \$10.99  
HeartOfOakBooks.com

Spunky, 12-year-old Ruby Mae Ryan is determined to catch enough crawdads for the local restaurant to buy something so special that she has kept it a secret from everyone but her daddy and her best friend. Set in 1940 in rural Oregon, this sweet and gentle story uses lots of

era-specific language and historical context to paint a rich picture of life in rural farm country before electric cooperatives brought power. Ruby is thwarted by a rascalion of a little brother and a neighbor's dog gone rogue. But in the end, Ruby achieves her dream and the valley residents get electricity.

– Jennifer Bohnhoff

**CASEY DAY RISLOV** (author) and **ZACHARY PULLEN** (illustrator)  
*The Rowdy Randy Wild West Show: The Legend Behind the Legend*

Mountain Stars Press  
Hardcover, 28 pages, \$21.95  
CaseyRislovBooks.com

Rowdy Randy, the West's legendary horsefly who first appeared in *Rowdy Randy*, a 2020 Spur Award finalist, returns in another charming children's picture book. This time author Casey Day Rislov has her cowgirl insect creating a buzz as she holds auditions for a Wild West show. Children – with help from adult readers – can look for badgers and other mammals, along with spiders, frogs, birds, insects and amphibians, all stunningly created by Zachary Pullen.

– Johnny D. Boggs



## To outline or fly by the seat of your pants ...?

Planner or Pantser?

It's not unusual for fiction writers to voice strong opinions on whether or not to outline. Personally, I tend to wing it. My historical novels or stories begin with an image of an imagined character in a specific place and time. Then I let the character loose to climb the scaffolding of history, with historical facts as my guide.



**CANDACE  
SIMAR**

During revision, I dig out *Save the Cat Writes a Novel* by Jessica Brody and determine if the necessary beats are found in my manuscript – and if they're in the right place. It's time consuming, and I'm envious of those

who are able to do it differently, but it works for me. I confess to boredom if I know too soon what will happen.

Nancy Oswald may or may not be a pantser, but her advice rings true. "If I'm bored writing, I figure the reader will be bored reading."

Janice Hurff (aka Susanna Lane) suggests a different approach. "Outline. Outline. Outline. I've heard many authors say they write by the seat of their pants. That's OK, but I still think the fundamental truth prevails. We all need something to guide us along a rough trail. We might decide to take the down slope or the up slope to reach the same place. But without a map, we can't look back to see if we might have found another way. Call it framework, map, or just a simple outline. It isn't carved in stone."

Natalie Bright gives the following tip: "About pantsing or plotting, I fall somewhere in between. The writing begins when I have a solid character, the opening scene, and the ending in my head. Then it's a matter of letting the character tell me their story."

Thank you for these excellent tips. How about you? Don't be shy. Send your tip to [simar@tds.net](mailto:simar@tds.net) with "Best Writing Tip" in the subject line. Let's help each other become the best writers we can be. Future topics include writing nonfiction, the traditional Western, historical romance, short story and writing for magazines.

\*\*\*

**Candace Simar is an award-winning writer based in Pequot Lakes, Minnesota.**





**The English**

Amazon Studios  
Streaming on Amazon Prime  
Amazon.com

The dirge for the Western has been droning, seemingly forever, but what keeps snuffing it out are audience expectations for what's next. The genre struggled into the 2000s, but now Westerns have won Oscars again (*The Revenant*, *The Power of the Dog*); *Dead-*

*wood* broke ratings records; *Justified*, *Longmire* and *Joe Pickett* hit; and in the past years, Taylor Sheridan has emerged as a creative Western force, and Walter Hill has returned to the director's chair.



No other genre defies business doom-saying like the Western.

The announcement of a new project always generates opinions and social media buzz, but, most important, gives us something to embrace. When FX dropped the first images of Tim Olyphant in *Justified: City Primeval*, the fans, including myself, roared through the internet needing to see more. The eager speculation of what Taylor Sheridan will do with *Bass Reeves* is practically electric.

In the middle of all this current frenzy, Emily Blount has quietly arrived as actor and producer of *The English*, a six-part BBC/Amazon Prime series that's arguably one of the best Westerns made since Eastwood gathered his *Unforgiven* Oscars.

The actress, who has beautifully embodied everything from *Mary Poppins* to the blood-spattered DEA agent of *Sicario*, is Cornelia Locke, a prim Englishwoman who arrives in the West of 1890 seeking revenge against those responsible for her son's death. Cornelia has no idea how to start her hunt or which direction to follow.

Cornelia falls in with Eli Whipp (Chaske Spencer), a Pawnee military scout who has revenge business of his own, and he agrees to help. But the journey is a twisted and brutally violent one that changes them both, perhaps leading them to a life together.

Only "perhaps," because *The English* takes us to the edge of Western cliché, then veers in other, surprising directions.

Writer-director Hugo Blick draws cinematic inspiration from Euro Westerns and also the genuine, hard landscape of the American West. Could Frederic Remington and Sergio Leone actually mesh into a visual style? They do here, and Arnau Valls Colomer's stunning photography captures it all, from glorious horizon shots to bleeding closeups.

Peppered with a superb supporting cast, including Toby Jones and a villainous Ciarán Hinds, *The English* is a true genre accomplishment, with Emily Blunt's transformative performance from a Deborah Kerr-like lady to a tough Woman of the West at its creative center.

**TIPPERARY (from page 18)**

military had begun to require heavier horses and farmers wanted that type, too, resulting in a glut of lightweight range horses. Prices plummeted. Some disgusted ranchers refused to sell and turned those horses back onto the range where they multiplied. This created a new problem, and a solution was decided. As one observer said, "A good horse was a canned horse."

Buyers came representing companies like Ken-L Rations or overseas countries that purchased horse meat for human consumption. Due to strong opposition to slaughtering horses in the United States, processing plants stopped operations in 2007. Horses intended for this market began going to Mexico or Canada to be processed in European-Union regulated plants.

Tipperary did not experience an ignoble end in a dog-food factory, but

his story does not end happily. In 1932, after he had been turned out to fend for himself, a blizzard caught him in the open. He was found in the spring, his bones picked clean.

But it seems only natural to imagine him fighting until the very end, biting, kicking, and striking out with his sharp hooves at snarling wolves that have him surrounded and finally bring him down. He had fought on until the end.

**PTW video selected for Oklahoma film festival**

*The Trial of Standing Bear* educational video for WWA's and the Homestead Foundation's *Packing the West* program has been selected as an official film for the Red Dirt Film Festival. The April 14-16 event features films and live music virtually and in person in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Ponca Chief Standing Bear became embroiled in one of the most important court cases in the land after leading his people back to Nebraska from the Indian Country

they had been removed to. Standing Bear was an American Indian civil rights leader who successfully argued in the US District Court in Omaha in 1879 that Native Americans are "persons within the meaning of the law," and that they had the right of habeas corpus. This made him the first Native American judicially granted civil rights under American law.

For more information, log on to [RedDirtFilm.com](http://RedDirtFilm.com).