

JUVENILE

JAMES J. GRIFFIN and **LESLEI FISHER** (authors)
and **LAURA TOMMASO** (illustrator)
Ranger Andy and the Ghastly Ghouls

Yankee Cowboy Press
Paperback, 100 pages, \$6.99
YankeeCowboyPress.com

On his way back to headquarters in Austin, Texas Ranger Andy Anderson stops in Llano, where he encounters some strange goings-on, including a haunted hotel and a ghost that steals from local businesses in the dead of night. Aided by his trusty horse, Patches; his entertaining dog, Tippy Howard; and local youngsters Tommy, Becky and Julio, Ranger Andy uses great investigative skills to help the town marshal solve the case. The book teaches children some of the history of Llano and the Texas Rangers, lots of cool words for “ghost,” including some in Spanish, and encourages readers to draw and decorate in the blank spaces at the end of each chapter.

– Rocky Gibbons

NONFICTION

J.J. ANSELM

Out Here on Our Own: An Oral History of an American Boomtown

University of Nebraska Press
Paperback, 192 pages, \$21.95
Nebraskapress.unl.edu

J.J. Anselmi is a heavy-metal musician, a drummer with an MFA, and he succeeds here in drumming into the reader the pathology of Rock Springs, Wyoming. Racism and sexism seem minor things when compared to the violence, addiction, suicide, alcoholism, mental illness, and despair of one of Wyoming’s best-known and least favorite places. Located on Interstate 80, the offspring of the Union Pacific Railroad and the coal mines located there, Rock Springs might be best known for the Chinese Riot of 1885 or the cop who was acquitted after shooting another cop between the eyes while both sat in a patrol car almost a hundred years later. This is a book about boom and bust in the West in an extreme version. It has its flaws. It’s assembled for insiders, and one wishes for greater background, more explanation, and less anger. (The author likes the “f” word – a lot.) But its authentic voices tell a visceral tale.

– Charles E. Rankin

TOBIN T. BUHK

American Hangman: A Biography of Amos Lunt, the Executioner of San Quentin

McFarland & Company
Paperback, 282 pages, \$29.95
McFarlandBooks.com

The craft of a hangman was derived from his skill in calculating “the drop.” If it was too short, then the victim would slowly strangle. If the drop was too long, the head popped off, creating a gruesome mess. Amos Lunt came to

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—Craig Johnson
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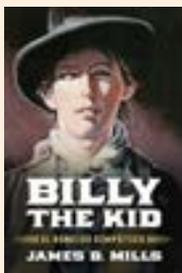
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his job when the public began to sour on small-town hangings. If the state took over, then perhaps the task could become more humane. Lunt, who had been a colorful, though fair-minded lawyer, brought professionalism to his work. In the 1890s, he hanged 20 men, most of them cleanly. But the ghosts of his victims, and Lunt's alcohol binges, drove him mad. Buhk's sad, impressively researched tale is enlivened by his portraits of the condemned, who seem quite human but pretty much deserved what they got.

– John Mort



Editor's Note: Running in the August and February issues, *Take 2* offers two opinions on one book.



JAMES B. MILLS
Billy the Kid: El Bandido Simpático

University of North Texas Press
Hardcover, 672 pages, \$34.95
UNTPress.unt.edu

Millions of pages have been written about Billy the Kid, the Southwest's iconic "bad boy." Those pages explored his life, death and everything in between. James B. Mills's

book emphasizes Billy's connection with Hispanics and their influence on him. The book generally is a rehash of what is known about Billy, along with insight of factors influencing the young man's actions. Unfortunately, Mills has never set foot in Lincoln, Fort Sumner or any of the territory Billy haunted. As an Australian, Mills hasn't made it to Billy's land to see and speak with people about what he writes. He has done mountains of research and reached out to Billy experts, so the information is fresh. At more than 600 pages, there are many stories squashed in there.

– Melody Groves

James B. Mills's first published biography raises the bar high for all scholars of the New Mexico outlaw. The young historian's detailed research on Henry McCarty, aka William H. Bonney, provides readers with a fresh perspective on the Kid's amiable and loving relationship with the Hispano community of New Mexico. His comprehensive synthesis of previously published materials and the Australian's original scholarship is detailed in his extensive, annotated endnotes and inclusive bibliography. In addition to providing a roadmap to fellow scholars and researchers of his primary and secondary sources, Mills also provides a comprehensive introduction and conclusion, including a well-written historiography that places his *Billy the Kid* within the previously published scholarship. Does Mills claim to have the last word on Billy Bonney? No, as Mills notes: "We relentlessly chase after him even more furiously than Pat Garrett did. Rarely does any historical figure so often cause as much debate and sometimes outright hostility amongst those who research and write about his life."

– Stuart Rosebrook

LaJEAN PURCELL CARRUTH
and **RONALD G. WATT** (editors)

Liverpool to Great Salt Lake: The 1851 Journal of Missionary George D. Watt

University Of Nebraska Press
Hardcover, 258 pages, \$45
NebraskaPress.unl.edu

The Liverpool-Great Salt Lake route was the one traveled most by Mormons emigrating to Utah for the gathering of Zion. From Liverpool to New Orleans by ship. From New Orleans up the Mississippi by boat to St. Louis. From St. Louis down the Missouri to Kaneshville, Iowa. From Kaneshville to Great Salt Lake City by wagon train and for a few years even by handcart. This was the route of my ancestors, and I looked to unearth some real detail. Mostly I was not disappointed, although the journal stops with Chimney Rock. The editors speculate on why George D. Watt wrote nothing after Chimney Rock. The journal is what you might expect: trip facts (weather, mileage, conditions), observations that caught attention (flowers, grasses) and a few notes, rarely negative, on the brethren. I found most of what I wanted in the journal, but if you might want more scholarly information, it is there. The journal runs 94 pages. Five appendices, notes, bibliography and commentary provide another 164 pages.

– Edward Massey

LYNN DOWNEY

American Dude Ranch: A Touch of the Cowboy and the Thrill of the West

University of Oklahoma Press
Paperback, 246 pages, \$24.95
OUPress.com

This book's existence began with the author's fascination for the 1930s clothing catalogs for "Dude Ranch Duds" when she was employed as historian and archivist for Levi Strauss & Co. in San Francisco. Dude ranches, which began as a way for cattle ranchers to survive hard times, became popular in the early 1900s, when Pittsburgh native Howard Eaton informally founded the first such enterprise in Wyoming. In those early days, dude ranches played host to novelists Mary Roberts Rinehart and Zane Grey (in need of retreats, as we all know!), and became the sites of movie shoots, including some Gene Autry and Tom Mix pictures. Lynn Downey tracks dude ranching from the start to current times, examining its influence on everyday lifestyles and vacation trends. As a teen in Arizona, growing up on and around cattle ranches, I remember reading *Trixie Belden and Mystery in Arizona*, and thinking to myself "Why in the world would Easterners want to come to a ranch out West?" Little did I know, dude ranches serve a definite purpose.

– Rocky Gibbons

HUBERT H. HAYS with **W.R. McAFEE**
and **CATHERINE HEFFERAN**

Driller: An Oilman's Fifty Years in the Field

Texas Tech University Press
Paperback, 194 pages, \$26.95
TTUPress.org

Whether you're pro-petroleum or lean more Tesla, Hubert Hays's autobiographical look at oilfield work is sure to entertain and inform. Hubert's homespun, yet scientifically

DAVID LAVENDER

Bent's Fort: A Historical Account of the Adobe Empire that Shaped the Destiny of the American Southwest

Doubleday, 1954
Hardcover, 450 pages

By Candy Moulton

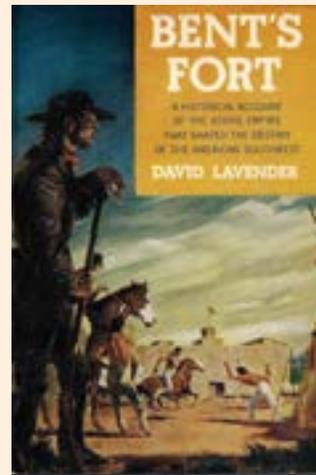
In 1954, WWA presented the first Spur Award for a nonfiction book to David Lavender for *Bent's Fort: A Historical Account of the Adobe Empire that Shaped the Destiny of the American Southwest*. This book, published by Doubleday, has continuously been in print since its first release. By any measure it is a classic. I had a reprint copy for many years, dog-eared from repeated use, but this summer I scored a copy of the first edition, picking it up at a farm auction as part of a collection of books.

I read it again. This time I was reading not to find details for my own writing, but to truly absorb the writing techniques and style Lavender utilized. His research is meticulous. And he has a penchant for a short sentence. Those two attributes make *Bent's Fort* imminently readable, and a remarkable resource for anyone interested in the early fur

trade, overland travel along the Santa Fe Trail, Indian relations and the landscape of the Arkansas River country, where the Bent brothers and partner Ceran St. Vrain established their trading post.

The end notes alone are worth studying – and appreciating. Lavender pored through archival records, wrote letters and made connections with like-minded writers who were on their own research and writing quests. One of them was Dale Morgan, who shared unpublished material with Lavender, a gift from one historian to another. And the gesture was appreciated. Lavender wrote in one of his notes: “Such experiences considerably brighten the often dreary chore of historical spadework.”

Anyone whose writing touches on the history of Bent's Fort and the area and people connected to that site, can easily respect Lavender's spadework.



precise tales give insight to an industry that's often maligned and misunderstood. Hays has a knack as a storyteller, historian and jokester. From Montana to Maracaibo, his stories of life as a driller are riveting. With the aid of a well-documented glossary, the mechanical, engineering and technical terms can be comprehended. However, insider's dialect and jargon are sometimes hard to decipher, leaving the reader adrift. Not to worry, Hubert regularly comes back to the meat of the matter: how he accomplishes difficult jobs in far-flung locations across the globe with flair and finesse, along with simple hard work and perseverance. The book kept me turning pages well past my normal shut-eye time.

– Peter Bruce

TOM LYNCH

Outback and Out West: The Settler-Colonial Imaginary

University of Nebraska Press
Hardcover, 335 pages, \$60
NebraskaPress.unl.edu

In recent years, the term “settler colonialism” has attracted Western history scholars. It is a term that has caused some controversy, for it challenges the writings of historians who have examined history from a Eurocentric viewpoint. Tom Lynch has written a coura-

geous book that offers transnational history comparing Australia's Outback with the American West. Both regions have had comparative experiences, sharing commonalities of aridity, environmental damage, and injustice toward Indigenous people. Lynch sees settler colonialism as a concept at odds with the traditional history, geology and literature regarding the two regions. Where settlers defined these regions as empty, unsettled lands, Lynch finds omissions in the neglect of the presence of Aboriginal and Native Americans whose long history predates the past 200 years of Outback and Western settlement. I hope that Lynch's book will awaken awareness that “pioneers” who tried to replicate European lifestyles found out the hard way that their efforts could not be sustained in arid regions.

– Abraham Hoffman

IAN MacPHERSON McCULLOCH
John Bradstreet's Raid, 1758: A Riverine Operation of the French and Indian War

University of Oklahoma Press
Hardcover, 230 pages, \$45
OUPress.com

In this ground-breaking study of riverine warfare during the French and Indian War (called the Seven Years War in Europe), the author, a retired lieutenant colonel in the Canadian army, surveys an early example of the concept

and methodology of this now largely forgotten form of combat. Colonel John Bradstreet (1714-74), a veteran of the Niagara campaign, was a strong advocate for the creation of what the British Army called the Battoe Service, “which gave the British Army a much-needed operational capability to maneuver in the wilderness of North America.” A bateau (pl. bateaux) was a flat-bottomed boat, made of wood, and capable of accommodating from two to five tons of cargo. The book quickly addresses Bradstreet's victory at Fort Frontenac located at the junction of the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario. The author successfully incorporates the colonel's views of the affair – which, to say the least, were self-serving – with the recollections of common soldiers and bateau men who served in the 3,000-man attacking force. The book is nicely illustrated and is augmented with 11 appendices, notes and a comprehensive bibliography.

– James A. Crutchfield

BILL MARKLEY

Wild Bill Hickok & Buffalo Bill Cody: Plainsmen of the Legendary West

TwoDot
Paperback, 489 pages, \$24.95
TwoDotBooks.com

This is a book about three Bills. If

you have ever been curious, perhaps confused, about Wild Bill Hickok and/or Buffalo Bill Cody, you need to read this history by Bill Markley. Hickok's and Cody's stories are similar in many ways, and in fact, they were friends. Both historical Bills sometimes seem larger than life. Markley does an admirable job separating truth from imagination and tells us when the distinction is a bit muddled. The book is thoroughly researched and well-written. Anyone who sets out to write about Hickok or Cody should consult Markley's book before diving into the original sources. The book is heavily footnoted and includes an extensive bibliography. The volume is a reliable source and a good read.

– Harlan Hague

GARY NOY (editor)

Nature's Mountain Mansion: Wonder, Wrangles, Bloodshed, and Bellyaching from Nineteenth-Century Yosemite

Bison Books
Paperback, 360 pages, \$29.95
Bisonbooks.com

This anthology is mainly based on contemporary articles, books and government reports, mostly written in the 1870s. Editor Gary Noy interweaves the accounts with brief introductory essays that places the authors and their contributions in a clear context, though the subtitle of the book, with its semi-alliterative provocative words, promises more than it delivers. The heart of the book, chapters 4-7, contains descriptions of visitors to Yosemite whose

admiration for Yosemite Valley knew no bounds. These descriptions are so similar they become repetitive. However, Noy includes important chapters on the valley's First Peoples, the Mariposa War and the complaints from government officials and travelers on the difficulties of traveling just to get to Yosemite and the damage done to the valley's environment by businessmen and ranchers who were more interested in making money than in preserving the environment. John Muir earns a separate chapter. Researchers will find this book useful for the eyewitness descriptions of the contributors and the easy access to information as to where the accounts were first published.

– Abraham Hoffman

JOHN M. OSKISON (author) and **LIONEL LARRÉ** (editor)
Unconquerable: The Story of John Ross, Chief of the Cherokees, 1828-1866

University of Nebraska Press
Paperback, 276 pages, \$30
NebraskaPress.unl.edu

John Ross (1790-1866) was the Cherokee principal chief whose tenure (1828-1866) spanned the "Trail of Tears" tribal displacement and the Civil War in Indian Territory. In the 1930s, Cherokee author John Oskison (1874-1947) wrote this biography, minus footnotes. He termed it a "story," as opposed to a history. The rejected manuscript languished nearly 90 years before seeing print in this fully annotated version, edited by Lionel Larré. It's clear Ross was an able,

sacrificing man. He receives unstinting praise – never is a flaw hinted at. Was he *that* good? When a writer pens a homage, objectivity can be a casualty. Was Ross important? Unquestionably. Was his life *exciting*? Well, he was a man of peace. If negotiations and endless envoys to Washington suffice, then yes. But this is also a story of the Cherokees, and their tale matters most.

– Jesse Mullins

CHUCK PARSONS and **THOMAS C. BICKNELL**

King Fisher: The Short Life and Elusive Legend of a Texas Desperado

University of North Texas Press
Hardcover, 320 pages, \$29.95
UNTPress.unt.edu

It's always interesting when modern day and the past reflect each other, and that example of parallelism is found here in the latest work by Chuck Parsons and Thomas C. Bicknell, *King Fisher: The Short Life and Elusive Legend of a Texas Desperado*. King Fisher was an outlaw to be reckoned with, killing and punishing witnesses or anyone who got in his way. Inaccurate reporting – yellow journalism – made Fisher's legend even bigger and more difficult to verify. Even an intervention by Texas Ranger Captain Leander McNelly couldn't save King Fisher. He was gunned down because of the company he kept. Well-written and thoroughly researched, especially given the lack of trustworthy history and material, this volume will be of interest to readers and researchers who want to know more about real

NEW BOOK RELEASE BY JIRI CERNIK

They Called Them the Fightin' Earps

Jiri Cernik



WYATT EARP

VIRGIL EARP

MORGAN EARP

The Earp brothers come to Tombstone to invest in recently opened silver mines and to retire from their law enforcement careers. They soon realize that on one hand they cannot ignore the lawlessness surrounding the territory, and on the other, their presence as former lawmen draws the attention of the local administration and the Wells Fargo Company.

AVAILABLE AT AMAZON.COM
OR WWW.PTPBOOKDIVISION.COM

"Western wordsmith and great storyteller Jiri Cernik has done it again with his latest historical novel, *They Called them the Fightin' Earps*. Fans of the Earps, Doc Holliday, Clantons, et al will certainly enjoy Cernik's colorful tale of the Earp Brothers violent days in Tombstone, Arizona Territory."

– Stuart Rosebrook, Ph.D., Editor of *True West*

"Jiri Cernik, clearly a devotee of Wild West history, brings Wyatt, Virgil, Doc, Ike, Ringo and other colorful Tombstone characters into the spotlight once more with his literary version of the ever-fascinating Earps vs. Cowboys real-life tale. Most of the dramatic episodes he enthusiastically relates – including the gunfight near the O.K. Corral and Wyatt Earp's Vendetta Ride afterward – actually took place, and Jiri adeptly fills in the historical blanks with what might have happened and what could have been said. The Fighting Earps and their foes sure enough speak their minds here, unleashing more than their fair share of good old-fashioned fighting words."

– Gregory Lalire, *Wild West* magazine editor and author of the 2019 novel *Our Frontier Pastime: 1804-1815*

Texas outlaws. With pictures, a complete bibliography and appendices, this would be a fantastic book if it weren't for the useless and overlooked index (the document here is a concordance, not an index, and fails any serious reader who might have questions to answer). Still, a worthy work that delves into the life of a lesser-known outlaw.

—Larry D. Sweazy

ANDREW J. RAUSCH

Perspectives on Elmore Leonard: Conversations with Authors, Experts and Collaborators

McFarland & Company
Paperback, 194 pages, \$49.95
McFarlandBooks.com

Whenever Dutch Leonard and I met, we talked writing. He found first-person, a form I often use, restrictive. I thought his “rules of writing” would make everyone write like him. Inevitably, this give-and-take is missing from *Perspectives on Elmore Leonard*. He’s not around to discuss the points. Max Allan Collins prefers “structure” to Leonard’s laissez-faire approach to plot; Dutch held that flying too close to one’s original outline is stilted and makes for a predictable narrative. Dave Geherin faults Leonard’s male-female relationships; yet *The Switch* is a compelling story told entirely from a woman’s perspective. Charles Ardai says, “It’s definitely true that writers lose their edge over time.” Dutch would reject that generalization. He admired authors whose later work was superior to their previous efforts. Jane Jones (née Leonard) sees nothing autobiographical in her father’s work. Knowing the craft of fiction, I’m sure Dutch could cite several examples – but he would be too private to do so. All the interviews in Andrew J. Rausch’s admirable book venerate its subject. If I seem to concentrate on the criticisms, it’s out of loyalty. The reading world misses Elmore Leonard. I miss my friend Dutch.

—Loren D. Estleman

C. THOMAS SHAY

Under Prairie Skies, The Plants and Native Peoples of the Northern Plains

Bison Books
Paperback, 312 pages, \$29.95
BisonBooks.com

C. Thomas Shay blends botany, ecology, history and Native American culture in this exquisite book. The reasons for traditional land routes are explained using topography of the different areas. He describes the effect of glaciers on the region. His investigation of plants and grasses is amazing. Shay’s language and beautiful photographs support his scientific observations. This book kept me mesmerized to the end. I will put it in my reference library for use in future writing projects set in the Northern Plains. I’d recommend it to anyone.

—Candace Simar

FICTION

KATE ANGER

The Shinnery

Bison Books
Paperback, 256 pages, \$21.95
BisonBooks.com

Most novels have characters. Others have people as real



Dead for a Dollar

Chaos a Film Company/Polaris Pictures
Streaming on various outlets
Prices vary

The fact that veteran action filmmaker Walter Hill dedicated *Dead for a Dollar* to Budd Boetticher should deal all criticism against it a death blow. Choosing Boetticher as his artistic muse wasn’t simply an inspired choice by the filmmaker, it was also a practical one. During Boetticher’s famous

Ranown period, the budgets imposed by star/producer Randolph Scott were notoriously tight, and the shooting schedules even tighter. Hill’s *Dead for a Dollar* faced those same challenges, and I think Hill wanted the cineastes in his audience to know it.

Christoph Waltz is a bounty hunter facing challenges all around him: the impending release of an old enemy (Willem Defoe) who has sworn revenge and taking on the task of locating the wife of a rich man, who insists she was kidnapped when the truth is she ran away with her Black lover. The stories collide when Defoe journeys to Mexico to confront Waltz, who is struggling with returning the woman to her husband, who wants to kill her rather than forgive her.



C. COURTNEY JOYNER

There’s familiar comfort in the plot with Defoe’s villain, and the racial aspects of the runaway wife story bring us echoes of *The Professionals* and the underrated *Duel at Diablo*, where the women chose lives with Mexican revolutionaries or the Apache instead of their white husbands. Fragments of other Westerns resonate throughout, but these tropes feel more like mini salutes

to the films that have gone before rather than poor imitations.

When it’s time for the guns to come out, Hill opts for intimacy with gunfights being in closed spaces, pistols inches from the enemy’s chest. When the action expands, it’s still limited in stunts, which is a mark of the film’s budget but not of Hill’s staging or camera placement. The visual pallet of *Dead for a Dollar* is muted earth tones, the accepted colors of memory, rather than the lush greens of *The Long Riders* or the sweep of *Broken Trail*. Those were movies made when money was no object for Walter Hill, which just isn’t the case here.

Make no mistake, *Dead for a Dollar* is a compromised Western created by a director dedicated to the genre. It’s also an example of an old pro, like Boetticher, making the most of his circumstances while showing the young turks how it’s done.

C. Courtney Joyner writes in many formats, including screenplays, fiction and nonfiction. E-mail him at olcourt@yahoo.com.

and authentic as you and I are. Kate Anger's *The Shinnery* isn't most novels. Seventeen-year-old Jessa Campbell gets a chance that most farm girls on the Texas frontier in 1894 would jump at, a comfortable position with a family in town. But to Jessa, the fields and pastures are her element. And then she meets Will Keyes, who brings laughter and a new kind of love into Jessa's life. But he brings something else as well. Through Jessa's senses, the reader smells the wildflowers, tastes the cobbler, feels the textures of life in rural West Texas. Through Jessa's heart, we experience a person loved and taken for granted, used and vindicated.

— Loyd Uglow

MARY CLEARMAN BLEW

Think of Horses

Bison Books
Paperback, 285 pages, \$21.95
BisonBooks.com

Tam Bowen returns to Montana to the place where she grew up and finds Bunce, a kindly, older friend, has died and his house is in disrepair. When she learns from the sheriff that Bunce has been shot, she decides to stay and learn what happened to him. Filled with a cast of rich characters from Tam's past and mountain landscape that transports you there, this book is well worth a look. This is not the first book I have read from Blew, and each piece of her work is quite unique.

— Linda Jacobs

IRENE BENNETT BROWN

Somebody's Business

Five Star Publishing
Hardcover, 218 pages, \$25.95
Gale.com/five-star

When Jocelyn Pladson buys the town of Skiddy, Kansas's only livery stable to help out a widowed friend, she doesn't realize that two uppity newcomers with fancy motorcars are going to stand in her way in the name of progress. Neither does she suspect that her family might end up threatened and in danger. Full of humor and sweetness, the third book in the "Nickel Hill" series continues to follow the characters from Brown's young adult novel *Before the Lark*. Brown, an award-winning author, includes enough backstory to allow new fans to enjoy this book, but it will be most satisfying to readers who have followed the growth of plucky Jocelyn and her cobbled-together family from the start.

— Jennifer Bohnhoff

JAMES DUERMAYER

Singing Creek

Speaking Volumes
Paperback, 308 pages, \$16.95

Counterfeit Rodeos

Speaking Volumes
Trade Paperback, 307 pages, \$16.95
SpeakingVolumes.us

Singing Creek and *Counterfeit Rodeos* are the second and third installments of James Duermeyer's Nathan Wolf series set in and around Chanute, Kansas. *Singing Creek* portrays the activities of the Ku Klux Klan that occurred after the Civil War in the late 1860s and beyond. These activities lead U.S. Marshal Nathan Wolf on an adventure trying to solve recent

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MARTHA BURNS

Blind Eye

Atmosphere Press
Hardcover, paperback, \$27.99, \$18.99,
306 pages
AtmospherePress.com

This is not a book you'll read for its pure entertainment value. In fact, it might break your heart. What it will do is make you think and help you decide what your responsibility to community, neighbors and the weak among us truly is. This is a story of an innocent child and the people who turned a blind eye to his painful upbringing. Even those who cared for him stood by and watched him suffer. The book, set in the vast spaces and small towns of New Mexico, takes place in the recent past. We learn – maybe more than we're comfortable knowing – the depths poverty of soul may acquire in this beautifully crafted tale of murder and abuse. I won't be surprised to see Martha Burns's story garnering writing awards.

— Carol Crigger

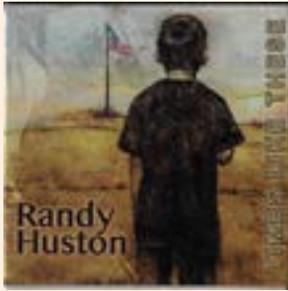
Martha Burns's latest novel is a well-executed story that prompts reflection on how a close-knit ranching community could turn a blind eye to years of mental and verbal abuse of a child at the hands of his father. The story is engaging and based on a real event that occurred in New Mexico. The Pruitt story is told with a compassionate voice. As the story unfolds, you begin to care deeply about the safety and well-being of characters whose lives are endangered. Burns's crisp and well-crafted sentences are visual gems with landscape and ranch life details bringing the story to life. Many thought-provoking issues are raised. It's a chilling novel whose voices will haunt you long after the last page.

— Sue Ready

cattle rustling problems that include his neighbors and could lead to his family's ranch. While investigating the cattle rustling, he discovers a murder that happened 20 years earlier. As the story progresses, the two are tied together. The story is full of excitement, but read the introduction, which lays out the story's background.

In *Counterfeit Rodeos*, Wolf becomes involved with the Secret Service and Pinkerton Agency after discovering that the rodeo that comes to Chanute is rigged. When a horse dies in the arena after being drugged by the stock owner to buck harder, he finds a local cowboy beaten to be kept from competing. The story continues to grow as counterfeit money is discovered hidden in books. The story has several twists, between fixed rodeo, counterfeit money and murder that will keep your interest.

— Lowell F. Volk



RANDY HUSTON
Times Like These

Outside Circle Records, \$18
RandyHuston.com

Randy Huston sang “Reflections,” a song on this 14-cut CD, during the Sunday Morning Gospel Concert at November’s International Western Music Association gathering

in Albuquerque, New Mexico. It’s about a man trying to measure up to what he believes is the way he appears to his horse, his dog, his child, his father and his God. He keeps falling short, in his own estimation, because he’s human.

Still, I keep seeking redemption

On roads that are paved with intention.



OLLIE REED JR.

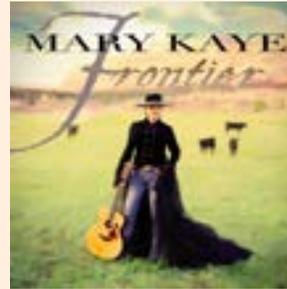
I found that song the most meaningful performed at that gospel concert and count it my favorite on this CD, no mean feat considering how fine this collection is. If “The Hands That Held the Child” doesn’t break your heart, it’s because it’s already beyond repair.

I would have bet “Times Like These,” about a community hanging together during rough times, was about the wildfire that devastated the country around Huston’s Rociada, New Mexico, home in 2022. Except it was written before that catastrophe. The

song is about a car crash that took the lives of a ranching couple, friends of Huston’s.

“We don’t get to explain a song before people hear it,” Huston said. “We make songs that are bigger than a specific event.”

Huston was voted Male Performer of the Year and Songwriter of the Year at the IWMA conference.



MARY KAYE
Frontier

Mary Kaye, \$20
MaryKayeHolt.com

Mary Kaye’s voice is the best thing about every song she performs, although the writing ranks right up there with those

she creates. She won the 2013 Spur Award for songwriting with “Any Name Will Do,” a rousing ballad about Butch Cassidy.

The opulently orchestrated title track is the highlight of this 12-cut CD. Kaye says the song is about “the dirty and the divine” that make up the lives of people who work with large animals and rattle over dirt roads.

Other favorites here include Kaye’s up-tempo “A Horse Called Freedom,” also about the cowboy life.

E-mail Ollie at olreed.com@gmail.com and send CDs to him at P.O. Box 2381, Corrales, NM 87048.

W. MICHAEL FARMER

Trini! Come!: Geronimo’s Captivity of Trinidad Verdín, A Novel

Five Star Publishing
Hardcover, 343 pages, \$25.95
Gale.com/five-star

Inspired by that which is historically uncertain yet begs for deeper exploration, the best historical fiction provides the reader with a plausible and engrossing story framed by what is accepted as historically certain. W. Michael Farmer accomplishes this with his latest novel. “I have taken a storyteller’s license to fill in those blank records with what might have happened.” In April 1886, Trini Verdín, a 12-year-old girl living with her aunt and uncle on a small ranch north of Nogales, was kidnapped by Apaches. Geronimo spared the girl’s life. Two months later she escaped. This novel is an empathetic exploration of the two months during which the brave girl lived with Geronimo and his small band. The first-person narrator, Trini, immerses the reader in Apache life ways and the circumstances that perpetuated the violence of the period. Farmer continues to use fiction effectively to explore the Apache perspective of the complexities of the Apache wars.

– Tom Carpenter

JAMES J. GRIFFIN

Change of Venue

Yankee Cowboy Press
Paperback, 223 pages, \$9.99
YankeeCowboyPress.com

Adventure fills the fifth book in James J. Griffin’s contemporary series about Texas Ranger James C. Blawczyk. After Blawczyk continues his spontaneous actions with Company F, he is forced to move to Company E in western Texas, where there is less action. However, his actions do not change between drug smugglers and corrupt politicians. This page-turner is an excellent read.

– Lowell F. Volk

JODY HEDLUND

To Tame a Cowboy

Bethany House
Paperback, 341 pages, \$16.99
BakerPublishingGroup.com

Savannah Marshall flees an arranged marriage and finds a place to hide when she accepts a position as a veterinarian for a neighboring ranch. There she meets troubled Brody McQuaid, who finds solace from his past in helping wild Mustangs. This is an emotional story of how two broken people with deep secrets come together over a common purpose.

The intensity of their attraction to each other plus their intuitive connection with horses add a unique element which makes for an enjoyable read.

– Natalie Bright

STEVE KELTON

Elmer Kelton's The Unlikely Lawman

Forge

Mass-market paperback, 288 pages, \$9.99
Tor-Forge.com

Hewey Callaway was one of the most endearing characters created by seven-time Spur Award winner Elmer Kelton (1926-2009). Callaway, a roaming early-1900s cowboy, appeared in *The Good Old Boys* (1978), *The Smiling Country* (1999) and *Six Bits a Day* (2005) – all Spur finalists. Kelton's son Steve, like his father a longtime West Texas livestock journalist, continues Callaway's escapades. "I wrote *The Unlikely Lawman* based on where Dad said he wanted it to begin," Steve writes, "and how he wanted to launch it; from there I had no idea what his plot would be because he never wrote an outline or synopsis for a book, preferring to let his characters drive the plot. That's what I've done as well." Fired again, Hewey lands a job driving

a horse herd to Durango, Colorado, and finds himself helping former Texas Ranger Hanley Baker – modeled after Steve Kelton's grandfather Buck Kelton – go after horse thieves led by one hard rock. Sadly, Steve Kelton didn't live to see his novel published or finish his planned continuation of the Callaway saga. Kelton died March 16 at age 70.

– Johnny D. Boggs

JANE KIRKPATRICK

Beneath the Bending Skies

Revell

Paperback, 352 pages, \$17.99
BakerPublishingGroup.com

We meet "Mollie" Sheehan Ronan in this novel based on a memoir of a real-life frontier woman and sprinkled with the richness and imagery of historical Montana. Well researched and engaging, this is the story of a dutiful daughter who struggles to forge her own path while striving to honor her father and mother. She follows her heart to become the wife of an Indian agent on the Flathead Reservation in 1800s. I loved the historical elements and attention to detail, drawing the reader into Mollie's life from the beginning.

– Natalie Bright

JEFFREY J. MARIOTTE

Tarzan and the Forest of Stone

Edgar Rice Burroughs Universe
Paperback, 150 pages, \$18.95
ERBUiverse.com

Murderous bandits stop the Santa Fe Chief passenger train in the Arizona desert, stealing a Native American artifact and kidnapping a young woman after brutally murdering her grandfather. Who can save the day when there's no Lone Ranger or Hollywood hero around? John Clayton, of course, who sheds his 20th Century duds for a loincloth to transform into Tarzan, finds a trusty black stallion and rides to the rescue. But there's another brutal enemy to deal with, and Tarzan's a long way from his beloved jungles and Jane. Jeffrey J. Mariotte, no stranger to pulp fiction, spins a delightful yarn, capturing the essence of Tarzan creator Edgar Rice Burroughs's style while putting his own stamp on the story. Enjoy the ride and hang on for a wild finish at Petrified Forest National Monument.

– Johnny D. Boggs

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LEE MARTIN

Pearl Hart & the Violent Men

Vaca Mountain Press
Paperback, 170 pages, \$18.99

In this story about Pearl Hart, retired U.S. Marshal Chance Donovan relays his story about his interactions with Hart to freelance journalist Elmer Kitchen. Pearl's abusive husband, Fred Hart, beats Pearl, takes her money and leaves. Pearl works hard to save money that she sends to her brother to help her children and sick mother. With Fred gone, actor Joe Boot tries to befriend Pearl. However, Joe and his relatives, the Boxers, use Pearl to get to Chance, who killed Joe's father while he was robbing a bank. I found the book full of action, mystery, love and surprises.

– Lowell F. Volk

ROD MILLER

With a Kiss I Die

Five Star Publishing
Hardcover, 301 pages, \$25.95
Gale.com/five-star

You know you're hooked when the Author's Note is among the best things you have read all year. I write that because the last thing I wanted to do was struggle through another recitation of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, however cleverly done with an overlay of Romeo and Juliet (Mormon boy, Arkansas girl). The prologue carries that same elegant invitation to read a gripping story of our past that soaked blood into the mountain desert. And then we're into it. Juliet, oops, Polly first, and after five chapters that make us like her very much, Romeo (Tom) leaps in. Although I have some quibble with his writing in story, but not in history, I have no doubt Rod Miller has earned himself more awards with this novel. He thanks Dusty Richards for the idea of merging a 165-year-old outrage with a 427-year-old tragedy. The gift is a sure winner.

– Edward Massey

RICHARD PROSCH (editor)

Over Western Trails: Stories by the Western Fictioneers

Western Fictioneers
Paperback, 332 pages, \$16.99
WesternFictioneers.com

The latest short-story collection from the Western Fictioneers organization gives the contributors a free rein to explore journeys over frontier trails. Editor Richard Prosch, a 2016 Spur Award

Goldstein staying at Kensington

From Staff Reports

NEW YORK – Gary Goldstein announced that he will stay with Kensington Publishing Corporation through the end of 2023 as “editor at large/consultant.”

Goldstein, who has edited nine

winner for his short story “The Scalper,” has put together an all-star cast, including Fictioneers Life Achievement Peacemaker Award winners Robert E. Vardeman (writing as Jackson Lowry) and James Reasoner. Most of the stories deal with stagecoaches – Jeffrey J. Mariotte’s “The Strong Box” ranks among the best of that bunch – but Edward Massey pens a well-researched 1849 Overland trails story, and Vonn McKee (aka Micki Fuhrman) delivers a heartbreaking Pony Express tale. Readers might tire of bouncing along in stagecoaches, but with writers like Terry Alexander, JD Arnold, Dennis Doty, J.L. Guin, J.E.S. Hays, Gail Heath, Cheryl Pierson, Terrence McCauley, Charlie Steel, Benjamin Thomas and Big Jim Williams, Western short fiction is in good hands.

– Johnny D. Boggs

RUDY RUIZ

Valley of Shadows

Blackstone
Hardcover, 350 pages, \$27.99
Downpour.com

Part border-Western, part spiritual odyssey, *Valley of Shadows* is Rudy Ruiz's best effort to date. As evidenced in his last novel, *The Resurrection of Fulgencio Ramirez*, (a Spur Award finalist), there is always a mythological spirit to Ruiz's work, but in *Valley of Shadows* the plight and pilgrimage of protagonist Solitario Cisneros is painstakingly human. With Cisneros as the aging hero, the mystical Onawa as his companion, and a beautifully rendered desert landscape as the backdrop, Ruiz weaves a fine tale of redemption and rediscovery. Ruiz writes with the ache of the lonely and the audacity of the hopeful. His prose is unforgiving and his characters unrelenting. *Valley of Shadows* contains a sharpness of vision that is exceedingly rare.

– James Wade

Spur Award-winning titles for Kensington's Pinnacle imprint, planned to retire at the end of 2022.

A 34-year veteran of book publishing, he has worked at Kensington since 2003.

JOHN SHIRLEY

Axle Bust Creek

Pinnacle
Mass-market paperback, 352 pages, \$8.99
KensingtonBooks.com

Former Union soldier Cleveland Trewe arrives in the mining town of Axle Bust Creek to find the villains who attacked his uncle and jumped his claim. He goes against Duncan Conroy, owner of the Golden Fleece Mine and a man who gets his own way without remorse. This is a curious mixture of Old West and 21st Century – don't expect a cowpoke who rubs his boot in the sand and says, “aw shucks, ma'am.” The hero addresses women by their first names, is cognizant of germs and rides off into the sunset with a woman who is more interested in making scientific studies of scorpions and rattlesnakes than she is in marriage. A well-written, but not old-school, Western.

– Vicky J. Rose

LARRY D. SWEAZY

A Cow Hunter's Lament and Other Stories: A Western Collection

Five Star Publishing
Hardcover, 258 pages, \$25.95
Gale.com/five-star

The title story in this collection finds an aging Florida cow hunter (the local term for cowboy) reflecting on a childhood tragedy after an unexpected visitor arrives during a raging hurricane. This original is bundled with 10 others, which have previously appeared in various anthologies. Sweazy delivers the deep, detail-rich storytelling we have come to expect, with characters ranging from plucky youngsters in “The Buffalo Trace” to a war-ravaged family in “The Harrows.” There are even a few Gothic horror tales, not to be read before bedtime. This is Sweazy's first short-story collection and, let's hope, not his last. Fine reading.

– Micki Fuhrman

ROBERT TEMPLE*The Strange Courtship of Kathleen O'Dwyer*

Five Star Publishing
 Hardcover, 223 pages, \$25.95
 Gale.com/five-star

An east-to-west journey finds schoolteacher Kathleen O'Dwyer in search of a new life. She joins an expedition going to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where a new job awaits. Her escorts include Captain Freepole and a group of mountain men. With her Irish Eastern upbringing, she is ill-prepared for a Comanche attack, dust storms, unforgiving landscape and dodging a buffalo stampede. Her feelings develop for mountain man James Colter, who later becomes an ally and love interest. Kathleen quickly realizes the need to be resourceful, ride a horse and shoot a gun to survive. Readers will enjoy rich descriptive details of the New Mexico landscape and mid-19th Century life while learning about political unrest between Mexicans and Spaniards and skirmishes between various Native American tribes.

– Sue Ready

MIKE TORREANO*White Sands Gold*

The Wild Rose Press
 Paperback, 313 pages, \$18.99
 TheWildRosePress.com

While he was writing *White Sands Gold*, it's possible that Mike Torreano kept one eye on Mark Twain's useful quote – "Get your facts first, then you can distort them as you please." This story is wrapped around an actual ragged mountain named Victorio Peak in New Mexico which has, for centuries, been said to shroud seemingly endless amounts of hidden gold. And of course, the legendary gold brings in the limitless, hungry searchers. Torreano weaves in a host of women and men, the best of whom have more valuable goals and understand that there are far more fulfilling ambitions in life than risking their lives and loves and honor for huge piles of heavy orange metal. The author has a truly appealing story, his writing skills are strong, and the subtle mysteries from time to time make the novel even more engaging.

– Greg Hunt

JAMES C. WILSON*The Dead Go Fast: A Fernando Lopez Santa Fe Mystery*

Sunstone Press
 Paperback, 172 pages, \$19.95
 SunstonePress.com

Detective Fernando Lopez, of the Santa Fe Police Department, is on medical leave, weeks away from his official retirement, when police chief Larry Stuart shows up at his home and asks him to take on one more case. The mayor's wife has been murdered. Her body was found in the trunk of her car at Jimmy Mackey's art studio. Mackey, endeared by many, especially women, claims to have been too drunk to remember anything. When Lopez tries to bring him in for questioning, Mackey leads the detective on a wild goose chase, ending in disaster. Wilson has written a page-turner full of intrigue, humor, suspense, and multiple surprises. Join the chase and read *The Dead Go Fast* for a fast-moving Santa Fe adventure.

– Milana Marsenich

ETHAN J. WOLFE*The Illinois Detective Agency: The Case of Duffy's Revenge*

Five Star Publishing
 Hardcover, 253 pages, \$25.95
 Gale.com/five-star

Readers are in for one wild ride with *The Case of Duffy's Revenge*, the third book in Ethan J. Wolfe's "Illinois Detective Agency" series. It begins with the murder of James Duffy's intended wife, Sylvia Trent. Detectives Duffy, Cavill and Goodluck are on a mission to track down the murder suspect to see that justice is served. Along the way they become embroiled in a land dispute involving suspicious mining practices. There's no shortage of work for the other detectives at James Porter's agency due to the abduction of Chicago children. Wolfe keeps the storyline moving briskly along with plenty of action. Character interaction is realistic and engaging. Several cleverly constructed plot lines converge with a dramatic unexpected conclusion leaving the door open for another story.

– Sue Ready

BOOK NOTES

JOHNNY D. BOGGS*American Newspaper Journalists on Film: Portrayals of the Press During the Sound Era*

McFarland & Company
 Paperback, 285 pages, \$49.95
 McFarlandBooks.com

Former newspaper journalist Johnny D. Boggs examines Hollywood's film depictions of the press, from 1929's groundbreaking *The Front Page* to 2017's *Richard Jewell's* skewering of *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reporter Kathy Scruggs. From the 1930s through the 1950s, newspaper films were practically a movie genre, and Boggs covers the classics and duds while showing what the movies got right and what the press thought of them. And, as a Spur-winning writer, he devotes a chapter to newspaper depictions in Western films like *Fort Worth* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*.

LOREN D. ESTLEMAN*Paperback Jack*

Forge
 Hardcover, 240 pages, \$26.99
 Tor-Forge.com

Despite five Spur Awards and the Owen Wister Award, Loren D. Estleman is best known for his Amos Walker mysteries and assorted crime novels. In *Paperback Jack*, Estleman lures readers into the paperback-novel scene of post-World War II New York City with a foray into Hollywood. Of course, Jacob Heppleman, a hack writing as Jack Holly, has written Westerns – Estleman throws in a sweet tribute to Eugene Manlove Rhodes's *Pasó Por Aquí* – but focuses on crime fiction. *Paperback Jack* is labeled as a crime thriller, but it reads like a love letter to those golden years of lurid paperback covers and pulp fiction.