

NONFICTION

LAURA J. ARATA

Race and the Wild West: Sarah Bickford, the Montana Vigilantes, and the Tourism of Decline, 1870-1930

University of Oklahoma Press
Softcover, 306 pages, \$24.95
OUPress.com

Sarah Bickford was an uncommon woman. Arriving in Montana Territory as a Black teenager, she married, divorced and remarried (both times to white men), raised successful children and enjoyed a reputation as an accomplished businesswoman who parlayed stock she inherited after her second husband's death into ownership of the Virginia City Water Company. As the former mining boomtown slipped into decline, Bickford purchased the Hangman's Building as the new water company headquarters and promoted the site of an 1864 vigilante lynching as a tourist attraction. Starting from a few sketchy biographies and cloudy recollections, Arata, a specialist in public history and race and gender in the American West, digs into manuscript sources and public records to construct a full-bodied account of Bickford's remarkable life and to assess her role in the social, political, and economic history of the mining frontier. Contrary to those who point to Bickford as evidence that race didn't matter, Arata makes a compelling argument that not the least of Bickford's accomplishments was her ability to navigate complex racial and gender norms. This compelling biography, the 2021 Spur winner for Best First Nonfiction Book and a Spur biography finalist, will satisfy scholars and lay readers alike.

– Bruce J. Dinges

ALICE L. BAUMGARTNER

South to Freedom: Runaway Slaves to Mexico and the Road to the Civil War

Basic Books
Hardcover, 365 pages, \$32
BasicBooks.com

Alice Baumgartner introduces the reader to the concept that slaves escaped south to freedom, a route taken

by hundreds. They were beckoned to Mexico, which outlawed slavery before the United States. This 2021 Spur finalist for historical nonfiction opens with a gripping story of an escape, then launches into its narrative, with ample examples and documentation reinforcing its premise. The book carefully examines the reasons for Mexico's cessation of slavery, the diplomatic maneuvering involved and the impacts upon U.S. policies that led to the Civil War. It also tells the often poignant tales of slaves who successfully, and unsuccessfully, escaped to Mexico. *South to Freedom* reveals one of the dirty secrets of Texas history, that an effort to maintain slavery was a major reason for the revolution against Mexico. Put in this light, the defenders of the Alamo and the victors at San Jacinto seem a bit less heroic. This book is going to upset some people ... and perhaps it's time.

– Steve Friesen

MICHAEL F. BLAKE

Go West, Mr. President: Theodore Roosevelt's Great Loop Tour of 1903

TwoDot Books
Hardcover, 280 pages, \$26.95
TwoDotBooks.com

Dozens of books have been written about Theodore Roosevelt. Now with Michael F. Blake's new book, we have one more. He takes a smaller bite than usual, though, by concentrating on a trip Roosevelt took in 1903. An ambitious trip, the president traveled for two months, visited 21 states and gave 265 speeches. Billed as a nonpartisan visit, it nevertheless smacked of a campaign trip because he intended to run for president again. The trip was not without incident, and newspapers covered his day-by-day travels. Blake's bibliography indicates the heavy coverage made by newspapers. This book is a studied, researched look at an ambitious Roosevelt, which most readers will find rich and entertaining.

– Lynn Bueling

TERRI A. CASTANEDA

Marie Mason Potts: The Lettered Life of a California Indian Activist

University of Oklahoma Press
Hardcover, 367 pages, \$45
OUPress.com

Anyone seeking the definition of an activist will find the answer in Terri Castaneda's excellent biography of Marie Mason Potts (1895-1978). She was born into the Mountain Maidu tribe in Northern California at a time when settler colonialism was depriving her people of their ancestral lands. Educated at Carlisle, for the rest of her life she utilized that education to adapt successfully to the white man's world while retaining her Native heritage. A founder of the Federated Indians of California, Potts served as writer, editor and publisher of *Smoke Signals* for some three decades, informing California Indians of their legal rights and writing articles about Native culture and society. Potts was instrumental in working for the inclusion of an Indian exhibit at the California Centennial Fair in 1950. Later in life, she served and participated in many Native organizations, taught classes in Maidu basketry and lobbied for federal legislation benefiting Indians. Castaneda utilizes 23 archives for primary source material, making the book the standard biography of a dedicated activist.

– Abraham Hoffman

PETER COZZENS

Tecumseh and the Prophet: The Shawnee Brothers Who Defied a Nation

Alfred A. Knopf
Hardcover, 558 pages, \$35
AAKnopf.com

William Henry Harrison, Indiana governor and future president, described the Shawnee warrior/diplomat Tecumseh as "one of those uncommon geniuses, which spring up occasionally to produce revolutions and overturn the established order of things." Peter Cozzens effectively argues in this superb dual biography that there is much more to the story. While the charismatic Tecumseh captured the spotlight then and now, it was his brother Tenskwatawa (The Prophet) who articulated the vision of a pan-Indian alliance that, with British assistance, would halt the tide of American

westward incursion and establish a native homeland somewhere in the present-day Midwest. With a deft command of published and manuscript sources, Cozzens leads readers through shifting loyalties on the Canadian/American frontier and paints a sympathetic portrait of two men united in a crusade to defend a people and a vanishing way of life. The collapse of their dream following Tecumseh's 1813 defeat and death at the Battle of the Thames underscores the symbiotic relationship between the brothers. Cozzens's propulsive narrative and perceptive analysis of conflicting viewpoints, Indian and Anglo, sets a new standard for future biographies.

— Bruce J. Dinges

DOUG DUKES

Firearms of the Texas Rangers: From the Frontier to the Modern Age

University of North Texas Press
Hardcover, 640 pages, \$45
UNTPress.unt.edu

This sprawling, meticulously researched book is about much more than firearms. Doug Dukes gives the readers all the specifications and history of each weapon but also spins engaging stories of their use and lore. No book about Texas Rangers would be complete without delving into the Frontier Battalion's reliance on the Peacemaker, or Frank Hamer's expert marksmanship with his Remington and Colt Single Action Army. Those are among the many weapons focused on in this book. This book is a must read for gun buffs, historians, Texas Ranger aficionados or anyone interested in the evolution of weapons used in law enforcement in the past three centuries. Complemented with detailed pictures, an in-depth bibliography and an index that could have been more detailed but is passable.

— Larry D. Sweazy

CHRIS ENSS

Iron Women: The Ladies Who Helped Build the Railroad

TwoDot Books
Paperback, 192 pages, \$19.95
TwoDotBooks.com

Iron Women provides a valuable addition to the history of the building of America's railroads. Thoroughly researched and wonderfully illustrated, this book describes many unrecognized contributions by women to successes achieved across the iron horse empires.

Not surprisingly, women who worked for the railroads had to overcome the traditional prejudices that plagued their struggles to prove their worth in most professions outside the home. From innovations made in telegraphy and engineering, to accomplishments in hospitality and entertainment, the efforts put forth by the featured females is that of frustration overcome by perseverance. This volume also contains interesting biographical vignettes of women who served as railroad presidents, travel journalists, artists, architects and more. Chris Enss couples her smooth writing style with historical quotations to make an enjoyable read. I learned fascinating new things about the railroads and the women who worked on them.

— Robert Lee Murphy

JUSTIN FARRELL

Billionaire Wilderness: The Ultra-Wealthy and the Remaking of the American West

Princeton University Press
Hardcover, paperback, 392 pages, \$27.94, \$17.95
Press.princeton.edu

Justin Farrell's *Billionaire Wilderness*, this year's contemporary nonfiction Spur Award winner, is a thoroughly researched and well-written examination of the economic chasm between the ultra-rich and the (working) pitifully poor in Teton County, Wyoming. With empathy for both ends of the spectrum, Farrell investigates the whys and hows of the glaring economic disparity in the county and looks deeply into the effects of that discrepancy on individuals, families, businesses, and society as a whole. The book is accessible and understandable to the reader, even someone with little or no background in economics or in Wyoming. Farrell pairs scholarly research with personal interviews and his own insights to create a vivid and complete picture of one small county, giving us important insights into the nation's, and perhaps the world's, issues of economic inequality.

— Donna Coulson

RYAN HALL

Beneath the Backbone of the World: Blackfoot People and the North American Borderlands, 1720-1877

University of North Carolina Press
Hardcover, paperback, 258 pages, \$90, \$29.95
UNCPress.org

The Blackfoot people's origin tales referred to the peaks of the Rockies as the "backbone of the world." They believed that when the world was created, they were put at the base of the mountains, with their domain extending eastward into the plains. That domain straddled Montana and Canada. The origin tale provides the title for Ryan Hall's 2021 Spur finalist for historical nonfiction. Hall tells the story of a tribal people searching for ways to co-exist with other surrounding tribes and an encroaching European culture during the 18th and 19th centuries. Through the mechanism of the fur trade, the tribal groups that made up the Blackfoot strived to maintain their traditional lands at the base of the Rockies, all while growing their economic power. The author provides a reader unfamiliar with the Blackfoot with a narrative that is easily read, yet has well documented detail about their culture, history and diplomatic relationships.

— Steve Friesen

JIM HOY

My Flint Hills: Observations and Reminiscences from America's Last Tallgrass Prairie

University Press of Kansas
Hardcover, 304 pages, \$29.95
KansasPress.ku.edu

Reading a book by Jim Hoy is like having a conversation at a neighbor's kitchen table, only Hoy is the smartest and most engaging neighbor you could ever hope for. He again returns to his favorite subject – the Flint Hills of Kansas – for this book, which is an intimate conversation about land and cattle and horses. Along the way you'll be given a tour of the Flying H Ranch, which Hoy's great-grandparents settled in 1877, and meet characters ranging from grandmothers to cattle buyers to cattle thieves. Hoy clearly loves the land he writes about, and he brings a scholar's attention to the details in this 2021 Spur finalist for contemporary nonfiction. His descriptions of ranch life in the tallgrass prairie, past and present, are a major cultural contribution to the literature of place.

— Max McCoy

PAUL MAGID

An Honest Enemy: George Crook and the Struggle for Indian Rights

University of Oklahoma Press
Hardcover, 568 pages, \$39.95
OUPress.com

In this third, and final, volume of his magisterial biography, 2012 Spur Award winner Paul Magid focuses on the iconic military commander's evolution as a perceptive critic of federal Indian policy and advocate for fair and honest treatment of Native Americans. Beginning with the conclusion of Lakota campaigns on the Northern Plains and Crook's role in *Standing Bear v. Crook* that acknowledged Native American personhood under the 14th Amendment, Magid turns his attention to Crook's return to Arizona for the penultimate campaign against Geronimo's Apache band, his crusade for humanitarian treatment of the Apache prisoners of war and the bureaucratic infighting that dogged his later career. A meticulous researcher and engaging writer, Magid casts new light on Crook, the frontier Army, and 19th Century Indian affairs in the 2021 Spur finalist for biography.

– Bruce J. Dinges

GRETCHEN E. MINTON

Shakespeare in Montana: Big Sky Country's Love Affair with the World's Most Famous Writer

University of New Mexico Press
Paperback, 216 pages, \$19.95
UNMPress.com

Gretchen E. Minton is a 2021 Spur finalist for short nonfiction for her "Shakespeare in Frontier and Territorial Montana, 1820-1889," published in *Montana The Magazine of Western History*, but in this longer work, she focuses on the state's long fascination with the Bard from the 19th Century to today. It's probably fitting that a state known for its wide-open spaces is home to several Shakespeare in the Park performances, since *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Henry IV: Part I* were first performed in open-air venues, but Minton observes that the playwright and lover of sonnets was admired by mountain man Jim Bridger, who couldn't read, and documents other fans, from Granville Stuart to cowboys to the gold-rush townfolks who flocked to see John S. "Jack" Langrishe's traveling thespians perform *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* in Virginia City. Travelers to WWA's 2022 convention in Great Falls might want to see if they can work in a performance.

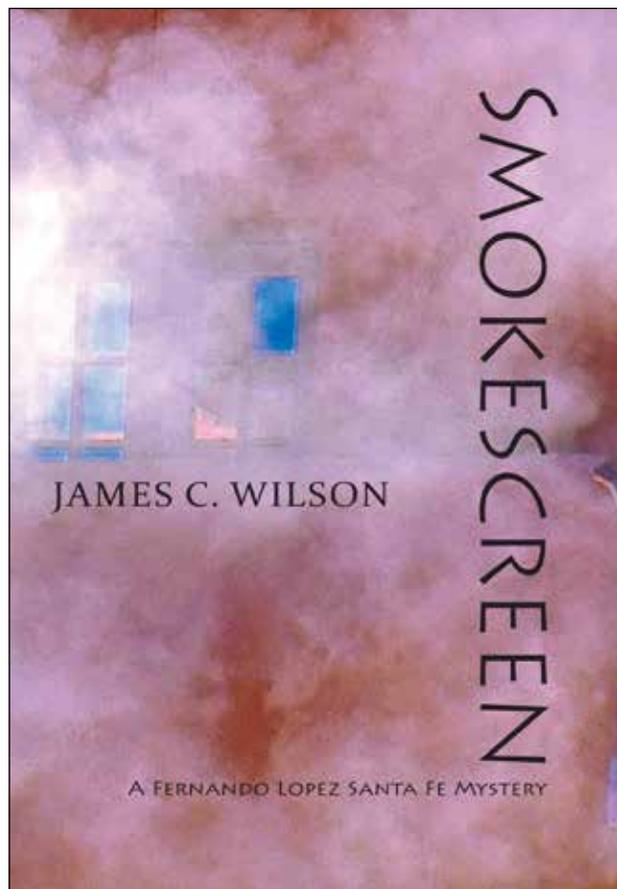
– Johnny D. Boggs

ROGER NAYLOR

Arizona's Scenic Roads & Hikes: Unforgettable Journeys in the Grand Canyon State

University of New Mexico Press
Paperback, 184 pages, \$21.95
UNMPress.com

Seriously, Roger Naylor must have so much fun on his road trips! This comprehensive guide is split into North Central, Northern Arizona, Route 66, Navajo Nation, Central Highlands, Central Deserts and Southern Arizona to make it easy to find your desired road or hike. (I would read the whole book, though, since it includes many surprising and little-known areas to explore.) Even my little hometown of Mammoth garners a small paragraph in the Copper Corridor Scenic Road East chapter. Each individual section includes an overview, route numbers, mileage and special notes, and ends with hiking trails, attractions and places to eat and stay. Beautiful photos, many courtesy of the author himself, enhance the text, and Naylor writes with such wit and humor that the reader immediately wants to jump in a vehicle and



Smokescreen

James C. Wilson

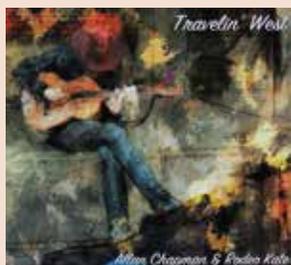
A Fernando Lopez Santa Fe Mystery

When a prominent Santa Fe City Council Member is assassinated at the beginning of Fiesta, Santa Fe Police Detective Fernando Lopez finds himself embroiled in the local culture wars. His search to find the murderer takes a dangerous turn after the body of a young woman is found near a mysterious compound south of the city.

James C. Wilson, Emeritus Professor of Journalism, is the author of nine books, including *Peyote Wolf*, the first of the Fernando Lopez Santa Fe Mystery series.

Published by Sunstone Press
Available at your favorite local bookstore or Amazon.com

WESTERN MUSIC



ALLAN CHAPMAN & RODEO KATE

Travelin' West

Dinosaur Cowboys Productions, \$20
AllanAndKatie.com

I listened to this 12-cut CD a half-dozen times and was thinking some of the songs – especially the title track, about the hazards

of going West back in the day – sounded as if they had been written in the 19th Century. Then I read the liner notes and discovered that's the point.

"We tried to include songs that are unvarnished ... The West will never be like it was a hundred years ago ... Yet we can pay homage to that tradition."

Except for the instrumental "Minor Swing" and two songs that are traditional – "Darling Cory" and "Wayfarin' Stranger" – Allan wrote all the songs, and wife Kate's fiddle is an achingly beautiful presence throughout the CD, especially on "Minor Swing."

Although traditional in tone, the CD's other songs – about a haunted hotel, a schoolmarm's enduring fantasy, the human race – mostly tote more substance than tumbling tumbleweeds and trail dust.

Allan allows us some smiles with the humorous "Cow Dags" ("We ain't got no tail"), but it is the disabled military vet in the evocative "Gardens of Gethsemane," trying to learn new computer skills while his wife works two jobs, that I won't forget.

Musical note: Add songwriter and recording artist to Chris



Enss's resume, which already includes author, actor, comedian, private detective, marketing maven and WWA president. Chris teamed up with WWA novelist and songwriter Mark C. Jackson and Jackson's longtime music partners Pamela Haan and David Morgan to write "A Cowgirl's Lament," based on

rodeo trick roper Rosemary Tope's

unrequited and unforgotten love for bronc rider Casey Tibbs. Tope herself told Chris about her romance with Tibbs. "So, the story is true," Mark said. "Though I did take license on some of the details in the song." Mark met Chris in Sacramento to record her performing the piece, a mostly spoken song framed by a verse that is sung.

*I was a sweet young cowgirl
Who never loved before,
Thought I'd ride forever
Behind his rodeo star*

The song is available on Spotify, Apple Music, iTunes, Google Play, YouTube Music, Amazon and iHeart Radio.

head for the Grand Canyon State. As the author exclaims, "Welcome to my world."

– Rocky Gibbons

WILLIAM SOUDER

Mad at the World: A Life of John Steinbeck

W.W. Norton & Company

Hardcover, 446 pages, \$32

WWNorton.com

Mad at the World documents the life of American writer John Steinbeck, his works and the struggles he faced in pursuing his craft. Most Western writers are familiar with Steinbeck's catalog of books, fiction and nonfiction. Less known are his articles, short stories, stage and screenplays, many of which Souder touches upon in this biography. Steinbeck, winner of a Pulitzer Prize, the Nobel Prize for Literature and many other awards and honors, shunned publicity and fame associated with his success. He resisted all pressure to write what critics, fans, agents and publishers expected of him but experimented with new forms, such as the play/novella. His life is an education and inspiration to anyone who picks up the pen to tell a story. I am fairly well versed in Steinbeckia but learned new and interesting facts in this book. It is a biography that all writers will want to read.

– William Groneman III

DOUG J. SWANSON

Cult of Glory: The Bold and Brutal History of the Texas Rangers

Viking Press

Hardcover, 480 pages, \$28

PenguinRandomHouse.com

Doug Swanson's *Cult of Glory* is a feather ruffler for sure – and one we've needed for a long time. Swanson, a highly regarded novelist and nonfiction author and a former investigative reporter for the *Dallas Morning News*, does a deep dive into the Texas Rangers past and present and systematically dismantles the hagiography created by Walter Prescott Webb and other idolizing authors. The Rangers who emerge from *Cult of Glory* are at times near-heroic, efficient crime solvers but more often are vicious, murderous, racist goons with no regard for due process of the law. The Rangers and affiliated posses killed hundreds of innocent ethnic Mexicans along the Río Grande during the 1910s, and Swanson's section on the horrors of that time and place is particularly disturbing. Swanson successfully synthesizes his own research with the groundbreaking work of scholars such as Monica Muñoz Martinez into a compelling narrative. Webb wrote, "And so it is with the Ranger. When we see him at his daily task of maintaining law, restoring order, and promoting peace ... a man standing alone between a society and its enemies." As Swanson shows, nothing could be further from the truth.

– W.K. Stratton

THEODORE WADDELL

Cheatgrass Dreams

Sweetgrass Books

Hardcover, paperback, 89 pages, \$29.95, \$19.95

SweetgrassBooks.com

Artist, writer and Montana rancher Theodore Waddell

paints pictures of the land, animals and people that he has known in the Big Sky Country. Yet *Cheatgrass Dreams*, a 2021 Spur finalist for contemporary nonfiction, offers much more than oil-on-paper and graphite-on-paper illustrations. Waddell is talented enough to paint pictures with words. Like lunchtime at The Corner Bar, where smoke pours “out of the deep fat fryer. Because of the poor ventilation, a healthy slug of that smell will stick to your clothes. Even when the wind blows like hell, it takes more than a day to lose that stench.” Or the shortgrass country: “City folk and valley farmers think the grass is green but dry-landers know ... grass in that country is yellow ochre.” In this art book, the words are just as captivating as the pictures.

– Johnny D. Boggs

FICTION

JOHNNY D. BOGGS

A Thousand Texas Longhorns

Pinnacle

Mass-market paperback, 500 pages, \$8.99

KensingtonBooks.com

In his “Author’s Note,” Johnny D. Boggs explains that “This novel is a blend of fact and fiction – and a whole lot of legend.” This has become a winning technique for Boggs, and again he has done an outstanding job of wrapping a sprawling, engaging plot around a historic event. Set just after the Civil War, this year’s Spur winner for Original Mass-Market Paperback Novel stands out both for its rich mixture of real and fictional characters, and for the pivotal story of Nelson Story’s unwavering determination to make his fortune by driving a half-wild herd of longhorn cattle from Texas to Virginia City, Montana. The reality of the constant, exhaustive work, the unknown dangers and the endless suffering that the conglomeration of men and women endure keeps the reader constantly wondering what unexpected catastrophe will come along next. Boggs did his homework, and it shows in the varying backgrounds of the characters and the hazardous reality of life on the trail.

– Greg Hunt

AMANDA CABOT

Dreams Rekindled

Revell

Paperback, 349 pages, \$15.99

BakerPublishingGroup.com

This is a lovely book to cozy up with. There are likeable characters, sweet romances and dastardly villains. Dorothy dreams of becoming a career writer in the mid-1800s when that was typically taboo for women. Providentially, Brandon, a newspaperman with a secret past involving the denunciation of slavery and a loved one’s death, comes to town to start *The Chronicle*. Enter Phil, a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Throw in busybodies, the rumor mill and local politics, and we’ve got a lot to hold our attention. Amanda Cabot has done her research on small-town newspapers of that era, as well as the acceptable conventions for single men and women meeting without a chaperone. Cabot’s writing is clear and balanced and a pleasurable escape from our modern world.

– Denise F. McAllister

CATLOW

Warner Archive

DVD, \$17.99

WBSshop.com

Years earlier, I had written that the standard features of a Louis L’Amour novel – predictable plots, an almost cartoonish lack of logic, strong action and a persistent vision of the Western hero as infallible superman – appealed to the Hollywood of the postwar years. How-



ever, by 1971, when MGM

filmed L’Amour’s serious 1963 novel, *Catlow*, the Western had been influenced by the lighter comedic films of Burt Kennedy and Andrew V. McLaglen.



**BOB
HERZBERG**

Directed by actor Sam Wanamaker and with a screenplay by Scot Finch and character actor James Griffith (as J.J. Griffith; he was an unforgettable Doc Holiday in

The Mastersons of Kansas), the film version ignored the description of Catlow in the novel as a lovable Irish rogue and cast Russian-born Yul Brynner as the lovably crooked scamp. Richard Crenna is marshal Ben Cowan (in a role originally set for Stephen Boyd), the lawman tracking Catlow (the two had fought together in the Civil War).

Certainly the film gives both characters a humorous bent that was clearly beyond L’Amour’s abilities, and their tit-for-tat relationship adds to the film’s atmosphere of (sometimes) harmless fun. The free-wheeling humor was a refreshing tonic to L’Amour’s usual dead-serious tomes about Western supermen; an anti-*Shalako*, if you will.

There are the subplots of stolen American gold down in Mexico, Apaches attacking various members of the cast, and a psychotic killer (played with grim determination by a post-Spock Leonard Nimoy) hired by the cattlemen to get Catlow. And though Quentin Tarantino has damned *Catlow* (and other comedy Westerns) as the worst Westerns of the 1970s and panned Brynner’s performance as his worst, the actor surprises his audience with a refreshing lighthearted performance, especially in his scenes opposite Crenna.

It’s as if his black-clad Chris of *The Magnificent Seven* decided to stop dealing in lead and instead deal in leaden humor. Filmed in the usual wonderful locations in Almería, Spain, *Catlow* does have its violent moments (uncomfortably reminding one of *Shalako*). But the “fun” elements overcome its sometimes crude violence.

It is *not* typical Louis L’Amour – and maybe that’s not such a bad thing.

Roundup video reviewer C. Courtney Joyner is taking time off. Bob Herzberg is the author of several books of film history and Western novels. His email is Bobcoll77@aol.com.

BRETT COGBURN

Gunpowder Express

Pinnacle

Mass-market paperback, 368 pages, \$7.99

KensingtonBooks.com

Needing money, Newt “Widow-maker” Jones is hired to ride shotgun on a stagecoach delivering gold out of Vulture City to the railroad at Maricopa. The problem is that getting the gold to the railroad requires traveling the Gunpowder Express, the name given the trail because of how many folks have been murdered traveling it. And Irish Jack O’Harrigan and his gang of cutthroats are waiting. Brett Cogburn writes prose that is often lyrical and creates a vivid setting with distinct characters. Readers will find great action and plot twists within twists in this 2021 Spur finalist for mass-market paperback. Good historical notes, too.

FRED DICKEY

Days of Hope, Miles of Misery: Love and Loss on the Oregon Trail

Lost River Books

Paperback, 440 pages, \$15.95

FredDickey.net

Nimrod, a mountain man, skilled in prairie and mountain lore and struggling with a troubled past, sets out to lead a party of greenhorns from Missouri to California in 1845. During the journey, Nimrod becomes cautiously interested in Hannah, a woman who is trapped in a marriage of convenience. The overlanders are beset by weather, Indians, travel toil, even some renegade whites. Conflicts with each other, the result of exhaustion and constant interaction,

are common. The pioneers are largely spared the ultimate Oregon-California Trail scourge, cholera, which does not become endemic until some years later. Nimrod’s early trouble reaches a bittersweet conclusion, softened by his relationship with Hannah. The book was meticulously researched and broadly presented, sometimes a mixed blessing. Extensive historical and geographical detail, conversation and description can add richness to a narrative, but too much interrupts the flow of the story.

– Harlan Hague

TYLER ENFIELD

Like Rum-Drunk Angels

Goose Lane Editions

Paperback, 438 pages, \$22.95

GooseLane.com

If you’re looking for an off-beat, mystical, magical Western, look no further than *Like Rum-Drunk Angels*. Highly entertaining, this novel brings chuckles, makes the reader cringe and evokes long-forgotten feelings. The hero, 14-year-old Francis Blackstone, who fancies himself a gunslinger, is totally infatuated by a girl. And not just any girl, but the governor’s daughter. Blackstone doesn’t even know her name, but that doesn’t matter. What *does* matter is making his fortune in order to win her hand properly. A volatile outlaw takes Francis under his wing, and together they create the Blackstone-Temple Gang. The goal: Rob a Manhattan Company bank. In preparation, they crisscross the West perfecting their skills. Winner of the 2021 Spur Award for Best Traditional Western Novel,

there truthfully isn’t much “traditional” about it. A pure delight to read.

– Melody Groves

ROY V. GASTON

Beyond the Goodnight Trail

KDP/Amazon

Mass-market paperback, 368 pages, \$7.99

Amazon.com

After helping Charlie Goodnight drive a herd of cattle up from Texas to feed starving Navajos on a barren reservation in New Mexico, former Texas Ranger Pete Horse planned to ride off toward new adventures. But Horse, a former slave with Black and Seminole ancestry, almost immediately finds himself entangled in an undeclared local war in which a religious zealot is determined to carve out a whole new country under his brutal leadership. In a tale set just after the Civil War, Roy V. Gaston adds unexpected depth to his story – a Spur finalist this year for mass-market paperback novel – by displaying the broad scope of the races, destinations, goals and savagery of the men, both real and fictional, who lived and died in these frontier times. Gaston has done his historic research, and the novel he folds around this time and place accurately displays the harsh and ever-changing challenges that these bold and brutal men faced head-on in the Southwestern frontier.

– Greg Hunt

W. MICHAEL GEAR

Dissolution

Wolfpack Publishing

Hardcover, 451 pages, \$28

WolfpackPublishing.com



Award Winning Author

Joe Corso...

is a storyteller in the tradition of Louis L'Amour. If you're looking for an exciting yarn, with well-drawn characters and believable and interesting plot, you can't go wrong reading any of his stories."

—R.W. Peake, author of the *Marching with Caesar* series."

Dissolution makes a unique contribution to Western literature as a contemporary political apocalyptic. The book reflects many old and contemporary perspectives on individual rights, history, anthropological questions and societal organizations. A hacker brings down the world's monetary systems, ensuring universal havoc. In Wyoming, archaeology students and professors are on a prominent rancher's land and bond with the family. When Wyoming sets itself up as a haven for its citizens, conflicts with outsiders begin. The real conflict is with a federal agent in Wyoming who declares himself the only rightful dictator needed, but the man is evil to the core. It is a whale of a tale, full of fast-moving intrigue and action.

– Larry Yoder

AARON GWYN
All God's Children

Europa Editions
Paperback, 389 pages, \$18
EuropaEditions.com

People living on the fringes of freedom struggle to live and love as they please in 1827. Duncan Lammons heads to Texas to create a new life at the same time Cecilia, a young Virginia slave, attempts the first of her many failed escapes. Sam Fisk, a former Army mate of Duncan, spots Cecilia at an auction, where he coerces the new owner to give her up. Together, Sam and Cecilia travel to Texas where she learns about freedom. He learns about life. Full of action, adventure and fine writing, a story based solely on Cecilia would have sufficed. With Duncan's story intertwined with hers, at times, the pacing bogged. But still, this 2021 Spur finalist for Best Traditional Western Novel is a great read with terrific imagery.

– Melody Groves

RON HANSEN (editor)
The Western: Four Classic Novels of the 1940s & 50s

The Library of America
Hardcover; 1,094 pages; \$39.95
LOA.org

The nonprofit Library of America, known for championing literacy and all genres of American literature, has brought out a handsome edition of four Western classics: *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1940), Walter Van Tilburg Clark's moving account of an 1885 Nevada lynch-

ing; *Shane* by Jack Schaefer (1949), the standard by which all gunfighter/ranger-war novels are measured; *The Searchers* (1954), Alan LeMay's stark look at racism and brutality on the Texas frontier; and *Warlock* (1958), Oakley Hall's captivating take on Western law, inspired by the principals involved in the Gunfight at the O.K. Corral. Includes a wonderful introduction by Ron Hansen, whose brilliant *Desperadoes* and *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* are modern-day classics of Western literature.

– Johnny D. Boggs

DAVID JESSUP
Mariano's Woman

Pronghorn Press
Paperback, 256 pages, \$19.99
PronghornPress.org

Since 1946, David Jessup's family has operated Sylvan Dale Guest Ranch in Northern Colorado's Big Thompson Canyon. In his third novel based on fur trader/guide/businessman Mariano Medina (who settled near Loveland, Colorado, in the mid-1800s), Jessup breathes life into historical details with intimacy and elegance, following Medina's Bitterroot Salish wife Takánsy as she grieves for her late daughter, Lena, and seeks to be reunited with her spirit. In so doing, Takánsy must relive painful memories of her youth and confront her "great sin." An engaging, well-written novel.

– Micki Fuhrman

TOM LOWE
Midnight's Whisperer

Kingsbridge Entertainment
Paperback, 378 pages, \$13.83

Ty McGill's grandfather left him with an uncanny ability to train problem horses. After being in the military in the Middle East, Ty returns to West Texas with deep problems. Madison had been Ty's girl in high school but married a man who abuses her. When Ty gets a job training Midnight, a fiery horse, at her ranch, the trouble is just beginning. And Ty learns that to find real love, you often have to go back to the place where it was lost. Tom Lowe's *Midnight Whisperer* is a wonderful read, well-deserving of its 2021 Spur Award honor for Best Romance Novel.

– Linda Jacobs

TRACIE PETERSON and KIMBERLEY WOODHOUSE
Forever Hidden

Bethany House
Paperback, 355 pages, \$15.99
BakerPublishingGroup.com

Forever Hidden, the first in the authors' "The Treasures of Nome" series, focuses on the eldest of three musical sisters living in Alaska during the 1908 gold rush. Their family owns a dairy near Nome, but trouble has struck it when Hayyn Powell's grandfather's health declines. This story focuses on Hayyn and her love interest John Roselli, who has come from the Lower 48 to help her family out. The 2021 Spur finalist for romance novel is a tale with rich landscape and emotions from experienced authors who know how to write a good romance. I predict we should stay tuned for the heroine's younger sisters' stories in books two and three.

– Linda Jacobs

DONALD L. ROBERTSON
Soul of a Mountain Man

CM Publishing
Paperback, 267 pages, \$12.99

Floyd Logan, a strapping 16-year-old woodsman and hunter, wins his first turkey shoot in Limerick, Tennessee, beating experienced adults. He then sets his sights on the far mountains, the tall peaks calling to him since he was in knee-high britches. Now it's time to go. Although his family wants him to stay, he heads west, determined to be a man of the mountains. His expert marksmanship and knowledge of guns serve him well as he hires on as first a shiphand, then apprentice gunmaker. Along the way, he grows into his wide shoulders and over 6-foot frame. This story is book five in a Logan family series but stands alone quite well. For fans of traditional mountain Westerns, this novel is sure to please. Dialogue is a tad stiff, but descriptions of firearms and such are well-researched and presented.

– Melody Groves

RUDY RUIZ
The Resurrection of Fulgencio Ramirez

Blackstone Publishing
Hardcover, 300 pages, \$27.99
BlackstonePublishing.com

With *The Resurrection of Fulgencio Ramirez*, Rudy Ruiz has created a work of art that succeeds both as a love story

and as a larger statement on the death of one culture when usurped by another. A testament to the power of skillfully crafted language, the entangled love between a young, dark Mexican man and a young, blonde, blue-eyed woman serves as a metaphor for all that is lost, and gained, when two such different human beings find their lives enmeshed in a curse of the past and the prejudices of the future. In this 2021 Spur finalist for contemporary novel, Ruiz asks readers to suspend their disbeliefs, and so we do – carried along on the surreal storytelling wings of magical realism in this epic tale. In the tradition of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, this is a borderland story, a love story set against the backdrop of the clashing cultures along the Rio Grande.

– Page Lambert

BRAD SMITH

Cactus Jack

Arcade Publishing

Hardcover, 298 pages, \$24.99

ArcadePub.com

Brad Smith won the 2019 Spur Award for Best Traditional Western Novel with *The Return of Kid Cooper*. His most recent book, *Cactus Jack*, takes the reader into the world of thoroughbred racing. An unexpected death brings free-spirited Billie Masterson back to Kentucky. She intends to settle her father's estate – a rundown farm with a mountain of debt – and get back to her Ohio waitress job. Her father's only valuable asset is a 2-year-old colt that may or may not have been sired by the world-famous Saguaro. Thoroughbred racing is a big-money

game, and Billie is broke. While the horse Cactus Jack can't be ignored, the real story is the characters who surround him. Vulturous billionaire Reese Ryker desperately wants the colt and will stoop to below chicanery to get him. But Billie has allies: a small-town lawyer; an alcoholic horse trainer; her father's girlfriend; and most interestingly, a semi-abandoned girl who hangs around Billie's barn tending to a donkey and a goat. Place a \$2 bet and see if you can predict the ending.

– John Neely Davis

JAMES C. WILSON

Smokescreen: A Fernando Lopez Santa Fe Mystery

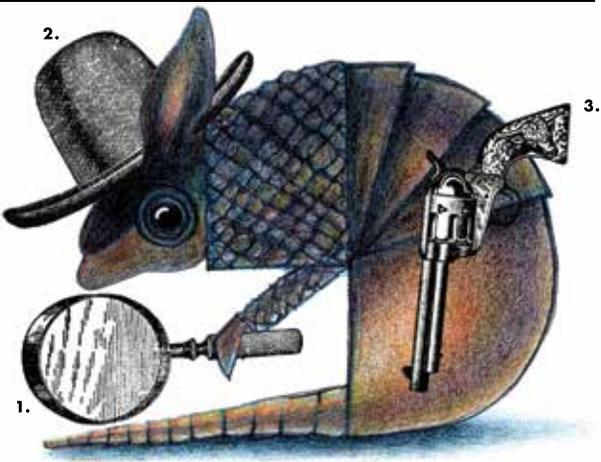
Sunstone Press

Paperback, 174 pages, \$18.95

SunstonePress.com

On the eve of a big fiesta commemorating the conquest of Santa Fe, councilman Tito Garcia is murdered. Tito was known as a peacemaker between the Spanish and Indigenous factions regarding the fiesta. With him dead, Santa Fe Police Detective Lopez is called upon to clear up the murder before the whole city riots. Plus, the problem of a girl's dead body whom nobody can identify crops up. Was she involved somehow in Tito's murder? It's up to Lopez to find out. The story itself has an excellent premise, but as a reader, I'm continuously taken out of that world by the indiscriminate use of "he." It never hurts to use a character's name to make clear the identity of whose thoughts we're in or who is actually speaking.

– Carol Crigger



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POETRY

MARC BEAUDIN

Life List: Poems

Riverfeet Press

Paperback, 140 pages, \$16

RiverfeetPress.com

Bird lover/photographer Marc Beaudin travels across not just America but to Europe in this homage that isn't just for birders or ornithologists. In his Spur finalist, "25 Bears," Beaudin begins "The promise of flycatchers/hidden in the deep wood/tease of song from the shadows." Loons, snow geese, owls and even the extinct passenger pigeon get their due, as does a great crested grebe diving in the Netherlands near a memorial for the Dutch murdered in Nazi concentration camps. A powerful, impassioned collection that includes several monotypes by artist Storrs Bishop that are also for sale from Riverfeet Press.

PATRICIA FROLANDER

Second Wind

High Plains Press

Paperback, 80 pages, \$12.95

HighPlainsPress.com

Patricia Frolander won the 2021 Spur Award for the poem "Baptism," which appears in her book *Second Wind*. Several poems in the book could have been singled out, but "Baptism," certainly deserves the honor. She writes with the wisdom and memory of a ranch wife who has lived a

hard, but satisfying life. Widowed a few years ago, many of the poems remember life with her husband. We are told of a South Dakota blizzard where “The rancher rides, searches for stock he might save.” In another she enters a lush wheat field and speaks to him, “You must be here for you love the fullness of a crop.” She laments, “Thirty-one miles of country road/ Eleven ranches, eight widows.” In other poems, she takes time to admire her surroundings, the mountains, the birds, the sweet sage. Well-written poetry fills the pages of *Second Wind*, making it a pleasurable reading experience.

– Lynn Bueling

BETTY LYNNE McCARTHY
Sundown Horses: 41 Fragments of a Cowgirl's Life

Sunlit Silver Bit Publishing
Paperback, 78 pages, price not listed

Betty Lynne McCarthy writes poetry that only one living the life of a rancher could write. Simply stated with no hint of pretense, you encounter a word picture of wind in tall grass with “The

roll and pitch of the prairie waves ...” Another lets us escape to “the quiet of dawn, before birdsong.” Her poetry appears in a variety of forms, including sonnets, free verse, pantoums, villanelles, and more, all the while spicing the pages with a few photographs. Her book, including her 2021 Spur finalist “Saddling,” makes for a pleasant read.

– Lynn Bueling

JUVENILE

JAMES J. GRIFFIN (author) and **VLADIMIR SHVACHKO** (illustrator)
Deputy Pete and the Purloined Pickles Puzzle

Condor Publishing
Paperback, 60 pages, \$10.95
CondorPublishingInc.com

Pete, a young deputy working in Travis County, Texas, comes home to Winchester, Texas, in 1894 for a rest. But, by golly, there’s a sick crime spree going on in Winchester, too, and when nine-year-old Libby and her kid brother, Ben, ask Deputy Pete to save the day,

he has no choice. Because somebody is stealing all the cucumbers and pickles in town – and right before the town’s annual pickle festival. What the dill’s going on? James J. Griffin, who has written Texas-set novels for young adults and adults, aims for young readers in this new series for grades 4-6. This debut should be kosher with kids, teachers, moms and dads.

– Johnny D. Boggs

WILL HOBBS
City of Gold

Harper
Hardcover, 241 pages, \$16.99
HarperCollinsChildrens.com

In the fall of 1900, young Owen Hol-lowell, his feisty little brother Till and their widowed ma are trying to make ends meet on their farm in the Animas Valley of Colorado. When a lowdown rustler steals the family’s beloved mules, Hercules and Peaches, Owen sets out alone to get them back. His trek takes him to the town of Telluride, in the sky-high gold-mining country of

BOOK REVIEWS (continued on page 37)



Capitalize on your WWA convention experience

Welcome to the 2021 WWA convention. Whether this is your first convention or one of many, you have chosen to spend your time and resources to attend the best convention in Western literature.



My first WWA convention was in 2013, and I continue to acquire more industry knowledge, credible connections and treasured friendships each time I attend. As

a writer, I hope you not only come away with the same but with some added publicity momentum. Here are five ways to maximize your convention.

√ Do you have a new book coming out? Blurbs from credible writers and

historians are a significant marketing tool for book covers, printed marketing material and websites. Connect with fellow authors and request a read of your pre-published manuscript and ask them to consider writing a blurb. This is also valuable to the author who is writing the blurb, as it showcases their own name and book.

√ If you have an author website with an events listing, add the convention to your list of appearances. Include a link to the WWA website. Add any specific information about your involvement and participation in any of the roundtables, readings, panels or music.

√ Post convention photos on your social media accounts. Use the hashtags #WWA2021, #thewestern lives and #Westernwritersofamerica

Increase your reach by tagging other authors and attendees.

√ After the convention, send a news

release to your local paper about your attendance at the convention, especially if you were nominated or won an award.

√ Post a blog about the convention with the title “Western Writers of America 2021 Convention.” Post pictures and link the authors and people you meet. Connect with other authors and agree to guest post on each other’s blogs to reach a new audience base.

One of the biggest mistakes I see authors make is not capitalizing on their connections, events, signings, awards and author news. I can bet, for each of you reading this, there are plenty of happenings in your author world to maximize.

Krista Rolfzen Soukup is a literary publicist and owner of Blue Cottage Agency (BlueCottageAgency.com).

BOOK REVIEWS *(from page 35)*

the San Juan Mountains. Wild West adventures ensue. Owen is plunged into the struggle between the miners' union and corrupt mine owners. He and Till – who has, of course, followed him – team up with a corrupt sheriff to track the mules and find themselves hot on the trail of the Wild Bunch. A 2021 Spur finalist for juvenile fiction, this lively tale for ages 10 and up has it all: humor, danger, gritty characters and a fascinating look at mining days of old.

– Nancy Plain

JIM JONES (author) and **KAMEE YOUNG** (illustrator)

Bolo the Brave

Kindle Direct Publishing

Paperback, 37 pages, \$13.95

Amazon.com

After losing his parents to pneumonia, young Charlie now lives with his Grandpa Will, who hires out his chuckwagon and cooking skills to wagon trains traveling across the windy Texas plains. While awaiting one such convoy, a funny-looking, crooked-nosed dog shows up to befriend the lonely boy. Bolo, named for the unusual pattern on his chest that resembles a bolo tie, soon becomes protective of Charlie, leading to a scary confrontation with a mountain lion. This 2021 Spur finalist in the Storyteller category includes lessons in friendship, compassion, overcoming fear and not judging according to looks. Charming pencil drawings complement the homespun, down-to-earth text.

– Rocky Gibbons