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The Western River Steamboat (review)

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Stephen A. Douglas's Kansas-Nebraska Act destroyed the Whig Party, bitterly divided the Democrats, and led to violence that extended from Kansas to the Senate Chamber in the national capitol. There would be no more compromises as the nation moved toward secession and war. So, given how sectionalism calmed from 1850 to 1854, was the annexation of Texas truly the "pivotal moment" on the road to secession, or did the Kansas-Nebraska Act constitute the pivot? Silbey's answer is that in 1854 "memories of Texas were again brought to the surface of public affairs," and the nation "found that it had moved very far along the road toward the sectionalizing of its politics, both rhetorically and behaviorally" (pp. 179–180). Thus, the argument is: Texas annexation was a pivotal moment in American history, but it may not have been without the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

Storm over Texas may disappoint Texas history enthusiasts in that Sam Houston, the state's best-known leader who served in the United States Senate through most of the period that Silbey discusses, has virtually no role in the story. Houston strongly and consistently supported the Union during the 1850s, and his opposition to extremism should have provided at least some measure of proof to northern Democrats that Calhoun-style southerners had not taken total control of their party. Perhaps one person, even one as spectacular as Houston, could make little difference, but given the book's focus on how Texas annexation divided the Democratic Party, his role probably should have received more attention. (One minor error that is likely to make Texas readers flinch is a reference to the last president of the republic as "Ansel" Jones.)

Storm over Texas may strain to maintain its argument that annexation constituted a pivotal moment in American history and will likely leave Texas readers wishing for more emphasis on Texans. However, it is a readable overview of the ways annexation of the Lone Star State moved the nation along the road to the Civil War.

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RANDOLPH B. CAMPBELL

The Western River Steamboat. By Adam I. Kane. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004. Pp. xx+188. Foreword, acknowledgments, illustrations, appendices, glossary, notes, bibliography, illustration credits, index. ISBN 1-58544-322-0. \$39.95, cloth. ISBN 1-58544-343-3. \$19.95, paper.)

Written by a nautical archeologist who has learned well the research methodologies of historians, *The Western River Steamboat* chronicles the evolution of steamboats on western rivers between 1811 and 1860. In the context of this study, "western rivers" are those west of the Appalachian Mountains, for the vessels studied operated primarily on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers and their tributaries.

Author Kane states in his introduction that "The steamboat was the primary agent in transforming the trans-Appalachian West from a sparsely settled wilderness into an economically significant region of the country." Most historians of the West will agree with this declaration, as few developments can compare with the steamboat in their economic impact on the region.

Historians have written volumes on steamboats and steamboating because of this significance, but few of them have understood the details of their evolution

and their construction. Having investigated historic steamboat wrecks and having analyzed the remains that survived from them, Kane brings to the study of these vessels the trained eye and intellect of the archeologist. Combining written sources, archeological evidence, and historic photographs, he provides insights into these vessels and their development that no one else has been able to synthesize.

Kane explains to readers how steamboat builders adapted their vessels to the conditions that they found in the wilderness of the trans-Appalachian West. The formerly deep-draft steamboats of the East became shallow-draft vessels across the mountains, where rivers were often shallow and filled with driftwood "snags." The builders of these vessels enhanced their usability in the West by fitting them with high-pressure steam boilers, which weighed about 60 percent less than the low-pressure boilers used in the East, thus making it possible for them to have more shallow draft. These boilers consumed large amounts of wood as fuel, but the boatmen viewed the forests along the rivers in the West as having inexhaustible supplies of this inexpensive fuel.

Historic photographs, engravings, and easily understood drawings assist readers in understanding the technical aspects of this book. It also includes a helpful glossary, tables of known Western river steamboats with their specifications, and carefully prepared endnotes and bibliography.

Adam I. Kane, combining expertise in both nautical archeology and history, has shared insights into the Western river steamboats that will benefit all scholars working in the region and time period.

Tarleton State University

T. LINDSAY BAKER

Texas Roots: Agriculture and Rural Life before the Civil War. By C. Allan Jones. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005. Pp. 264. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 1585444189. \$40.00, cloth. ISBN 1585444294. \$19.95, paper.)

Through the generations, and over the expanse of centuries, Texans have forged an identity that stands unique among others. So much has been said and written about the distinctive character that defines the Lone Star State. It is a legacy unlike any other in the American story, a heritage that is as vast, diverse, and magnificent as the land itself. As author C. Allan Jones, director of the Texas Water Resources Institute explains, Texas roots run deep.

A readable survey of the state's rural and agricultural beginnings is long overdue. Jones should, therefore, be commended for offering a thorough examination of this much-neglected yet critically important chapter in the Texas experience. His aptly stated objective—"to bring alive a part of Texas history that is rarely addressed: the relationship of Texans to their land before the Civil War" (p. 3)—is one worthy of the scholar's serious attention, even if the topic is not one that lends itself to a more popular appeal.

Despite the fact that the wilderness world Jones explores has been largely lost to the present generation, the legacy of that rural society remains relevant and instructive. To be sure, it is a story worth telling. In its earliest stages of