Engraved Prints of Texas, 1554-1900 (review)

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Southwestern Historical Quarterly, Volume 110, Number 1, July 2006, pp. 132-133 (Review)

Published by Texas State Historical Association

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/swh.2006.0028

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of Texas are encouraged to reference anthropologist George Sabo’s “Dancing in the Past: Colonial Legacies in Modern Caddo Indian Ceremony,” which discusses the Turkey Dance, a modern Caddo practice, and one of their oldest surviving traditions, which LaSalle’s lieutenant Henri Joutel may have observed in an earlier form in his visit to the Hasinai in 1687. A Whole Country in Commotion: The Louisiana Purchase and the American Southwest is recommended for anyone interested in the history of Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and the Southwest borderlands.

**Texas State University—San Marcos**

**Jeffrey G. Mauck**


This massive work served as a companion piece for the 2005 exhibition of the engravings collection of Houston surgeon Mavis P. Kelsey, housed at Texas A&M University. In the preface, Dr. Kelsey and Robin Brandt Hutchinson, the collection’s curator, discuss illustrative art as well as selection criteria while emphasizing that this work should be regarded as a first step, not an exhaustive study. Ron Tyler’s very helpful introduction offers a concise history of printing illustration in America (and Texas subjects’ place in it), as well as giving the historical context for the works and artists included in the catalog.

Following the introductory essay, the book is organized chronologically, according to date of publication of the works discussed in each of the remaining eight chapters. Each chapter opens with an overview essay concerning the highlights of that decade’s illustrations, with the exception of the first chapter, which discusses Texas engravings prior to 1830 (the earliest image is a 1554 engraving of a buffalo based on Cabeza de Vaca’s description). In addition to discussing specific works and artists, these essays serve as capsule discussions of the technology of engraving, especially during the nineteenth century as wood engravings dominated the middle decades only to be gradually supplanted by photomechanical and photographic reproductions during the 1880s and 1890s. Each essay is followed by detailed catalog entries that are the strength of the book. Since the authors strived to include all Texas-related illustrations from the publications selected, the entries, taken as a whole, also serve as a rough outline of the state’s history.

The book is a treasure trove of unexpected images, such as an 1830s depiction of Houston as nestled among mountains, an 1867 illustration of Apaches reading newspapers that they captured after attacking a stagecoach near Fort Davis, and illustrations for “Texas Rain Making Experiments,” in an 1892 issue of *Scientific American.* One of the most remarkable aspects of the authors’ research is the diversity of sources, including currency bills, standard illustrated histories, railroad promotional literature (which illustrated scenes of smaller towns as well as large cities), church denominational publications, and government boundary survey
reports. Artists well known to the general public, such as Frederic Remington, are represented but lesser-known (although no less important for purpose of this study) artists such as Paul Frenzeny and Jules Tavernier also are discussed at length. Included, too, are amusing nuggets such as that Julian Onderdonk, renowned for serene paintings of misty fields of bluebonnets, illustrated the autobiography of one of Texas’s most notorious killers, John Wesley Hardin.

Readers should be aware that, since this volume focuses on engravings, it does not attempt to trace the lineage of each work (such as Storming of the Alamo, which originated as a painting by Theodore Gentilz) back to original medium and artist. Also, some readers may disagree with the inclusion of several illustrations not specifically related to Texas, even though the authors do address this question in the preface. These caveats notwithstanding, this volume will prove to be a valuable resource for collectors and scholars of the history of Texas and of illustration.

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SAM RATCLIFFE


No event in Texas history has experienced as much analysis as the tragic fate of the defenders of the Alamo in 1836. Of the main trio of martyrs for Texan independence, perhaps the most popular in the generations since was Davy Crockett. The final days of the Tennessee congressman have been played out again and again on stage, screen, and in the written word. With Journey into the Land of Trials, Manley F. Cobia has masterfully put together what may well become the definitive account of Crockett’s trek from Tennessee politician to Texan hero.

Cobia points out early on that there is a reason why so little has been said of Crockett’s last journey: there is very little from which to work. Working primarily from personal accounts of individuals who claimed at one time or another to have witnessed Crockett at various stages on his trip from the Tennessee frontier, through the Comanche-filled wilds of northeast Texas, and finally to Bexar, the author attempts to separate fact from fiction. Throughout, Cobia does a magnificent job of interweaving more than a century-and-a-half of historiography. Where documentary evidence is scant, he uses contemporary accounts of the territories through which Crockett is known to have traveled to paint a portrait of the wilderness and bring the reader alongside Crockett on his way to destiny.

The author brings late Mexican Texas to life with his narrative, continuously returning to a major theme of the book: what was Crockett’s motive for his Texas adventure? Cobia examines the multitude of theories, from political ambition to a desire to escape politics altogether, to a mission to assist in Texan independence. The other heroes of the time—Houston, Bowie, and Travis—are present throughout the work, but attention never wanders far from Crockett and his journey.