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*Ropin' the Dream: The Story of the Ken Lance Sports Arena,  
1964-1994 (review)*

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absent minded, Eckhardt arrived in the capitol a sketching, bicycling, seersucker-clad lawmaker.

Rather ironically, as Keith explains, similar reactionary political circumstances to those during Eckhardt's rise helped bring his political demise, especially the backlash to the Carter years and particularly the oil and gas crises. By his 1980 reelection campaign Eckhardt found himself a target for the Reagan Revolution. Cast as a liberal and, in the words of his young opponent Jack Fields Jr., representing "everything that is wrong with this country," Eckhardt lost reelection in 1980, ending a storied legislative career (298).

At first glance this is a celebratory account of Eckhardt. Yet Keith balances this with some of Eckhardt's flaws, including extramarital affairs and failed marriages, drinking, political failures, and ego. While some may find the chapter sub-headings distracting to the narrative and others might balk at the description of the "*angry* sociopolitical movement" of the New Right, this is solid and impressive scholarship (295). *Eckhardt: There Once Was a Congressman from Texas* stands as an invaluable addition to our understanding of recent U.S. politics, in Texas and nationally. This brand of well-researched and written biography works.

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JEFFREY A. JOHNSON

*Ropin' the Dream: The Story of the Ken Lance Sports Arena, 1964–1994.* By Ruth Lance Wester and June Proctor. (Kearney, Neb.: Morris Publishing, 2007. Pp. 186. Illustrations, notes, bibliography. ISBN 9780970576706, \$16.95 paper.)

Part memoir and part institutional history, *Ropin' the Dream* tells the story of the Ken Lance Sports Arena, a mainstay of the Oklahoma and Texas rodeo circuit between the 1960s and 1990s. Located near Ada, Oklahoma, the sports complex served an important role in supporting regional as well as national rodeo talent. Music, too, played a part in the arena's story as Ken Lance brought in popular (or soon-to-be popular) country music acts to perform throughout the year. The authors—including Lance's former wife—provide an insider's perspective on the trials and successes in the big business of southwestern rodeos.

Although focused on the particulars of the annual rodeo competitions (from best roping times to prize amounts), much of the book's value is found in its discussion of the variety of country-western acts that came through town to support the rodeos. Many of these performers came from the Oklahoma and Texas area, and played the arena (or at least at the nearby dance pavilion) early in their career as they relied on regional tours then returned later as larger draws once they became famous. The authors center much of their attention on Reba McEntire, as she had her start on this circuit, but other musicians such as Gene Watson, Moe Bandy, Johnny Rodriguez, and the Kendalls also appear throughout the book. Many of these musicians rarely receive the attention they deserve even within country-music historiography. As much as the authors delight in reciting the accounting figures for the arena's cashbox during these years, the real joy of the book is in placing these musicians into a larger framework of rodeo culture.

Wester and Proctor do not take full advantage of the potential these accounts provide, but the book does include some interesting vignettes—especially memorable is one with a pre-fame, short-haired Willie Nelson receiving a clause in his performer's contract to allow him to "get there early and practice calf roping" (39). More of a focus on similar stories would enhance the appeal of the book.

From the peculiarities of running a business in the 1960s with a party line to an unfortunate incident involving roping a coyote (and subsequent rabies inoculations), Wester and Proctor provide a personal tale of promoting and running the Ken Lance Sports Arena. Still, for a book written by two women and focused in large measure on all-girl rodeo competitions, the issue of gender remains surprisingly elusive and the book fails to examine any of the more obviously gendered elements of rodeo culture. This omission seems even starker considering that the memoir-related sections stress a number of stories that relate directly to a business run by a married woman, female singers performing on stage, and young women competing within the masculine world of rodeos. Overall, the blend of institutional history and memoir provides for an interesting look at an underrepresented cultural phenomenon. To be sure, *Ropin' the Dream* is not an academic book—the writing is too casual and the history too anecdotal—but the authors do tell the often-overlooked story of the interconnected worlds of competitive rodeo and country music from a personal and sometimes poignant point of view.

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COURT CARNEY

*Taking on Giants: Fabián Chávez Jr. and New Mexico Politics.* By David Roybal (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008. Pp. 320. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 9780826344366, \$27.95 cloth.)

Ambitious in both its scope and purpose, political journalist David Roybal's new book *Taking on Giants: Fabián Chávez Jr. and New Mexico Politics*, offers what is, and undoubtedly will remain for some time to come, the most comprehensive study of the life and political career of one of New Mexico's most prominent and influential Democrats, Fabián Chávez Jr.

Though Roybal treats thoroughly the narrative of Chávez's career, which included stints as Majority Leader for the New Mexico State Senate, failed campaigns for U.S. Congress and New Mexico's governorship, oversight of an expanding and evolving tourism industry in the 1970s, and an appointment as Assistant Secretary of Commerce during the Carter administration, it is when addressing Chávez's youth that Roybal is most effective. Not so much rebellious as restless and intellectually curious, Chávez, one of eleven siblings, traveled to Los Angeles, alone and without parental permission, at the age of twelve. Soon after Fabián's return to Santa Fe, his father decided to enroll the precocious youth in the Springer boys' school, which was essentially a juvenile correctional facility. Roybal's use of Springer as a framing event—one that reemerged as a political issue later in Chavez's life—stands as one of the book's best moments and structural successes.