



PROJECT MUSE®

*Guarding The Border: The Military Memoirs of Ward Schrantz,
1912-1917 (review)*

William McWhorter

Southwestern Historical Quarterly, Volume 113, Number 4, April 2010, pp.
544-545 (Review)

Published by Texas State Historical Association

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/swh.2010.0064>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/408624/summary>

ian protest movements as it is a cultural history of plain-folk communities and the transformation they underwent from majority landownership to farm tenancy. Wilkison addresses the Greenback and Populist movements only in summary. The Socialist Party in Texas, while examined in greater detail, is done so primarily from a cultural perspective. This should not be viewed as a weakness. The cultural approach allows Wilkison to analyze issues of race and religion with more depth than more politically oriented histories of agrarian protest and farm tenancy. This is where Wilkison makes a noteworthy contribution to the historical literature on agrarian protest movements. Previous studies have noted how populists and socialists used religious rhetoric to gain adherents and the conflicts these movements experienced with church-based religions. Wilkison goes a step further by bringing to light how the issues raised by agrarian radicals, particularly that of landownership, caused rifts within the churches themselves.

Wilkison's 2009 Fehrenbach Award winning book presents Texas plain folk in a struggle against modern market forces in an attempt to hold onto their traditional way of life. Landownership, semi-subsistence agriculture, and tight-knit rural communities served as the foundation for this traditional culture. According to Wilkison blacks and whites shared this common culture only to be separated "by the chasm created by the white majority's belief in and practice of white supremacy" (7). Wilkison presents rural Texans' vote for populism and socialism as an expression of their attempt to hold onto their traditional communities. These attempts failed because of the rural majority's adherence to racism and religion.

Wilkison's portrayal of plain folk protest as an anti-modern, tradition-based movement stands in conflict with other recent works on the subject. For example, Charles Postel's 2008 Brancroft Prize winning *The Populist Vision* (Oxford University Press, 2007) presents the agrarian protest movement of the 1880s and 1890s as a modern movement embracing progressive stances on economics, education, women's suffrage, and religion. Leaving aside the modernity debate, Wilkison offers a detailed portrait of the everyday life of yeomen, sharecroppers, and tenant farmers often missing in other studies of agrarian reform movements. It is for Wilkison's use of cultural history that those interested in plain folk culture, agrarian radicalism, and Texas history in general will find this book a useful read.

University of Illinois at Chicago

THOMAS E. ALTER II

Guarding The Border: The Military Memoirs of Ward Schrantz, 1912-1917. Edited by Jeff Patrick. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009. Pp. 205. Illustrations & Maps, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 9781603440967, \$29.95, cloth.)

The pre-World War I (1912-1917) years are in many respects an underdeveloped segment of U.S. military history. This period between the twilight of the frontier Army and the establishment of the modern mechanized U.S. Army has generally lacked significant evaluation by modern historians. In *Guarding the Border: The Military Memories of Ward Schrantz, 1912-1917*, Jeff Patrick has produced a well-rounded volume by editing the memories of Ward Schrantz. Patrick provides

the reader with an excellent example of social history through Schrantz's first-person perspective of military life along the U.S.–Mexico border prior to World War I. While Patrick references Schrantz's later military career, he focuses the book on Schrantz's border service.

Although not a professional writer, Schrantz's education and small town newspaper experience allowed him to craft well-written narratives, describing in great detail the daily life of a soldier. This account provides a fascinating contrast between life in the regular U.S. Army (the 22nd Infantry Regiment specifically) and the Missouri National Guard from training to active deployment. Stationed in El Paso, Schrantz participated in the patrolling of the border for armed parties entering or leaving Mexico. His colorful descriptions of Fort Bliss in December 1912 provide the reader with a fine picture of the area's geography and landscape. The next year, his unit was transferred to East Texas. As their troop train cut a path across the Lone Star State, Schrantz's memories paint a brilliant picture of the wild and rugged grandeur of Far West Texas, the crossing of the tall Pecos bridge, the Hill County, the harbingers of the great Piney Woods the train passed as it pushed east, and the open, flat coastal plain near Houston. Schrantz's candid memories provide today's reader with both an understanding of what the state's built environment looked like nearly a century ago and a personal description of the state's majestic beauty in both the rural border setting of the west and the denser populated areas near Houston.

Where Patrick most excels is in weaving Schrantz's memories together for the period during the U.S. Army's deployment to Texas City in preparation for what many in America thought was a possible war with Mexico, which never materialized. Through Schrantz's memories, Patrick succeeds in showing how many American soldiers, such as Schrantz, grew disillusioned with service as the reality of an unlikely invasion materialized. This creates an honest picture of youth and male bravado irrevocably altered after a person's initial baptism under fire.

Patrick excels in editing Schrantz's memories effectively, leaving the reader with the understanding that men like Schrantz truly were the nucleus that kept the National Guard together during the pre-World War I years. Patrick cites excellent secondary and primary sources, including official U.S. Army documents of the era and newspapers from both Missouri and Texas. Appendix A of the book provides a fine context for the peripheral events of the time during Schrantz's border service and years leading up to American involvement in World War I. Appendix B provides a very personal connection to the book's author, Schrantz's letters to the *Carthage (Mo.) Evening Press* are glimpses of regular army life in Texas and are the core of Patrick's book.

Guarding the Border instills in the reader the distinct impression that Schrantz truly understood that he served at a time of great transformation within the U.S. Army. As a result, Patrick's scholarship is a welcome addition to this underdeveloped segment of U.S. military history.