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Eavesdropping on Texas History ed. by Mary L. Scheer
(review)

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Book Reviews

NANCY BAKER JONES, *Editor*

Eavesdropping on Texas History. Edited by Mary L. Scheer. (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2017. Pp. 352. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.)

Editor Mary L. Scheer's first-rate collection *Eavesdropping on Texas History* challenges the reader; is entertaining, scholarly, and informative; and inspires some questions: What is history? Why study history? How does one research and report on history? Answers to these questions are not as apparent as one might assume.

Scheer requested that the authors, each a prominent and recognized Texas history scholar, select an event or time in Texas history at which they would have enjoyed being a "fly on the wall" and to explain why. Scheer also asked that the selected episodes be researched in primary and recent secondary sources, be of interest to authors and readers, entertaining to read, and fun to write about.

Eavesdropping on Texas History includes fourteen episodes selected by the authors in conjunction with the editor; they range in time from Victoria Cummins's account of the New Madrid Earthquakes in 1811–12 to Nancy E. Baker's report on the passage of the Marital Property Act of 1967. In between are myriad intriguing and critical historical events. Among my favorites, written by Scheer, is Sam Houston's courageous decision not to take a loyalty oath to the Confederate States of America. Chuck Parsons's take on a Texas Ranger killing of four black, former United States soldiers, members of one of the Buffalo Soldier units, raises a question of meaning today: was race an issue on both sides? Of particular interest and significance to Texans is Michael Collins's vivid portrayal of the day President John F. Kennedy was assassinated and Texan Vice President Lyndon Baines Johnson became president, November 22, 1963.

Additional Texas events well-covered by historians in this volume include Stephen F. Austin's 1822–23 sojourn to Mexico; the fall of the Alamo; the abduction of Cynthia Ann Parker; an East Texas environmental meeting in 1909; the Black Sunday dust storm in April 1935; the pivotal football game between SMU and TCU that same year; the 1944 firing of the University of Texas president, Homer Price Rainey; the death of four-term President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the accession of Harry S. Truman to the presidency in 1945 (with Texans Sam Rayburn's and

Lyndon Johnson's involvement); and the beginning of Texas Southern University in 1947. The book, in other words, is replete with fascinating and thought-provoking stories from Texas history; it offers the reader an opportunity to graze historical moments of interest to historians.

San Antonio, Texas

BRUCE A. GLASRUDE

Thirty-Three Years, Thirty-Three Works: Celebrating the Contributions of F. E. Abernethy, Texas Folklore Society Secretary-Editor, 1971–2004. Edited by Kenneth L. Untiedt and Kira E. Mort. (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2016. Pp. 384. Illustrations, notes, index.)

This book is not a review of a single article or of a collection of historical articles. Rather it is about the writings, speakings, and singings of Francis E. Abernethy, Ph.D., a consummate folklorist. Ab, as he was called by one and all, was a man who knew all there was to know about folklore and who lived it every day of his life: he spoke, sang, wrote, believed, and championed it and spread its message through the publications of the Texas Folklore Society (TFS). His passing in 2015 leaves boots unlikely to be filled for a long time.

Ab was a Fellow of both the TFS and the Texas State Historical Association. At one time, not too many years ago, the words *folklore* and *history* were miles apart, but over the years, the two disciplines came to respect each other, largely through such individuals as Ab, who firmly held that folklore is a discipline and not just a quaint curiosity, although it is that, too.

Editor Kenneth Untiedt gathered many selections illustrating the range and scope of Ab's educated mind. Some of the works are scholarly, defining folklore and tracing its origins to the universal, including endnotes and explanations beyond the tales or stories being told. Ab felt it necessary to write articles of substance whether or not readers dwelled on them or read them first. This book begins with such; but if some are scholarly, they are friendly and readable scholarship.

Ab knew the importance of writing just plain good stories such as "The East Texas Communal Hunt," "Running the Fox," and "Snake Lore," and he sometimes began with an explanation of terms. Such stories clearly lean to East Texas, underscoring his sense of place. "Snake Lore" is representative of Ab's style. The essay begins with Ab's personal acquaintance with snakes, moves to the role of the snake in the Bible, and hooks on to ancient mythology before telling the reader how to catch a snake, then finishes with "tales." Perhaps he remembered J. Frank Dobie's philosophy in *Rattlesnakes* (1965): "Never let the facts stand in the way of a good story."

Of course, Dobie is recalled in "Dobie's Only Child: the T.F.S. in 1926." While the article centers on the venerable Dobie, the reader learns about the beginnings of the TFS and other important figures in its history, such