Both Sides of the Border
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Tell me honestly, have you ever cleaned out your files? I don’t mean picking through one pittance of a drawer of files while watching As the World Turns. I mean thoughtfully and meticulously going through cabinets and closets and garages filled with files that go back to your school days and even before. I thought not. The task out-daunted you, didn’t it? You feared the cataclysmic emotional upheaval that would result from delving through the detritus of your past. I urge you to summon your true grit and intestinal fortitude and to do so now. Address yourself to the task so that those who follow you will not have that as one of their onerous duties at your eventual exit.

This “holier than thou” attitude is the result of my having cleaned out my Texas Folklore Society files as I prepare to pass the TFS editorial mantle on to Ken Untiedt. I had to do a massive cleanout and organization some years back when I organized and boxed all of the Society’s records from 1971 to 2000 to be deposited with the rest of the TFS records in the archives at the Barker Center at The University. Now I have made the second round of cleaning out files to see if there was anything I missed, and I found some real jewels. These were papers and clippings from years past that had been lying around just looking for a place to make their literary debuts.

The result of all this cleaning out is that this year’s PTFS is one of your ultimate bargains—four books in one!—a history monograph, a Tex-Mex book, a miscellany, and a Family Saga reprise. Now is that a huge hype or what!

We purposely highlighted the Tex-Mex section and christened this 2004 Publication of the Texas Folklore Society #61 Both Sides
of the Border: A Scattering of Texas Folklore, because of its emphasis upon recently researched Tex-Mex folklore—and because the opening article is a beautiful autobiographical piece by Lucy West about growing up on both sides of the Rio Grande border. Additionally, we recognize that Texas has other borders besides the Rio Grande. In fact, we considered the ambiguity of the word “Border” as it applied to Texas with its several borders and will use that title with the folklorists’ knowledge that all of this state’s songs, tales, and traditions have lived and prospered on the other sides of Texas borders at one time or another before they crossed the rivers and became “ours.”

The Texas Folklore Society has been publishing Mexican folklore from both sides of the border since its beginning. PTFS #1, now called ’Round the Levee, included a Mexican border ballad—untranslated! Frank Dobie began his folkloric mission collecting and publishing Mexican folklore that had lived on both sides of the Rio Grande. His Spur of the Cock (PTFS #11–1933) and Puro Mexicano (PTFS #12–1935) were extensive collections of Texas-Mexican folklore as were Mody Boatright’s Mexican Border Ballads (PTFS #21–1946) and Wilson Hudson’s Healer of Los Olmos (PTFS #24–1951). More recently, Joe Graham edited Hecho en Tejas (PTFS #50–1991) and the Society published Al Rendon’s classic picture study, Charreada: Mexican Rodeo in Texas (PTFS #59–2002).

The above list does not include the fact that just about every volume of the Society’s sixty-one publications has included Mexican folklore that has lived on both sides of the Texas Rio Grande border. Nor does it include Texas Folklore Society extra books such as Frank Dobie’s Coronado’s Children, Americo Paredes’ With His Pistol in His Hand, Riley Aiken’s Mexican Folktales from the Borderland, and John O. West’s Mexican-American Folklore.

And we must conclude with the observation that Texas has a large population of individuals who have lived on both sides of the border and are now creating a folkloric mix that we will hear much of in the future. Thus, Both Sides of the Border is timely.
Both Sides was to have been a traditional miscellany, containing the best of papers presented at TFS meetings over the past few years, as well as casual submissions. We have used that meritorious miscellany of materials as the center of the book. We concluded Both Sides of the Border with “The Family Saga (Cont’d.)” because we had several rich family legends and studies of family legends left over from last year’s publication. The Family Saga has stimulated a flow of family legends that will eventually require the publishing of a companion volume.

I started editing my first PTFS, number thirty-seven, in the fall of 1971, which was before some of you were even born. I was determined to start the volume with something by my hero J. Frank Dobie, so I talked Bertha Dobie into sending me a hunting story from his unpublished files. You will notice that I start this, my last volume, with J. Frank Dobie also. I thought such a beginning tribute was fitting.

I bummed and borrowed enough articles to make a passable TFS miscellany in 1971, and I gave the material to Bill Wittliff at the newly founded Encino Press. Bill put it artistically all together in what we clumsily called Observations & Reflections On Texas Folklore (PTFS #37–1972). The title was accurately descriptive but it lacked euphony, or something. But Lordy! Was I ever proud of that book! Bill followed the footsteps of Carl Hertzog. He knew instinctively and aesthetically how to blend paper, print, pictures, text, etc.—all the elements that make a book—into a unified artistic whole. It is a rare talent, one much neglected in our fury to get books on the stands.

I started editing Both Sides of the Border, number sixty-one, with a full hopper of folkloric articles, much richer in material than I was that first year of this editorship. I realized again—for the twentieth time—how blessed the Society is with its wealth of writers and researchers. Folklore courses have lost their places in
academe since the beginning of my editorship, but Society mem-
bers have continued to collect and preserve and study folklore on
their own. And the Society has been able to continue its publishing
program, always with the support of its members. I take this
opportunity to thank all members who have ever put their literary
pens to paper for the Society’s sake. You are the lives of the Soci-
ety’s publishing program, and future generations will bless your
names as the carriers of Texas’ folkloric torch.

I have not made a survey lately to see what other states have
done in the way of preserving and presenting their folklore. But I
would venture to say that Texas has done as well as any in main-
taining a published record of its folklore studies.

So I am ending much as I began thirty-three years ago with a
miscellany of observations and reflections on Texas folklore that I
found readable and informative. I used a few old papers that had
rattled around in my files for years because I could not find the
exact place to use them. I paid tribute to some long departed
buddies who still remain dear to my heart. And I hope that ultimately I have organized a PTFS that has some worthwhile academic value.

The editors thank Heather Gotti, our office secretary, for her work in collecting and organizing the articles for this publication, and we thank Karen DeVinney, managing editor at the University of North Texas Press, for her editing.

I shall not sing a swan song until I find one that goes well with a country band composed of fiddle and guitar, banjo and bass—something like the East Texas String Ensemble. And as much as I like the perks more than the works, I will try to keep my hands off the TFS publications so that Ken Untiedt can start putting his stamp on the books of the next thirty-three years.

It’s been a blast! It’s been my life.

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