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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

Murder and Mystery in New Mexico. By Erna Fergusson. Merle Armitage Editions, Albuquerque, N. M., 1948. Pp. 193 and photographs. \$3.50.

Here is a modern retelling of nine true stories of New Mexican violence. It is evident that Erna Fergusson has enjoyed digging out details concerning the murders and collecting the various explanations that have been offered for still unsolved mysteries. "The Vigilantes of Socorro" tells of the shooting of A. M. Conklin, editor of the *Socorro Sun*, by one of the young Bacas in 1880, over a fancied insult, and the subsequent illegal proceedings of the Committee of Safety, organized to secure "justice." The second narrative explains the shooting that arose over a disputed land title between Manuel B. Otero and Joel P. Whitney, of Boston, in August, 1883. Other chapters are devoted to the career of Billy the Kid, the strange disappearance near the White Sands of the San Andrés of Colonel Albert J. Fountain and his little son, the hanging of train robber Black Jack Ketchum, the killing of Indian trader Frank Dugan on the Navajo reservation, the Manby mystery of Taos, the murder of Yee Fong in Silver City, and the mob violence against some Mexican coal miners in Chihuahuita, near Gallup.

All of the stories hold the reader's interest, even better than do the ever-popular fictional "who-done-its." Here fact itself falls into patterns of suspense, and the assembled clues have a concreteness difficult to rival by invented circumstance. The characters, also, are more varied, colorful, and convincing than are the creations of even top level purveyors of today's crime and mystery best sellers. For this reader, at least, truth in the realm of murder is not only stranger but also more fascinating than fiction.

Murder and Mystery in New Mexico appeals, also, by its regional quality. Racial and physical backgrounds, common occupations, local customs, ethical and cultural standards, and characteristic ways of thinking and speaking permeate the stories. No one of them could be inserted unde-

tected, even with a change of place names, in such recent crime anthologies as those entitled *New York Murders*, *San Francisco Murders*, or *Denver Murders*.

Another important aspect of this volume is the artistry of the narrator. Erna Fergusson goes far beyond the usual levels of newspaper crime reporting, giving us sympathetic understanding in addition to accuracy and clarity. She demonstrates the ease, freshness, vividness, and restraint of the experienced and gifted writer. She also avoids the over-detailed and the over-sensational treatments that have too often been accorded the criminal aspects of earlier Western and Southwestern life. Her writing is, moreover, beautifully framed by the attractive format of the book, another example of distinguished local publishing.

University of Denver

LEVETTE J. DAVIDSON

No Man's Land. By Carl Coke Rister. Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press. 1948. Pp. xi, 210. \$3.00.

This book is a history of the once wild and often dusty area which is now the Oklahoma Panhandle. Its title comes from a phrase used in a "New York Sun" story on this area in 1889, when it was indeed "God's land, but no man's." It is an area bigger than Rhode Island and Delaware combined. Although repeatedly blasted by droughts, dust storms, and blizzards, many of its sturdy inhabitants have stuck to their homes and farms through thick and thin.

Dr. Rister, research professor of history at the University of Oklahoma, is well known as author of a series of excellent books on the history of the Southwest. The work is not annotated; but its bibliography, and other books by the same author, provide sufficient guarantee that it is based upon wide study of the original sources, in Oklahoma, at the National Archive, and elsewhere.

The story of the area is carried from the days of Coronado to that of the latest suitcase-and-windshield farmer who hopes here to get rich raising wheat under inflated wartime and post-war prices. "Don't Go Out Thar," was the advice to an army officer's wife given by Kit Carson, who

knew the area well from the days of Josiah Gregg and the wagon trade over the Santa Fe Trail. The blizzard of the 1880's, causing death to thousands of cattle when this was chiefly a cattle area, and the dust storms of the "Dirty Thirties," after War I had made it a wheat area, were the region's worst God-made plagues. Man-made plagues were the outlaw gangs which located here in the later 1800's, when adequate government was lacking.

To this latter problem, and to the struggle for law and order, Dr. Rister gives most of his attention. Part of the Texas cession originally, in 1850 Congress had left the area unorganized, being preoccupied with the slavery question. Hence the panhandle area was placed in no administrative unit, neither state nor territory. Law and order were non-existent. Here outlaws found a choice refuge, and non-criminal settlers faced a long and heartbreaking fight. Today's local boosters call the area a "beef bowl" or "wheat bowl," as means of forgetting that the dust may come again. Fortunately the outlaws never will.

University of Nevada

AUSTIN E. HUTCHESON

Jeff Milton, a Good Man With a Gun. J. Evetts Haley. Norman, Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma Press, 1948. Pp. xiii, 430. \$5.00.

I have a very considerable admiration for J. Evetts Haley. I do not know Mr. Haley from Adam's off ox but I know his writings and these I regard with lasting respect. Mr. Haley began acquiring this respect with his first book, *The XIT Ranch and the Early Days of the Llano Estacado*, and it continued to grow as I read his story of Charles Goodnight and those other books concerning George W. Littlefield and Charles Schriener. I was not let down when I read *Jeff Milton, a Good Man With a Gun*.

Mr. Haley is a Texan and, as everybody knows, a Texan's cattle bawl a little louder, his horses buck a little higher, and his friends grow a little taller and shoot a little straighter than any others. Mr. Haley writes about Jeff Milton, who was his friend, and proceeds to prove his points

regarding bucking, bawling and shooting. He dots the i's and crosses the t's of his story with documentary proof, and he has dug back into source material, interviewed many and gone out and ridden the country he writes about. To my way of thinking this is essential for how else can a man write of the old timers? He must know them and their country.

Mr. Haley knew Jeff Milton and the reader comes to know him too. He liked and admired Jeff Milton; the reader also likes and admires him. He saw Jeff Milton as a whole man, with weaknesses as well as strengths, and the reader also sees Jeff Milton. Therefore a good deal of Southwestern history unfolds and is explained. Men like Jeff Milton made it; men like J. Evetts Haley record it.

There were many doors in Jeff Milton's life and Mr. Haley opens them. Through the doors come stalking such characters as Governor John Milton of Florida, Major Jones and Captain Bryan Marsh of the Texas Rangers, Old John Selman and George Scarborough down in El Paso, Burt Alvord, Bronco Bill Walters; the Rurale Colonel, Emelio Kosterlitzsky, and hundreds of others. But these are small people. With them stands Jeff Milton, dominating them.

Jeff Milton did it all. He was a Ranger when rangering was tough; he was a peace officer when to wear a star often meant assuming the duties of judge, jury and executioner as well; he prospected; he guarded gold shipments for Wells Fargo; he was an inspector for the Immigration Service. Jeff Milton was "a good man with a gun," and he was also a good man, and so he hunted outlaws and put down lawlessness; was shot at and hit; shot back and made hits in return. He did those things that honest, fearless men do in a savage, untamed country. J. Evetts Haley tells about them in salty, hard twisted prose. Where else but in a Haley book will you find a man described as being "comfortable" to have along in a fight? Or another as, "standing out like a black muley steer in a whitefaced herd?" Me, I don't know. But I do know that Haley writes that way and that I like it.

Something should be said about the illustrations. There are photographs of old timers and old time places, and there

are line drawings by Harold D. Bugbee. These last particularly are like the chilitipins that Jeff Milton carried in his old cap box: they make colorful, spicy flavoring for the whole.

Maybe I've gone overboard about this book. If I have that's all right with me. A critic might dig in and find fault and discover discrepancies and overdrawings. I don't know. I do know that I read *Jeff Milton, a Good Man With a Gun*, and that I did not put it down until I had finished. Then I dipped back into the book and repeated the performance. I expect to read it many times.

Albuquerque, N. M.

BENNETT FOSTER

CONSTITUTION
OF THE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW MEXICO

(As amended Nov. 25, 1941)

Article 1. Name. This Society shall be called the Historical Society of New Mexico.

Article 2. Objects and Operation. The objects of the Society shall be, in general, the promotion of historical studies; and in particular, the discovery, collection, preservation, and publication of historical material especially such as relates to New Mexico.

Article 3. Membership. The Society shall consist of Members, Fellows, Life Members and Honorary Life Members.

(a) *Members.* Persons recommended by the Executive Council and elected by the Society may become members.

(b) *Fellows.* Members who show, by published work, special aptitude for historical investigation may become Fellows. Immediately following the adoption of this Constitution, the Executive Council shall elect five Fellows, and the body thus created may thereafter elect additional Fellows on the nomination of the Executive Council. The number of Fellows shall never exceed twenty-five.

(c) *Life Members.* In addition to life members of the Historical Society of New Mexico at the date of the adoption hereof, such other benefactors of the Society as shall pay into its treasury at one time the sum of fifty dollars, or shall present to the Society an equivalent in books, manuscripts, portraits, or other acceptable material of an historic nature, may upon recommendation by the Executive Council and election by the Society, be classed as Life Members.

(d) *Honorary Life Members.* Persons who have rendered eminent service to New Mexico and others who have, by published work, contributed to the historical literature of New Mexico or the Southwest, may become Honorary Life Members upon being recommended by the Executive Council and elected by the Society.

Article 4. Officers. The elective officers of the Society shall be a president, a vice-president, a corresponding secretary, a treasurer, and a recording secretary; and these five officers shall constitute the *Executive Council* with full administrative powers.

Officers shall qualify on January 1st following their election, and shall hold office for the term of two years and until their successors shall have been elected and qualified.

Article 5. *Elections.* At the October meeting of each odd-numbered year, a nominating committee shall be named by the president of the Society and such committee shall make its report to the Society at the November meeting. Nominations may be made from the floor and the Society shall, in open meeting, proceed to elect its officers by ballot, those nominees receiving a majority of the votes cast for the respective offices to be declared elected.

Article 6. *Dues.* Dues shall be \$3.00 for each calendar year, and shall entitle members to receive bulletins as published and also the *Historical Review*.

Article 7. *Publications.* All publications of the Society and the selection and editing of matter for publication shall be under the direction and control of the Executive Council.

Article 8. *Meetings.* Monthly meetings of the Society shall be held at the rooms of the Society on the third Tuesday of each month at eight P. M. The Executive Council shall meet at any time upon call of the President or of three of its members.

Article 9. *Quorums.* Seven members of the Society and three members of the Executive Council, shall constitute quorums.

Article 10. *Amendments.* Amendments to this constitution shall become operative after being recommended by the Executive Council and approved by two-thirds of the members present and voting at any regular monthly meeting; provided, that notice of the proposed amendments shall have been given at a regular meeting of the Society, at least four weeks prior to the meeting when such proposed amendment is passed upon by the Society.

The Historical Society of New Mexico

Organized December 26, 1859

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1863 — HON. KIRBY BENEDICT

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