

New Mexico Historical Review

Volume 34 | Number 4

Article 5

10-1-1959

Book Reviews

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr>

Recommended Citation

. "Book Reviews." *New Mexico Historical Review* 34, 4 (1959). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol34/iss4/5>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in *New Mexico Historical Review* by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu, lsloane@salud.unm.edu, sarahrk@unm.edu.

Book Reviews

Twenty-Four Years a Cowboy & Ranchman. By Will Hale. With an introduction by A. M. Gibson. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959. Pp. xii, 183. Illustrations. \$2.00.

I suspect that the editor of the *NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW* asked me, a folklorist, to review Will Hale's book because he did not know whether the book is history, folklore, or literature and because he wanted me to wrestle with the problem. I have no answer for the problem either.

In his introduction, the editor of the text, first published in 1905, pursues the baffling problem of authorship and speculates about the fact that only three copies of the original publication are known to exist. The book purports to be the autobiography of Will Hale, who indicates that he was born just before the war with Mexico. However, the holder of the copyright is Will Hale Stone, who was born in 1875. About the only readily identifiable historical fact in the book seems to be an account of the posse trailing Billy the Kid at Coyote Springs in the late seventies. Sheriff Pat Garrett mentions that a William Stone was a member of that posse.

Fantastic as the experiences of "Will Hale" are, they could possibly be true. Some of the events indicate why the real author—whoever he was—did not publish the book himself and why he may have changed most of the names. For example, just after the Civil War, "Will Hale" was a member of a gang (four to six members called the Smith Gang) that killed a prodigious number of men—100 to 150 Mexicans and Indians and one Pinkerton detective—on both sides of the Rio Grande in the course of hijacking mule trains of Mexican treasure, robbing gambling dens in Matamoros, and establishing themselves as cattle ranchers by hijacking herds of Texas cattle being trailed into Mexico by Mexicans who were presumed to have stolen them. Perhaps the most amazing aspect of the outlaw episode was that it was really unnecessary. The principals were already off to a good start in cattle

ranching. However, when the gang broke up after two years of operations, they were all wealthy, for a time at least.

The teller of the story was the son of a cattleman in Texas, near the Rio Grande, not far from Fort Brown (later Brownsville). He attended grade school in New York and high school in St. Louis, boarding with residents of those places during the school years. He fought on the side of the North in the Civil War (three chapters of the book are devoted to the Civil War—not to his part in it, but to a general, and not very good history of the Civil War). After the war he became a rancher in a small way; then he became an outlaw whose callousness and violence would win the admiration of today's most amoral juvenile delinquent. But after that, he became almost completely law-abiding for the remainder of the account. He aided in tracking down Billy the Kid, worked for a Fort Sumner rancher, married a New York girl, and again became a rancher, this time in Northern Texas. He was about forty years old at the end of the book.

The style is flat, sometimes terse. The language is a mixture of the ungrammatical and the elegant. There is little sustained development of the activities chronicled, except for the outlaw years which are fairly satisfactory. All in all, it is an interesting and puzzling book. One has the feeling that the puzzles could be solved and the material authenticated as personal history. The attempt would probably require years of research, and the results probably would not justify the effort. It is just not that important a book; but it is interesting—and puzzling.

The University of New Mexico

ERNEST W. BAUGHMAN

A History of the Circus in America. By George L. Chindahl. Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1959. Pp. xvi, 279. Appendix, bibliography, plates.

Before his death in 1957, the late George Leonard Chindahl during the eighty rewarding years of his life was able to combine a love for the circus with a successful career as a

patent attorney. His birthplace, Rockford, Illinois, is only about a hundred miles from the Ringling family home at Baraboo, Wisconsin; in the years of his youth it was a region in which middle-sized cities surrounded by prosperous rural communities were able to attract the circuses often enough that the circus lithographs, either gaudy-new or faded, were almost always to be seen on barns or store buildings. As a practitioner of patent-law in Chicago, Chindahl often permitted his eye to fall upon patent descriptions of circus inventions, such as power driven spool loaders, seat-wagons, and the "human cannon" device. His love for the circus brought him into the Circus Fans Association of America, of which he became Historian. The Association's periodical, *White Tops*, printed some of these chapters as articles.

Most of this history of the circus in America (there are references to the circus in Mexico and Canada as well as the United States) is a careful account of itineraries, programs, performers, and owners, from the eighteenth century menageries and troupes of wandering clowns and actors to the indoor and motorized circuses of the present day. This is a painstaking effort to trace the rise and fall of the specific circus ventures that at times becomes a repetitious although encyclopedic catalogue of the meandering course of one circus after another from coast to coast. By way of summary, an appendix running to over thirty pages provides a "partial list" of circuses and menageries from c.1771 through 1956. It is a meticulous compilation of circus names and gives the inclusive dates of their runs. Chapter VII, the most interesting in the volume, takes up various aspects of circus life. In brief sections such topics are considered as the types of entertainment, the circus performer, horsemanship, clowning, trained wild animal acts, circus music, seating, side-shows, advertising, labor relations, financial returns to the proprietors (few of them became wealthy from the circus business and many of them lost fortunes in it), attitudes of the public toward the circus, the influence of the circus upon physical education, and the future of the circus. On the last-mentioned subject, Chindahl had few doubts. "In some form," he wrote

at the end of his book, "and probably in numerous forms, the circus will live." Chindahl offered several explanations for the decline of the railroad circuses which exhibited under canvas. These included high transportation costs, labor disputes, the consolidation of the big shows (the movement toward combination in the circuses paralleled that of big business generally), influence of the great economic depression, natural disasters such as the Ringling fire in Hartford, restrictions during World War II, erratic if not unimaginative management, and the competition of other forms of indoor entertainment.

Like the traveller to the Indies he who would bring away knowledge from this volume must carry into it his own wealth of memories. The author only occasionally loses himself in it enough to really bring the story to life. But any reader who can remember rising in the chill pre-dawn of circus days to watch the big show "unload" from the railroad flat cars, and the nomadic life which grew before his eyes like an abnormal swelling at the edge of some green-lawned town, can read again with a touch of nostalgia and even excitement the well-remembered names of Al G. Barnes, Sells-Floto, Clyde Beatty and above all, Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey. To give a jog to memory, there are included forty-four excellent plates: photo-engravings of circus posters, big tops, band wagons, and many more facets of the circus. In the footnotes and selected bibliography, there are indications that in addition to memoirs, travel books and other printed materials, the author used contemporary newspapers, route books and other primary sources.

University of New Mexico

GEORGE WINSTON SMITH

Santa Fe: The Autobiography of a Southwestern Town. By Oliver La Farge. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959. Pp. xviii, 436. Index. \$5.95.

The *Santa Fe New Mexican* was first published in 1849, but the files only date from 1863. Mr. La Farge with the assistance of Arthur N. Morgan has culled excerpts from the

paper down to the year 1953 that portray not only the changing way of life in the capital city, but deviate to items of statewide interest. The compilation, therefore, is not strictly the autobiography of a city, but has wider interest. This does not detract from its usefulness, nor mar the work of the author, although it might be said that Santa Fe does not really emerge from the book as apparently was planned—the wider scene clouds the local picture.

The author finds certain breaking points which mark a change in the overall nature of the news. The first period from the Civil War to 1870 is weighted toward Indian activities. The next period to 1890 is the heyday of the outlaw; then follows the modernization of the city with changes in architecture and material comforts. The fourth period beginning with statehood in 1912 presents competition between cultural and political interests for the attention of the reader. The balance of the book from 1940 on is Santa Fe of the tourist age upset by the discovery of atomic power. Progress has entered with a vengeance, but the book closes before the parking meter arrives.

Editorial comments introduce the several sections and are interspersed throughout the book. They reveal Mr. La Farge's intimate knowledge of the inside story of New Mexican politics, his sympathy for the Indians and an overall grasp of the historical background. However, this is not a book to be written about, but one to be read. It should prove interesting to a variety of reading tastes and can serve the useful purpose of a source book for the historical investigator.

Three of the editorial comments should receive correction. Kit Carson was not the first of the military to enter the Canyon de Chelly. Army men had learned its secrets several times before his visit in pursuit of the Navahos (p. 18). Chimayo was not settled by transplanted weavers from Mexico. New Mexicans had taken up the land long before their arrival which was in 1807, which might be acceptable as being the "end" of the eighteenth century (p. 125). And the reference to the "university" opening in 1890 (p. 130) at Santa Fe meant a privately incorporated school under the name of the

University of New Mexico which functioned in the capital city during the decade of the 1880's; it closed about 1891 and the school building was sold in 1893. The university chartered by the legislature in 1889 was located at Albuquerque and opened in 1892.

The author's comment on page 22 about the route of the Santa Fe trail is not clear. The newspaper report is correct except that an alternate route did lie over the mountains.

F. D. R.