New Mexico Historical Review

Volume 36 | Number 3 Article 5

7-1-1961

# Book Reviews

## *Book Reviews*

*The Jews of California from the Discovery of Gold until 1880.* By Rudolf Glanz, New York, 1960, with the help of the Southern California Jewish Historical Society. Pp. viii, 188.

An introductory chapter, dealing in broad sweeps, whets the appetite of the reader to the expectation of consuming a serious, analytical study—an analysis that never quite materializes. What does come forth is a factually packed volume derived from meticulous combing of primary and other sound sources. Even so, it is weakened by the repetitiousness of similar fact, much of which could have been avoided by a more balanced grouping of imaginative topics. The last eleven of the book's fifteen chapters, comprising but one-third of the pages, but embracing important and promising subjects, suggest the opportunities that were available to the author.

The heavy concentration of Jews in San Francisco with the flower of their mercantile interests dominating smaller economic communities, including Los Angeles, is recognized frequently by the author but is not developed as a thesis. The permanent residence of these people is a matter of occasional comment. Yet what would seem to follow, a major contribution to the cultural life of the communities, is seldom approached with a positive flavor.

If, in spite of the introductory chapter, the author had meant to limit his objective to a simple descriptive but factually accurate story, the book could be read much less critically. It would have been helpful in any case, however, if a preface setting forth these limits of treatment had been written, and if an index and bibliography had been constructed.

It is evident that Dr. Glanz has uncovered, for this study, adequate factual material which, if coupled with his known rich background in Jewish cultural history, should have produced a more expansive and significant analysis of Jewish contributions to the early development of California.

University of New Mexico WM. J. PARISH

*Indians, Infants and Infantry: Andrew and Elizabeth Burt on the Frontier.* By Merrill J. Mattes. Denver: The Old West Publishing Company, 1960. Preface, end-plate maps, illustrations, index. Pp. 304. $5.95.

By and large, the last frontier was a man's frontier. The fur trapper, the miner and the cowboy found it so, and until the "sodbuster" brought in his family to till the land women were mighty scarce articles. The ordinary soldier, in his grim, louse-infested barracks, was aware of this ugly truth. He knew that "rank has its privileges," one of which was that of the officers to bring their wives and children to the lonely outposts that stood forlornly against the western backdrop. Occasionally these frontierswomen sought to escape from the tedium of army post life by keeping journals in which they noted the things that interested them. Elizabeth Burt, wife of career officer Andrew Burt, was one of them, and through her eyes we see another side of army life.

The diaries kept by Elizabeth Burt have been lost, but a good deal of the information they contained went into a reminiscence she wrote in 1912. The important thing about this writing is that it was done with the diaries before her, setting it apart from many other frontier recollections that depend upon memory. Her manuscript, "An Army Wife's Forty Years in the Service," covered most of her fifty-three year marriage to Burt, but of particular interest to historians of the plains West is the fact that over half of it dealt with the crucial years 1866-1876.

Elizabeth Burt's story not only supplements a good deal of the information already known to historians, but it adds to that side of western life of which so little has been written: the woman's view, family life. Merrill Mattes has done a great deal with his materials at hand, carefully supplementing the document with lengthy explanatory discourses that fill any gaps and make the whole fabric not only good reading but entirely useful as a contribution to western history.

Through this intelligent and observant woman's eyes, one follows the family to Fort Kearny, Nebraska, in the critical year, 1866, and on to Fort Bridger in southwestern Wyo-

ming, followed closely by an assignment to Fort C. F. Smith, on the southern Montana segment of the Bozeman Trail. Here the Burts moved into Red Cloud's country at a time when that famous road was under siege by the Sioux, and Fort Smith, so little known in history, comes to life at the hands of an army wife who not only followed her husband to this distant outpost but took along a small baby. This is the heart of the book, the zenith of Mrs. Burt's military experience, and its words are a bonanza to both historian and lay reader. There is an excellent account of leaving the Fort when the Bozeman Trail posts were given up by the army in 1868.

From 1874 to 1876 the Burts were at Fort Laramie, again finding themselves in the center of events that led to the climax at the Little Big Horn in the latter year. One does not find here the usual portrayal of these significant military actions, but instead the richness of experience related by one who waited nearby, saw the coming and going of the troops, and watched anxiously for word from the front. Mrs. Burt might be said to have been sitting in the bleachers, but it takes nothing away from the excitement of events transpiring on the field of action. Her story well complements the many published stories of what happened on the field of battle. No major work about the days of the Indian fighting army will be written now without reference to this valuable contribution Merrill Mattes has provided.

University of Colorado ROBERT G. ATHEARN

*Victoriano Huerta: A Reappraisal.* William L. Sherman and Richard E. Greenleaf. Mexico, D. F.: *Imprenta Aldina,* 1960. Distributed by The Mexico City College Press. Pp. 164.

For two reasons, this reviewer has approached this book with what may be something less than an objective state of mind. One reason is that, in his opinion, on a list of Latin American historical figures for whom biographies are "long overdue," Victoriano Huerta should be comfortably entrenched, preferably buried, near or at the bottom. He might

be worth a footnote by way of reinstatement of character; he could conceivably be stretched to article-length treatment by dint of painstaking research and careful presentation. In book-length treatment, this reviewer finds his career insufferably dull, his mind a vacuum, his physical courage a far too common and misdirected quality to be interesting, and his family life approximating that of a Mexican Babbitt.

Secondly, the reviewer holds an aversion toward published works resting heavily upon secondary sources. Such works oblige one to wade through masses of material already (and recently) in print in English in order to grasp the "new contribution" presumably embedded in this reworked ore, whether in the form of "new-fact" nuggets or in what purports to be reinterpretation. He regrets to report that after reading this book both his prejudices have been deepened.

The fault with this work is not in the way in which it is written. The authors demonstrate considerable skill in synthesizing; their quotations are often well chosen and are revealing cameos of Mexico during the Revolution. The fault lies rather in the reasoning of the authors as to why Huerta should be reappraised, the readers to whom such reappraisal should be addressed, and the proper limitations of the reappraisal given the use of limited sources.

Huerta has been maliciously defamed by propagandists of the Mexico Revolution, whose outpourings have been uncritically absorbed (the false Huerta is far more interesting than the real one) by semipopular writers in the United States. The authors of this work feel that the scholarly world should be informed that Huerta was, after all, human. He was not a drunkard for he held his liquor well; he did not take dope or indulge in sexual orgies. This reviewer makes the assumption that only the casual reader of textbook level status is in need of this reminder. The book, however, carries the baggage of footnotes, conventional historical style, and bibliography—the appendages but not the content (due to lack of depth in research)—of genuine scholarship. It thereby has been misconceived for it is neither popular nor scholarly.

As to the limitations of their work, the authors proceed

to pass judgment on far more serious matters than Huerta's character—a task for which the amount of research done ill equips them to do. The question of the exact relationship of a man to an event as profound and complex as the Mexican Revolution is a matter requiring the most detailed study. It is, in short, assessing the role of the political leader within the context of multiple impersonal forces. Given the several forces of discontent unleashed by 1910, no leader could command a peaceful, progressive Mexico until other impersonal forces came to his aid. The authors seem to think differently. Despite references to Charles Cumberland's work *(Mexican Revolution: Genesis Under Madero,* Austin, 1952*)*, they adopt a pre-Cumberland view of Madero, selecting for citation quotations concerning Madero's personal shortcomings, and justifying the coup of 1913 against him on the grounds that the administration was, after all, weak, and that the most powerful elements of society were agitating for a change. They conclude that it is "more or less certain that his administration would not have remained in power for a full term, regardless of Victoriano Huerta" (p. 73). In other words, Madero simply could not maintain peace and order and at the same time satisfy discontented elements. Concerning the conservative coup of 1913 (where the authors omit mentioning that Huerta made no convincing efforts to assault the *Ciudadela* and used reinforcements on useless military objectives), the picture presented by the authors is one of a much-needed restorer of peace and order who has become, by some miraculous metamorphosis, a social reformer desirous of advancing the land reform program if Mexican discontents and Woodrow Wilson would only let him alone.

This thesis is supported by extremely thin evidence. As to Huerta's success in restoring law and order, the authors do observe that revolts by Carranza and Zapata were never suppressed. They use, however, a comment by the American diplomat's wife, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy (p. 110), to support the contention that elsewhere brigandage and small-scale revolts had been put down. It seems unlikely that Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, or any other person residing in Mexico City, could know this by other than hearsay. The fact that Huerta,

previously innocent of ideas, stated that he would create a Ministry of Agriculture devoted in part to land distribution (p. 109) does not make him a social reformer. The authors fail to observe that Huerta's conservative support rested exactly on the supposition that he would not carry out a program of this kind. It is, furthermore, illogical to contend that Huerta would have been able to restore peace and would have advanced the Revolution if revolts had stopped and Wilson's intervention had been withdrawn, and, at the same time, to contend that the reason Madero could *not* do these things was because he was weak and could not maintain control, thus justifying a coup against him. Actually both Madero and Huerta were trying unsuccessfully to ride the wild horse of Revolution. Both failed. If Madero had the advantage of non-intervention by the United States, Huerta had the advantage of conservative support; but neither of these advantages could offset the rising tide of the Revolution. The personalities of the respective leaders had very little to do with the course of events.

Despite a tendency toward many short sentences in succession which create, at times, a monotonous effect, this book is written in crisp prose embellished by a number of well-turned phrases. There are, however, a few non sequiturs and occasional vaguenesses. In a summation of pre-revolutionary discontent including strikes, examples of subversive literature, and Madero's political activities, the authors conclude: "The government suddenly realized that the mild little agitator, Madero, had created a monster which eyed hungrily the National Palace in Mexico City" (p. 20). The reader has hardly been prepared for this sweeping evaluation of Madero's influence. The meaning of the statement that "Huerta's seizure of power was little more than a *fait accompli* . . . (the remainder of the sentence deals with another thought) leaves this reviewer completely mystified.

The book is cleanly edited with scrupulous accuracy in the accentuation of Spanish words; apotheoistic (p. 45), however, does not appear in the dictionary. There are one or two misplaced relative pronouns and a dependent clause (p. 12) is set aside by a semicolon as though it were independent.

Sources are occasionally cited uncritically. Aside from the question of historical importance, Huerta did not die poor simply because Samuel F. Bemis "states flatly" (p. 115) that it is so. He probably did die poor, but Professor Bemis stands at a respectable distance from intimate knowledge of this matter. There remains the fact that the great bulk of this book simply recounts what has already appeared in English. This reviewer is not enlightened to reread Howard Cline's (*The United States and Mexico,* Cambridge, 1953) educated sneers at Wilsonian idealism in paraphrased form in the last chapter. There are citations of several Masters' theses written at Mexico City College. Their content, however, has apparently not been utilized; the footnotes merely announce their existence.

Except for the reappraisal of Huerta's character, which might have been done in one-tenth the space, this work merely rearranges the topsoil of the Mexican Revolution in an unconvincing pattern. The authors have embarked upon a course without the necessary ballast.

University of New Mexico TROY S. FLOYD

*The Gila Trail: The Texas Argonauts and the California Gold Rush.* By Benjamin Butler Harris. Edited and annotated by Richard H. Dillon. (American Exploration and Travel Series, Volume 31.) Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960. Pp. ix, 175. Map, illustrations, notes, appendix, bibliographical note and index. $4.00.

The editor contends that Benjamin Butler Harris's reminiscence of his experience on the Gila Trail and in the California gold fields is worthy of publication on the basis of interest, color, readability, and new information added to the meager knowledge available concerning the experiences of gold seekers over the Gila route. The editor is correct in his contention. Harris, a practicing attorney, was well educated, an intelligent observer, a humorist worthy of note and a writer of ability. His account is well worth the attention of readers who desire to be entertained as well as those who seek historical information.

Harris left Panola County, Texas, on March 25, 1849, to join the party of Isaac H. Duval who was in charge of one of the earliest groups from Texas to travel to the California gold fields. The party journeyed to El Paso and then looped southward across northern Chihuahua before passing through Tucson, Yuma and Tejon to complete their journey at Sonora on September 29, 1849.

The carefully prepared editorial notes generally complement the narrative; however, two important points should be clarified. Harris tells (114-119) an interesting and an amusing account of acquiring a turpentine topknot while sleeping under a resinous pine tree. The pound ball of turpentine clung annoyingly to his hair for days because he could not find scissors to cut it away. "Then bowie and pocket knives were tried but their rough edges proved too tedious and painful (114)." He even moved to another camp before he found a pair of scissors.

The editor should have recognized this as a good story and nothing more. On the frontier, a man's life could depend on a sharp knife and in an environment where it was not unknown for an individual to amputate one of his own limbs, it is hard to conceive of Harris being squeamish about having someone cut a ball of pine tar out of his hair with a knife.

Harris says (103), "A peculiarity of the atmosphere at this season was its magnifying properties under certain conditions and situations." The editor states (note 113), "Perhaps this will explain (even excuse) the tendency of Californians . . . to exaggerate." The editor is naive in not recognizing exaggeration to be a more fundamental characteristic than something induced by a peculiarity of the atmosphere and is lax in not pointing out specific instances of exexaggeration.

That Chief Gómez (110) had two thousand warriors is certainly an overstatement. The footnote (4) implies that this number may have been two hundred, but it is not clear. A war party of four hundred Apaches (67, 69) was possible. The editor should have questioned (79, note 72) that "More than once [Tucson] has been invested by from one to two thousand Indians . . ."

The editors Foreword and Dramatis Personæ might have been more carefully presented. The statement that the "Sooners" of the California Gold Rush (ix) were Texans should have been more substantially supported. This contention is contradicted by the statement (3) that "Their companions on the trail were simple, restless and rootless men from all corners and strata of North America." The reader is left to wonder if they became Texans by simply passing through Texas. The statement that Harris's companions were simple, restless or rootless is contradicted by the editor's admission (14) that little is known about the rest of the Duval party.

"At this, I laid from my belt by two duelling pistols . . ." (107) should read my instead of by. Damned (29, note 4) should be dammed since it refers to impounding a body of water rather than dooming to everlasting punishment.

Albuquerque, N. M. VICTOR WESTPHALL

*End of Track.* By James H. Kyner as told to Hawthorne Daniel. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960. Pp. 280. Notes. $1.60.

The University of Nebraska Press, launching a new series of paper bound volumes called Bison Books, has wisely chosen to reprint this autobiography, originally issued in 1937 by the Caxton Printers. The present edition, well made, sets an excellent physical standard for the volumes to come. The book itself is absorbing reading. It begins with Kyner's youth as the son of a village innkeeper in Ohio, depicting an attractive kind of rural life now long vanished from America. His idyllic situation was shattered by the Civil War, in which he served as a young volunteer. His account of how he fought and was wounded in the Battle of Shiloh vividly shows just what must have happened to many a simple rural lad in the early clashes of the conflict. After the war Kyner farmed, was in the insurance business and eventually won a seat in the Nebraska legislature, where for four years he so successfully blocked anti-railroad legislation that the Union Pacific abruptly, unexpectedly rewarded him with a contract to build a twenty-five mile branch line within the state. He had

no experience or capital, but managed to execute the task successfully and make a profit of $10,000. He went on to build or refurbish many miles of track in Idaho, Colorado, Wyoming, Iowa and Ohio. Bankrupted in the panic of 1893, he started again with nothing and made enough to retire from railroading in 1901 with a comfortable fortune.

Kyner's account of his experiences as a railroad contractor is unique; there is no comparable document. He relates the exciting things, the tribulations and the general techniques in pages interesting for the general reader but frustrating to the specialist eager for the details which only such an expert as he could have supplied. In sweeping strokes he depicts the era when railroads pioneered through the unsettled west, when men of pragmatic enterprise achieved great works and secured large fortunes. Most of the areas where Kyner built were sparsely populated, lawless and in many ways uncivilized. As serious history, this autobiography of a railroad frontiersman is much better in setting the general scene than giving the details; as interesting reading, it is superior.

University of Idaho WILLIAM S. GREEVER

*The Maxwell Land Grant.* By Jim Berry Pearson. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961. Pp. xiv, 305. $5.00.

The many histories of the famous Maxwell Land Grant have usually stressed the way in which Carlos Beaubien and Guadalupe Miranda, its original recipients, managed to acquire such a huge two million acre tract from Governor Armijo in 1843. Then they treat the lordly manner in which Lucien B. Maxwell, who became the Grant's owner for a time, lived on his vast estate and dispensed lavish frontier hospitality to all comers. After Maxwell agreed to sell the property in 1869 to a syndicate of Colorado and British promoters backed by Dutch capital, the Grant's history is usually depicted as a saga of sophisticated financial chicanery practiced by the Maxwell Land Grant and Railroad Company as they promoted fraudulent stock sales abroad and exploited the company property at home. This robber-baron, big-

business aspect of the Grant's history has been reinforced by many colorful accounts of the violent and often tragic war between settlers who felt the Grant was public domain and the Company who insisted—sometimes at gunpoint—that it was not.

All these standard items and many more appear in Dr. Jim Berry Pearson's fact-studded and often entertaining book. But this study is far more than a rehash of a familiar story. Intrigued by placer mining scars on the side of Baldy Mountain and curious about the few remaining buildings of the once prosperous mining community of Elizabethtown, the author at first sought to uncover the mining history of Colfax County. But this search led him into a study of the Maxwell Company itself since it owned the region and many of its enterprises centered on mining. What has emerged is an unusually detailed history of the Company from its beginnings down to the present decade, in essense a study of large-scale corporate endeavor on the frontier. Dr. Pearson's fresh version is all the more valuable since he had access to the Company records which have been lying undisturbed in the vault of the First National Bank of Raton for some years. Consisting of account books, minutes of meetings, annual reports, scrapbooks and letters, these sources—supplemented by local newspapers—enabled Dr. Pearson to make a thorough economic case study of the Company somewhat on the order of Herbert O. Brayer's monumental history of William Blackmore's western enterprises. *The Maxwell Land Grant* also represents another sure step in the direction of recovering New Mexico's past economic history, a task in which Dean William J. Parish, Max Moorhead, and Brayer have already pioneered.

Dr. Pearson's account is far from a straight business history, however, for he provides a readable but intelligent summary of Lucien Maxwell's career, a history of the brief-lived but roaring community of Elizabethtown, and a detailed rendition of the deadly activities of gunmen like "Wall" Henderson and Clay Allison, as well as of crusaders like the rambunctious Reverend O. P. McMains. Nevertheless his chief contributions lie in a coverage of mining and Company

history. He establishes the importance of mining in fostering the Grant's development even though the gold extracted seldom paid large sums. Quite the reverse, the cost of mining it often bankrupted its investors. At the same time he uses facts and figures to cut the legendary stories about the Aztec and Montezuma mines down to size. In discussing the Company's other wide-ranging enterprises on the Grant—a coal and coke company, irrigation projects, a cement factory, ranching and railroad building—he finds that these efforts also met with relatively limited success.

Such failures are explained in large part by the unending struggle lasting to 1887, to secure valid title to the Grant, to eject squatters, and to find capital. But the real cause of failure lay in the Company itself which was torn by warring factions among the directors, feuds between the British promoters and the Dutch mortgage holders, and a lack of understanding between the local managers of the property and its absentee owners. And lastly, the presence of speculators who periodically raided the Company's assets resulted in a crushing bonded indebtedness and receivership. The author finds this struggle continuing right into the twentieth century until the Amsterdam bondholders finally assumed full control of the property.

By carefully avoiding moral judgments and by the use of a historical perspective which O. P. McMains and his anti-Grant settlers could never have acquired, Dr. Pearson is able to conclude his study on a somewhat positive note:

> Despite . . . constant dissension the land grant company initiated projects for developing the area's resources. Its officials sought to bring in railroads, mined and marketed coal, operated a cement factory, constructed two expensive irrigation projects, experimented with various crops, mined gold and silver, ran herds of cattle, leased rich stands of timber, and sold off the property in both large and small tracts.

*The Maxwell Land Grant* is so generally thorough and objective in its coverage that only one major omission deserves comment. Every observer in nineteenth century New Mexico noted that little could be done in the territory with-

out the sanction or collaboration of the clique of lawyers and businessmen called the Santa Fe Ring. Yet the role of the Ring in Colfax County politics and in the Company's history is never made clear in this book. If the relations of Probate Judge Dr. R. H. Longwill, Attorney M. W. Mills, and Frank Springer with the Ring could be spelled out, the real reason for attaching Colfax County to Taos during Governor Axtell's administration might be less obscure than it appears here. It rather looks as if the Company managers were fighting Tom Catron and the Ring just then and the attachment was a legal method to embarrass or even seize the Company. The role of Judge L. B. Prince and several others in rendering certain favorable decisions for the Company is not treated; and finally, the reason for choosing W. T. Thornton, law partner to Catron, as receiver for the Company in 1880 might have been explored. Such inclusions would have given better focus to the Grant's role in New Mexican political history.

On the level of minor criticism this reviewer unhappily found several instances of poor proof reading. Dr. R. H. Longwill, or so spelled in Twitchell, becomes Longwell in this volume. Melvin W. Mills also appears as Marvin W. Mills, while Wilson Waddingham is on one occasion "Waddington" and George M. Pullman is "George H." These errors and the fact that the University of Oklahoma Press omitted pages 99 to 115 in this reviewer's copy mar a clear, readable, thoroughly researched and documented history of the Maxwell Land Grant, its owners, enterprises, and opponents. The book is well illustrated with many photographs of Grant figures and scenes.

Yale University HOWARD R. LAMAR