

Vanity, Vanity Thy Name is History

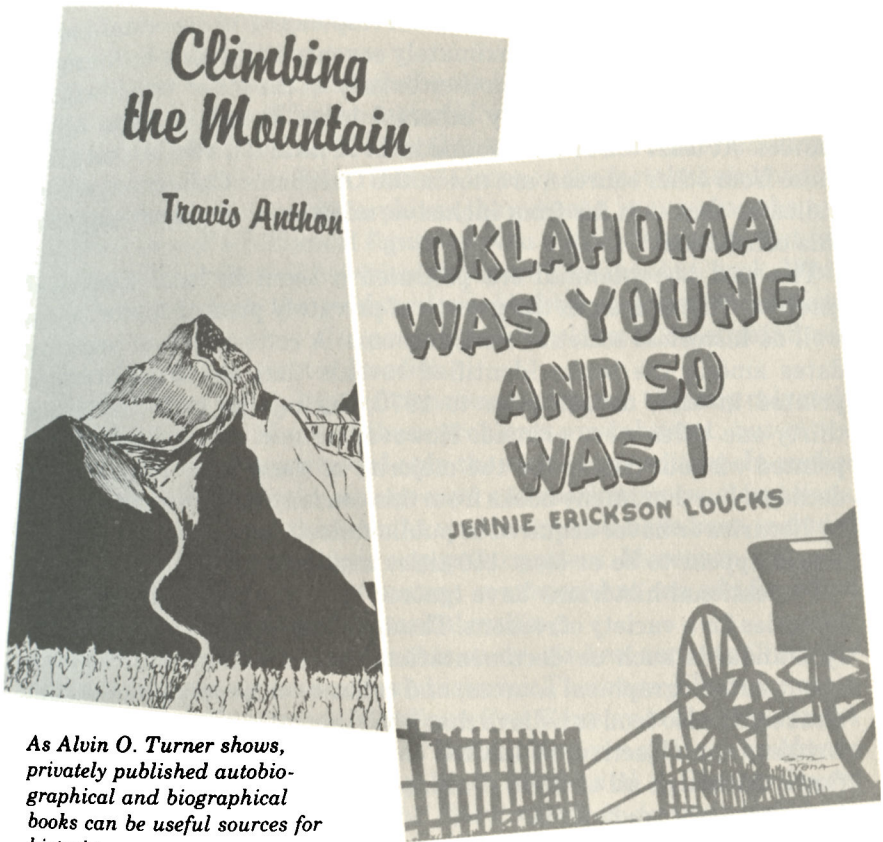
*By Alvin O. Turner**

For decades an untapped resource for regional, state, and local history has been gathering dust on library shelves and filling gaps in private book collections—this potential treasure trove of material is found in autobiographies and other historical accounts produced by non-academic, private sources. Such books, however, usually have been neglected by historians. This has been caused by professional biases, limited availability, as well as inherent problems in the books. Yet, their value as a historical resource requires recognition of their contributions and steps to preserve them as a part of the total historical record.

This preliminary evaluation is based on a survey of more than thirty books read during 1983. Selection was based on four criteria: publication since statehood; private or subsidy printing; availability; and, autobiographical elements present in the content. Many similar books published before statehood already are recognized as having historical merit, and many have been published by an academic press. Therefore, their availability and content is known to scholars, and most can be found in college and university libraries.

Availability of books was a major obstacle, for there is no central repository for privately printed Oklahoma materials. This required a reliance on two local libraries, the El Reno Carnegie, and the Guthrie Public Library, and a shelf-by-shelf examination of the Oklahoma Collection in the Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma

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As Alvin O. Turner shows, privately published autobiographical and biographical books can be useful sources for historians.

City. The local libraries also required some shelf reading, as many of the books studied were catalogued under a variety of listings including Oklahoma history, biographies, and even fiction.

The autobiographical requirement allowed considerable narrowing of the study, although I included some books that were written by persons close to the principal character if there was evidence of direct contributions by that person. County and local histories were excluded entirely even though they often contain some segments with similar potential to the books studied. These should be given future historical attention. However, their existence is likely to be known to scholars and the public. Many of the books in this study previously were known only to a few friends or family members of the authors, and an occasional librarian.

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The scope of available material corresponding to the established criteria is staggering. Approximately seventy titles may be found in the Oklahoma Collection, another twenty in the other two libraries surveyed, and about twenty others I have identified from other sources. At least ten of those found in El Reno and Guthrie, and all of those from other sources, are not in the Oklahoma Collection, which indicates that it is far from inclusive; additional evidence supports this conclusion.

The post bi-centennial era produced a boom in local historical interest. This is seen in the growth of privately printed histories, as well as historical societies and museums. A comparison of printing dates among the books identified reveals that six to eight were printed in each decade prior to 1970; during the next ten years thirty-one titles were printed. However, almost thirty books were printed without dates, and the majority of these were from earlier decades. Further, many books from this era may have been discarded by libraries or never acquired in public collections. In any case, there would appear to be at least 150 titles available.

Professional historians have ignored or denigrated non-academic histories for a variety of reasons. These include concern with scholarly standards such as documentation requirements, ambivalence about autobiographical sources, and reliance on primary materials. Academics also tend to believe that privately printed books are badly written, non-objective, of limited interest, and filled with related flaws. Although all of these concerns are justified, they also reveal some basic contradictions.

Even the most scrupulous critic of private histories generally, or of autobiographies in particular, uses such sources from earlier periods. Their value in background research, for perspective, and in obtaining a feeling for an era is unarguable. Historical writing has been improved greatly through the judicious use of these sources to add details, varying points of view, anecdotes, and similar content that enriches and flavors otherwise dry reports of facts from the past. The real problem then with comparable later works is their recent vintage and the historian's attitudes toward the authors. If the author is known to the historian, the book is dismissed as vanity history by his or her contemporaries. Yet, the next generation of historians will seize upon the work. For instance, Charles F. Colcord's autobiography received no critical attention initially, but is used frequently by current state historians. On the other hand, if the author is not well known, his work is judged peripheral or insignificant. In this case,

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though, the book may be lost to or otherwise undiscovered by subsequent historians.¹

The current fascination with the so called "new history" requires at least as much regard for the material written by unknowns as by the famous. Similarly, other historical trends justify a reexamination of non-academic publications. There is irony in the fact that oral historians, or those who use the archives they create, may value the oral recollections of a historical figure or even a local character, but will snicker at his efforts if he writes the same accounts in a book. While such writings lack the guidance provided by an experienced historian/interviewer, they also permit greater elaboration of detail and allow the subject greater freedom.

Stylistic and reliability deficiencies are common to many privately printed histories. Many of these problems are inherent, but in the great majority of cases reveal only the lack of any editing. In earlier eras with different publications costs and marketing considerations, a high percentage of these books could very well have been included among releases by academic or popular presses. Moreover, virtually all offered small nuggets of content or stories that can add flesh and blood to the dry bones of historical writing.

Of the thirty books read for this study, six best serve to illustrate the weaknesses of non-academic histories. These are: Elbert Stoner's, *The Spirit of '89*; *Cowboy Flat From Cow Country to Combine* and *A History of Cowboy Flat* by M. C. Rouse; *Memoirs of Mary* by Maude Bixler; *Wild Bill the Driller* by W. B. Wells; and S. Chester Davis' *What? Had I Shot Him!*² *The Spirit of '89* is devoted largely to third-hand vignettes and descriptions of the common place. Stoner's book should interest only family or friends and possibly those interested in the Cashion community. Rouse's writings are slightly more valuable. Although they rely heavily on secondary research, some stories are based on the author's own experiences. The best of these concerns a cattle buyer who discovered he had been paying two dollars too much per cow because they looked so much bigger through his new glasses. However, there is still little to commend for most readers or students. Bixler's *Memoirs of Mary*, while well written, is concerned mostly with her travels abroad. The first few chapters, though, contain references to her early years in education and might have some interest to historians dealing with that subject.

The most disappointing is *Wild Bill the Driller*, which suffers from a lack of arrangement and extensive use of field slang and technical terminology. As a result, the book is virtually unreadable to even a

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person with some familiarity with the industry. Persons more familiar with drilling might find some value in his accounts but most of the stories relate to the problems of particular wells and provide neither insight, humor, nor understanding. There are, however, two stories in Wells's account that provide these elements. The first concerns his efforts to secure a \$600 loan to complete a well. A banker refused the loan while volubly describing collateral requirements and the speculative nature of the oil business. He then accompanied Wells to his car where he told him to come back after a few days had passed and the bank examiners had departed. Wells's account of a trip from Slick to Cromwell, a journey of about seventy miles, adds to the understanding of oil field practices and transportation hazards in Oklahoma during the 1930s. The trip required three days because of muddy road conditions and the failure of teamsters to yield the road to automobiles.³

What? Had I Shot Him! by S. Chester Davis contains similar flaws. His foreword acknowledges compilation in "haphazard" fashion and no better word can describe his arrangement. Davis also departs frequently from his subject to introduce extraneous opinions ranging from his admiration for "The Guns of Will Sonnet," a television program, to his opinion that when the history of the Watergate scandals is written, "ample evidence will probably show that subversive elements . . . plotted and masterminded it. . . ." He also states one of his purposes is "to correct the impression my fellow countrymen have of Warren G. Harding" and claims to know the discredited President personally. However, he never defends Harding, offers an opinion regarding the charges that have been made against him, or states that he ever met the man except perhaps in passing. Interestingly, he offers two accounts of sexual encounters in a book that he wrote to benefit his grandchildren.⁴

The grammatically bizarre title indicates other flaws. It seems to be based on a boyhood plan to shoot a neighbor, but he reveals similar incidents later in life that also could have led to his shooting someone. Nevertheless, Davis's book contains much useful information. He was involved in a number of early Oklahoma City and Tulsa automobile dealerships, first as a salesman, then as a distributor. Later he entered the real estate business and participated in the development of Nichols Hills and other additions. He served as President of the Oklahoma Association of Realtors, President of five corporations, and two terms as mayor of Nichols Hills. He also owned an independent oil company and provides personal recollections of persons such as W.

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P. Cannavan, Dr. G. A. Nichols, and others involved in early Oklahoma business life. Further numerous accounts of travel through early day Oklahoma contain useful reports of benefit to historians of transportation in the state. In short, the flaws notwithstanding, Davis's book merits attention by historians.

One other characteristic of many privately printed histories is seen as a drawback by some readers; this is a tendency toward didacticism, or the inclusion of moral instruction. This trait intrudes frequently in three books: *Where Trails Have Led Me*, by Tsianina; *Pioneering With God*, by Augusta Oaks Guy; and *My First Seventy-Five Years*, by Tom Pexton. Both Pexton and Guy wrote for the explicit purpose of illustrating the role of God in their lives, and Tsianina devoted a number of pages to her understanding of the relationship between Christian and Indian religions. Again, such elements often distract the reader, but usually do not detract from the value of their memoirs.⁵

Tsianina was born in Oklahoma in 1892, of Cherokee and Creek parentage. At age sixteen, she travelled to Denver to study music. She soon met Charles Cadman, a noted pianist and author of so-called "Indian" songs including "The Trail of Sky Blue Water." Shortly after their initial meeting they began a series of tours including one to Europe for the American Expeditionary Force in 1918 and 1919. Cadman eventually wrote an opera based on her life, "Shanewis," and they continued their work together until shortly before his death in 1946. She then retired to Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Pexton began his life in Stamford, Nebraska, and spent his early years in a variety of locations in that state, Kansas, and Colorado before moving to Oklahoma in 1889. His father was an itinerant "ne'er do well" railroad clerk who "always gave boot" in a variety of trades and business endeavors. As a result, Pexton began cowboying when only ten years of age. His recollections of ranch work, prairie fires, and blizzards are especially interesting. For instance, he was snowbound on one occasion in a cabin where the snow drifted over his bed during the night while rats fought over food scraps. At age twenty-one, he spent a brief period in attendance at the agricultural school at Manhattan, Kansas, leaving there to homestead near Guthrie, Oklahoma. After a few years there he moved to Murray County, Oklahoma, where he established an award-winning farming operation. His accounts of clearing, cultivating, and establishing a successful farming operation provide informative reading. An added bonus is found in humorous and folksy homilies and stories throughout the book.

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Pioneering With God tells the story of Augusta Oaks Guy. Her story includes some of the harshest and most poignant descriptions of pioneering life imaginable. For example, her father outlived three wives, the second of whom died during a blizzard. When it abated, he tied her jaw shut and departed to seek assistance from neighbors, leaving his four-year-old son overnight in the dugout with the body of his mother. A third wife gave birth to Augusta and then died shortly after the birth of a second child. Subsequently, Augusta, aged nine, and her half-brother climbed to the top of a windmill where they sang hymns imagining themselves closer to their departed mother.

Mrs. Guy also describes numerous blizzards, the children spending weeks alone while her father sought work, living in a dugout, various encounters with snakes, numerous home remedies, and what she believed was an effort to capture her by white slavers. One of her most vivid stories details her baptism during a severe cold spell. The pond which was used for the ceremony had frozen over so a plate of ice was cut and removed from the water. She was then immersed; the water in her clothing and hair iced between the time she left the water and entered a nearby tent. The latter part of the book consists of accounts of her marriage to Francis R. Guy, their work in the Methodist ministry, and eventual association with the Nazarene movement. Mrs. Guy is still alive as of this writing and in a recent conversation related that she intends to publish an extended version of the book.

Besides overtly religious purposes as seen in the books above, many authors imply the importance of such convictions. More common, however, is a note of optimism and hope. This is often seen in the titles, as with Pexton's book. Other titles indicating similar kinds of faith are: O. A. Cargill's *My First Eighty Years*; Verl A. Teeter's *Life Begins at Eighty One*; and Charles H. McFall's *The First Eighty Five Years of My Life*.⁶

Only Cargill's book was available for this review. It contains the story of his early life and career. He was born near Viola, Arkansas, in 1885, departing there for Indian Territory sixteen years later after knocking his school superintendent unconscious. He acquired work as a mule skinner and then worked in a variety of jobs before beginning law school in 1912 at Oklahoma City, where he later established his practice. During the next fifty years he participated in a variety of trials as a lawyer for the defense or as prosecuting attorney for Oklahoma County. He also acted as a Special Justice of the Supreme Court of Oklahoma and served a term as Mayor of Oklahoma City. This book discusses his extensive work as a Baptist layman. He

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makes no mention of his subsequent involvement and conviction in the Oklahoma Supreme Court scandals, but concludes with an oblique defense of his career and quotes from "Matthew 5:11-12" regarding the blessings that accrue to those who are unjustly persecuted.

Cargill offers some details regarding particular cases but does not focus on such matters. In contrast, *A Boomtown Lawyer in the Osage 1919-1927*, by Charles L. Roff furnishes much detail of this kind as well as valuable insights into daily life and patterns of the lawlessness in Osage County during the 1920s. There are numerous tales of bootleggers, character sketches of outlaws and law enforcement officials, and stories about county politics.⁷

After completing law school, Roff established a practice at Wynona, where he helped organize the local government. Among his various activities was the promotion of a rodeo which became one of the major events on the circuit at that time. He also participated in other civic and social activities including lodges. This led to his joining the Ku Klux Klan following the recommendation of a fellow Mason. Although he soon disassociated himself from the Klan, his membership affected his subsequent political career. It became an issue in his successful campaign for county attorney and remained a problem after his election. George Short, the attorney general of Oklahoma during Roff's tenure in office, frequently made headlines by criticizing law enforcement in the Osage generally and Roff in particular. Roff used his political influence with the governor to curtail these criticisms, but conditions there kept the county in the news.

Even more adverse publicity for Roff and the county occurred with the publicity generated by the Osage murders, a series of killings in which wealthy Osages were murdered for their oil wealth. Roff's role in the investigation and prosecution of these crimes was limited by the participation of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. It is possible that he was regarded as sympathetic; although he was careful to note his opposition to the lawlessness, he does offer an apology for some exploitation of the Osages noting that it was "accepted as a way of life" and "not considered criminal in the strict sense."⁸ He also defends Bill Hale, who was convicted along with Earnest Burkhardt and others for conspiracy and participation in the murders. Ross asserts that Hale was not guilty but was implicated by Burkhardt under pressure from the FBI.

Few of the books depict the kinds of controversy and excitement that Roff experienced. Instead, most are valuable for either insights

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into daily life in an era or for what they reveal about particular areas of endeavor or significant events. These features are characteristic of *Oklahoma Boy* by Ross T. Warner. He discusses his early years growing up in Guthrie, where he was employed in a variety of activities besides the pursuits of youth. He began working at a Harvey House and subsequently worked for that chain at other locations in Oklahoma and New Mexico. This career was interrupted by World War I.⁹

He devotes three chapters to his experiences in the United States Army, where he served as a chief clerk in a number of units. This experience offered a foundation for similar employment at the conclusion of the war when he moved to Tulsa, soon to enter public accountancy. His professional career began with Crockett, Couchman and Co., which became Warner & Young, then Warner, Godfrey & Co. He also was involved in the Oklahoma School of Accountancy as a teacher and later as a part-owner. As would be expected, the book offers considerable detail on early business, accounting, and tax practices. He also comments extensively on various businesses, especially those related to the oil industry such as the National Tank Company. In addition, he furnishes information on acquaintances in the oil business, Tulsa and Guthrie business and personal associations, and professional organizations. There also is a chapter on the Tulsa race riot which occurred soon after his settling in that community.

The old West and pioneer-related subjects predominate among the books surveyed. Besides those noted earlier, others from this category include: *The Sun Rides High* by Ora Blanche Burright; *The Old West as told by Billy McGinty*; and *Ragged Roads* by Solon Porter.¹⁰ *The Sun Rides High* is based on the recollections of Orrin Burright. It is marred by grammatical problems, and the early chapters deal mostly with second-hand reports of Burright's ancestry and his father's experience during the Civil War. These chapters are based on secondary research and many of the conclusions and "facts" presented are arguable. But, when Burright begins his own story, he gains the strength added by authenticity. He presents interesting accounts of a journey from Missouri to Kansas, homesteading throughout the southern part of the state, cowboying, freighting from Kansas to Oklahoma, and his participation in the first land run into Oklahoma. His accounts of time in Arkansas City, Kansas, in the months preceding the land opening are often insightful. There also are stories of ranch work, building soddies and half-dugouts, and surviving a bliz-

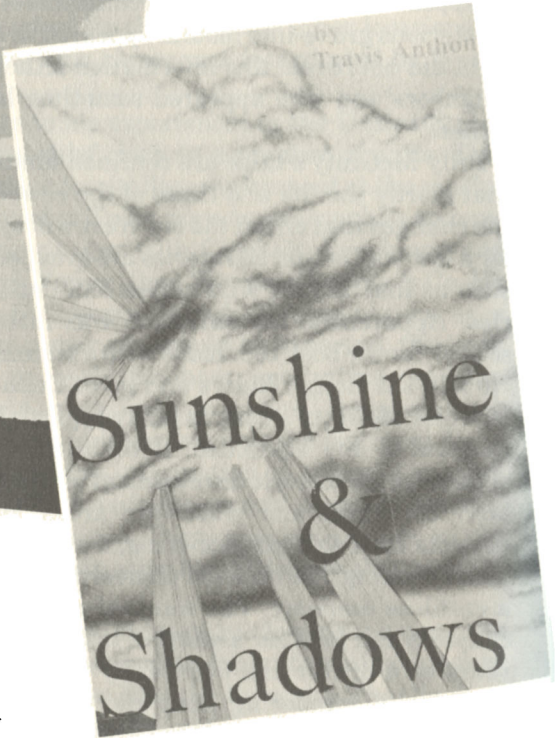
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zard in a cabin with a frozen steer, that should inform or entertain most readers. Burright retained an authentic scorn for Sooners, which is often forgotten by those who report on the past. He also may have provided the solution to a murder. He indicates that a neighbor disappeared under peculiar circumstances at about the same time a mysterious grave-like mound appeared in a pasture. Strangely, Burright did not reveal this information either to investigators or to the neighbors' son who appeared sometime later seeking traces of his father.¹¹

Billy McGinty's tales are confined almost exclusively to the kind that glorify the life and times of the cowboy. And, those who mourn the changes that ended the old West will sympathize with his lament for a lost way of life. His stories are grouped topically under headings such as individuals, wild horses and mustangs, and similar categories. Apparently, his narrative was interrupted or he intended a sequel, for the book concludes with a statement that he left Oklahoma "to join the Rough Riders and go to Cuba."

While McGinty's book is fairly typical, *Ragged Roads* is the most unusual of any examined. It contains material of interest to any student of the historic development of Northwest Oklahoma, particularly the Fargo and Woodward areas. He also reports on diverse subjects such as bone gathering, a great flood in the Antelope Hills, land breaking, the rigors of pioneering winters, and the operations of a cashless economy. The unusual elements are found in the early chapters and in other aspects of his life. Porter spent his early adult years as a drifter and eventually became a landscape painter. His accounts of wandering from his native Tennessee throughout the American West could well be sub-titled "frontier hobo." After beginning a homestead near Fargo, then marriage, he continued to drift and at some point began to paint the scenes he encountered in the West. Though he never received formal training, and his work revealed a problem with perspective, it received some recognition. He was among featured artists in a recent statewide exhibit of Oklahoma folk artists, and together with Augusta Metcalfe shares a distinction as an authentic early Oklahoma artist. Porter also wrote a novel dealing with Tennessee hill tales of a lady bootlegger.¹²

No perception of the popular view of pioneer history is complete without an examination of the role of the frontier doctor. This is provided in *The Saga of a Mud Road Doctor* by Dr. Charles C. Allen, and in Laressa McBurney's *A Doctor Called Charlie*. The majority of Allen's book is dedicated to the part of his life spent prior to establish-



These two publications represent the wealth of experiences available in limited edition books. Dian Takes to the Indians details a missionary's life among the Cheyenne-Arapaho, and Sunshine and Shadows describes life during the Great Depression.

ing his practice at Frederick, Oklahoma. This includes his early years at Saffordville, Kansas, attendance at public schools in Emporia, and his study at Washington University Medical School, St. Louis, Missouri. His profiles of medical studies, professors, and of a year's service in the Royal Army Medical Corps should interest any student of the history of medicine. A wider audience can gain a sense of the hardships of pioneer life from his accounts of interesting births he attended and of performing an amputation on a kitchen table. Such stories also help to explain the regard given the previous generation of physicians.¹³

Doctor Charles McBurney's biography was written by his wife, Laressa Cox McBurney, but the details she offers illustrate both her

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understanding and her closeness to his experiences. She discusses his early years of hardship and pioneering in Oklahoma, his persistent search for an education, and his eventual attainment of goals despite formidable barriers. In many respects, the book offers a joint biography as she also tells her own story beginning with their meeting at Central State Normal School, where they were active in numerous clubs and extra-curricular functions. Their courtship waned during years that Laressa taught school in Texas and Southwest Oklahoma, and Charlie attempted to prove up a homestead in Beaver County during breaks from attendance at Kansas University Medical School. They met again after she moved to Clinton, Oklahoma, where he then joined a successful practice and they soon were married. His medical career flourished and included service in the U.S. Army Medical Corps during World War I, struggles during the 1918 flu epidemic, and voluntary work in Indian health. He became one of the more prominent physicians in Clinton and established a major clinic there. In addition, he was prominent in the work of the Methodist Church and even helped in architectural design of his church.

Doctor Charlie's Wife, also written by Laressa McBurney, parallels much of the content described above, but concentrates more on her role. As such, the book represents one of a number of private histories that focus on the diverse experiences of women. All of the books contained in this category were among the best written found in the survey. McBurney's books and Jennie Erickson Louck's *Oklahoma Was Young and So Was I*, could also be read as authentic historical romances. However, Louck's accounts of the early days of Oklahoma City and details she furnishes about pre-World War I student life at Kingfisher College and the University of Oklahoma add another dimension to her story. She comments extensively on neighbors, transportation, business, recreation, church life, and attendance in public schools. While at Kingfisher College she met Clifford Loucks, who was working his way through school while employed as secretary to the college president. She and Loucks both transferred to the University of Oklahoma, where she majored in music while he studied law. He later served as law clerk to Chief Justice Sharp of the State Supreme Court. She subsequently taught at the Oklahoma College for Women, joined the staff at the University of Oklahoma during World War I, then started teaching at Central High School in Oklahoma City.¹⁴

One of Louck's more interesting stories concerns an outing to El Reno to witness the beef distribution to the Cheyenne and Arapaho

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tribes. At that time, the Indians persisted in "hunting" their meat. A steer was turned loose from a pen and then pursued by a designated warrior, who ran it down and shot it. The steer was then butchered where it had fallen. These years of transition for the Cheyenne-Arapaho also are covered in Joseph Leroy Carter's *Dian Takes to the Indians*, the story of Dian Lugenbuehl Meschberger, who entered Oklahoma as a Mennonite missionary in 1885. This book was written in the form of a novel, and the author chose to attempt to render the dialect of his characters. Despite his failure in this respect, Dian's story offers valuable reading. It provides many details of activities and conditions at Cantonment and Darlington, of life among the missionaries, and other matters. For example, it explains how Indian photographs were used as fund-raisers for the mission. Dian married Joseph Meschberger in 1888, and four years later they left the Mission to begin farming near Darlington. While managing a successful farming operation and raising their children, they retained their concern for the Indians and continued to assist them in a variety of ways.¹⁵

Love, courtship, and marriage form the nucleus for most of the books written by women. In the case of *The Lady Driller*, by N. Elizabeth Mills, such matters are peripheral. She was born on a homestead in Nebraska and spent most of her early years on different farms in that state. Her pursuit of an education led to Hastings, where she became involved in hotel and restaurant management. She married a young physician, the "ne'er do well" son of a wealthy Eastern family, and spent a few years in an attempt to preserve her marriage despite his problems with gambling, other women, and narcotics. Her dealings with adoption agencies during this time depict an incredibly unsavory business as well as a great deal of personal tragedy. One adopted child died, and a second was removed from her after it was established that the agency had not had the authority to place the child. Instead, it had been charged with caring for it but had reduced operating costs by placing the child anyway.¹⁶

Following her divorce, Mills returned to the hotel business in Hastings and eventually acquired considerable property. In the 1920s she moved to Oklahoma and established a drilling company with her brother. The successful completion of a gas well near Muskogee created new problems because the gas company in that area refused to connect a pipeline to their well. Therefore she organized the Muskogee Oil & Gas Company and led a successful campaign to obtain the franchise for that city, only to lose control of the company

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because of alleged political and financial scheming by her partners.

Having lost a small fortune, she examined her assets, which included considerable drilling equipment, and decided to enter the drilling business alone. She succeeded here as elsewhere and soon achieved national attention following an article in the *Oil & Gas Journal*. Later, this recognition aided her in efforts throughout Oklahoma and in brief ventures in the East Texas field. Her accounts of various endeavors offer extensive details and entertaining reading. Unfortunately, she used pseudonyms throughout so that the reader is not certain even of her married name. Further, there are few dates and no real sense of time, although she tells her story chronologically. Despite these deficiencies, her book can be read profitably by those interested in the history of business, the oil industry, women, or general social developments.

Mills's career probably could not have been predicted from the early events of her life. Similarly, a number of writers emphasized their youth as a contrast to their later life. This theme is most evident in Percy R. Parnell's *The Joint* and in two books by Travis D. Anthony, *Climbing The Mountain* and *Sunshine and Shadows*. Everything in Parnell's youth pointed toward a stable future far removed from a life of crime. He played in the state prison at McAlester as a boy and acquired many friends among the guards and a variety of experiences with prisoners. All should have reinforced a belief that prison should be avoided. Yet, he spent the majority of his adult years in the prison where he had played as a boy.¹⁷

The historical value of his story is limited because a large part of the book is devoted to secondary material concerning the prison. This weakness is remedied in part by descriptions of prison personalities, guards, and prisoners. He also offers complimentary sketches of C. R. Anthony and other acquaintances who remained friends and supporters despite his personal failings. Yet, the real value of *The Joint* may lie in his comments on the relationship between his first imprisonment and subsequent life. Although he acknowledges that alcohol abuse was the immediate source of many of his difficulties, he asks, "was it the whiskey or was it me?" He also observes that the person he became was influenced greatly by his experience in prison. Much of this parallels current criticism of the prison system or could be discounted as biased or as an isolated instance. However, the book may acquire a different significance in the future.

Anthony's story is almost the opposite of Parnell's. As portrayed in *Sunshine and Shadows*, his boyhood was a series of misadventures.

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At one time, he accidentally burned his parents' house, but this was only one of many comparable disasters he precipitated prior to the death of his father. This event required his mother to return to the home of her father who commented that he did not mind the mother or other children moving in but "T. D. belonged in a reform school." Apparently, the boy settled somewhat after that time but his mother's subsequent remarriage brought him into conflict with his stepfather and bootleggers of the community where they lived. He then spent the better part of a year drifting through Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico before turning to sympathetic relatives who provided a home while he finished high school.

Both of Anthony's books offer a great deal of humor and considerable perspective and detail regarding life during the Great Depression. There is some duplication between the books but *Climbing the Mountain* focuses on his first two years teaching school before being drafted into the army at the beginning of World War II. This theme is interspersed with tales of his struggles with poverty while trying to obtain an education at the University of Oklahoma. He was fired from both of his first two teaching jobs despite favorable evaluations. In the first community, a new school board fired all the teachers and administrators who had worked the previous year. Anthony then spent a frantic summer seeking another job which he finally obtained at Stafford, Oklahoma. He arrived at the interview coated with cattle manure and dust after hitching a ride in a cattle truck and walking the last ten miles to make the appointment. The board was impressed with this evidence of his dedication, but he was fired at the end of the term. The superintendent of schools explained that the board was pleased with his teaching and with his coaching the basketball team to its first county championship, but believed that Anthony spent too many weekends away from the community.

Another story of youthful experiences is found in Leon E. Smith's *High Noon at the Boley Corral*, which also serves as a good example of an author who missed the real value of his story by concentrating on another. His book tells the story of an attempted robbery of the Boley Bank by George Birdwell, Charles Glass, and others. Smith believed that this story had not been given the attention it should have because of the significance of Birdwell's serving as the chief lieutenant of Charles "Pretty Boy" Floyd. However, Floyd was not involved directly with the Boley attempt, and the significance of outlaws and their lieutenants is always debateable. Yet, the stories of the organization of the town's defenses, and particularly the role of the banker,

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offer insight for social historians. Of even more importance are the autobiographical components which examine the life of a boy in a sturdy black family persisting in their struggles and ambitions through hail storms, the Depression, and other adversities.¹⁸

The Great Depression provides the background for a story of a different type. *My Years With Bob Wills* recounts the phenomenal rise of Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys as seen through the eyes of Al Stricklin, the pianist for the band until the beginning of World War II. Stricklin was employed as a school teacher in Texas when he first met Wills, who invited him to join the band. Stricklin agonized over leaving a steady though low paying job but decided to risk it and moved to Tulsa. Once there, he decided he had been foolish and almost returned to Texas without contacting Wills, but went to hear the band play. Wills recognized him and called him to join them on the stage, informing the crowd that Stricklin would be replacing Tommy Duncan on the piano.¹⁹

The book is filled with a variety of tales and information. This includes descriptions of ballrooms, playing in country school houses and road trips by bus and in a fleet of Buicks. Anecdotes about band members, life on the road, and recording sessions abound. Stricklin regarded Wills as a personal hero and participated in a series of tributes to him in the last year of his life. The original Texas Playboys reorganized shortly after this time and continue to schedule performances throughout the Southwest with Stricklin on the piano.

My Years With Bob Wills and Charles Colcord's autobiography are the only books in this survey that have received scholarly or public attention. Most privately published books are doomed to obscurity. Yet, many of the books described in the preceding could have been published justifiably by an academic press. Though there often are clear reasons not to do so, such is not the case with *Sixty Years in Southwest Oklahoma* by G. W. Conover. This book is an excellent first-hand account of early ranching in the state. Conover offers details on his own operations and an enlightened understanding of the problems of the plains Indians. Some of his stories of conflict appear second-hand or otherwise questionable but these instances are unusual. His perspective on the effects of cattle operations on Indian leases is particularly interesting because he opposed this practice. He argued that it broke up the Indians' farming and ranching labors and therefore worked to their disadvantage. Conover, together with other like-minded cattlemen, opposed the initial leases of Kiowa-Comanche lands and secured the temporary agreement of

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the Indian Commissioner to oppose this practice. However, ex-Indian agent Laurie Tatum, Quanah Parker, and cattlemen led by Burk Burnett soon persuaded the Comanches and the commissioner that the Indians' interest would be best served by leasing agreements.²⁰

Books such as Conover's have done much to enrich our perception of Western history. It is unfortunate that others of comparable value have not been read by the public or used by historians, particularly when the reasons behind this neglect are not actually defensible. Both the standards of the past and the current interests of the profession justify increasing attention to such sources. We are among the first generation of historians to have the opportunity not only of recording the past but also of taking steps toward preserving vital links in the chain of our understanding.

Presently, there is no systematic effort in the state to preserve privately published histories or to evaluate their offerings. Historians should encourage systematic collection of such resources by the Oklahoma Historical Society or the Oklahoma Department of Libraries. They should also examine the biases that may have caused contemporary historical accounts to be dismissed without critical evaluation. Perhaps this represents a step in that direction.

ENDNOTES

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¹ Charles F. Colcord, *The Autobiography of Charles Francis Colcord, 1859-1934* (Oklahoma City: C. C. Helmerich, 1970).

² Elbert Stoner, *The Spirit of '89* (Edmond: Central State University, 1969); M. C. Rouse, *Cowboy Flat from Cow Country to Combine* (no pub.: 1972) and *A History of Cowboy Flat* (no pub.: no date); Mary Maude Bixler, *Memoirs of Mary* (New York: Pageant Press International, 1970); W. B. Wells, *Wild Bill the Driller* (Hoffman Printing Co. Inc., 1977); and S. Chester Davis, *What? Had I Shot Him!* (Philadelphia: Dorrance & Co. 1975).

³ Wells, pp. 25 and 42.

⁴ Davis, pp. 1, 8, 79.

⁵ Tsianina, *Where Trails Have Led Me* (Santa Fe: Vergara Printing Co., 1970); Augusta Oakes Guy, *Pioneering With God* (Yukon: Yukon Printing Co., 1972); Tom Pexton, *My First Seventy Five Years* (Harrah: no pub., 1967).

⁶ O. A. Cargill, *My First Eighty Years* (Oklahoma City: Banner Book Co., 1965); Verl A. Teeter, *Life Begins at Eighty-One* (Tulsa: Teeter Publishing Co., no date); Charles H. McFall *The First Eighty Five Years of My Life* (no pub., 1972).

⁷ Charles L. Roff, *A Boom Town Lawyer in the Osage* (Quanah: Nortex Publishing Co., 1957).

⁸ Roff, p. 51.

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⁹ Ross T. Warner, *Oklahoma Boy* (no pub., 1968).

¹⁰ Ora Blanche Burright, *The Sun Rides High: Pioneering Days in Oklahoma, Kansas and Missouri* (Quanah: Nortex Publishing Co., 1973); Billy McGinty, *The Old West* (Stillwater: Redlands Press, 1958); Solon Porter, *Ragged Roads* (Fargo, Oklahoma: no pub., 1951).

¹¹ Burright, pp. 173–74.

¹² Mary Ann Anders, *Folk Art in Oklahoma* (Oklahoma City: Mercury Press, 1982) p. 82; Solon Porter, *Smoky Mountain* (Vici: Beacon Printing Co., 1955).

¹³ Charles C. Allen, *The Sage of a Mud Road Doctor* (Quanah: Nortex Publishing Co., 1975); Laressa Cox McBurney, *A Doctor Called Charlie* (San Antonio: The Naylor Co., 1966).

¹⁴ McBurney, *Doctor Charlie's Wife* (San Antonio: The Naylor Co., 1975); Jennie Erickson Loucks, *Oklahoma Was Young And So Was I* (San Antonio: The Naylor Co., 1964).

¹⁵ Joseph Leroy Carter, *Dian Takes to the Indians* (no pub., 1979).

¹⁶ N. Elizabeth Mills, *The Lady Driller* (New York: Exposition Press, 1955).

¹⁷ Percy R. Parnell, *The Joint* (San Antonio: The Naylor Co., 1976); Travis Anthony, *Climbing the Mountain* (Detroit: Harlo Press, 1980); and *Sunshine and Shadows* (no city: Alpha Printing Ltd., 1981).

¹⁸ Leon E. Smith, *High Noon at the Boley Corral* (Detroit: Leon E. Smith, no date).

¹⁹ Al Stricklin, *My Years With Bob Wills* (San Antonio: The Naylor Co., 1976).

²⁰ G. W. Conover, *Sixty Years in Southwest Oklahoma* (Anadarko: no pub., 1927).