
B O O K N O T E S

Found Documents from the Life of Nell Johnson Doerr. By Thomas Fox Averill. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018, 206 pages, paper \$19.95.)

Nell Johnson Doerr accompanies her husband, Solomon, from the slave state of Arkansas to the newly opened Kansas Territory in 1854. She leaves behind her garden, her family, and the graves of two stillborn babies she'd hoped to mother. But, together with her husband in their new home of Lawrence, Nell plans to assist fugitive slaves in finding freedom and to make Kansas a free state. From here, *Found Documents from the Life of Nell Johnson Doerr* takes an unexpected turn. Nell loses Solomon in Quantrill's Raid but discovers, while hiding in her basement, a new passion in the fossils of ancient creatures in the foundation rock. The rest of the novel details Nell's search for herself and for happiness in an unconventional life. The story is told entirely through an imaginary archive created by the book's author, Thomas Fox Averill, documenting Nell's life. There are letters, diary entries, and even sketches of the fossilized creatures Nell holds dear. Though the tale is fiction, readers will nonetheless learn a thing or two about late-nineteenth-century Kansas and the practice of science at the time thanks to the careful research that informs Averill's writing. In Nell, they will find someone both fascinating and deeply relatable.

Lanford Wilson: Early Stories, Sketches, and Poems. Edited by David A. Crespy. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2017, 288 pages, cloth \$45.00.)

A native Missourian, Lanford Wilson is best known for his work as a playwright; he wrote such plays as *The Hot I Baltimore*, *Fifth of July*, *Burn This*, and *Talley's Folly*, the latter earning him the 1980 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Like noted playwrights Anton Chekhov and Tennessee Williams, however, Wilson also wrote short stories. The selection contained within this volume, written between 1955 and 1964 (when Wilson was between the ages of 18 and 27) and never before published, "chronicles the exceptional development of a young writer discovering his language, the tales and characters he would come back to again and again, and perhaps most importantly, the progression of his craft as a storyteller and lyric dramatist" (p. 3). Exploring many of the themes Wilson later took up in the theater, this collection is both an important resource for budding dramatists and a fascinating read for those interested in the short-story genre.

Great Plains Literature. By Linda Ray Pratt. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Discover the Great Plains, 2018, xiv-172 pages, paper \$14.95.)

Linda Pratt, professor emeritus of English and former provost of the University of Nebraska system, has written a synopsis of Great Plains literature. Her work is a volume in a "short book" series sponsored by the Center for Great Plains Studies. She makes a point of providing commentary on "the writers whose work has an integral relationship to place and history" and delivers a highly engaging critique of prominent authors from the region (p. 8). Pratt begins with Black Elk, whose story serves as a "fable for numerous other chapters in American history when other cultures and different people were in the way of some grand ambition of the nation" (p. 35). From there she turns her attention to N. Scott Momaday, Ole Edvart Rølvaag, Willa Cather, Mari Sandoz, Tillie Olson, Rilla Askew, and the poetry of Ted Kooser, the first and only poet laureate of the United States who hailed from the Great Plains. A powerful, central theme resonates throughout Pratt's work: "The

roots of both the conservative and the radical politics of today . . . the never-ending prejudices against race and ethnicity, all arise out of the pioneer experience of building a New American culture" (p. 55). Pratt provides an excellent introduction to the works of these authors, and others, and will lead her readers to head to a library to read more.

The California Trail Yesterday and Today: A Pictorial Journey along the California Trail. By William E. Hill. (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Press, 2017, 343 pages, paper \$18.00.)

The two-thousand-mile journey from Missouri's jumping-off points to California was perilous, to say the least, but tens of thousands of settlers and gold seekers made the trip using guidebooks and leaving many accounts of their adventures. William Hill, a retired history teacher whose maternal family farmed near Manhattan, Kansas, offers the reader some valuable information about the guidebooks and maps available to the nineteenth-century overlanders as well as interesting excerpts from several of their diaries. More than half of the book is "A Pictorial Journey" that uses historical and contemporary images to follow travelers from Independence, Missouri, to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to Fort Kearny, Nebraska, and beyond. Finally, Hill provides a chapter on parks, museums, and displays that modern-day travelers can visit and an essay on "additional reading."

Joe: The Slave Who Became an Alamo Legend. By Ron J. Jackson Jr. and Lee Spencer White. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015, 325 pages, cloth \$29.95.)

"Remember the Alamo!" is the iconic phrase that exhorts one to never forget the many sacrifices made at the Battle of the Alamo. In *Joe: The Slave Who Became an Alamo Legend*, Jackson and White explore the life of Joe, an enslaved man from Kentucky who was one of the few surviving witnesses of the battle. Jackson and White comb through the journal of Lt. Col. William B. Travis, Joe's master and the American commanding officer, in addition to plantation records, newspapers, court records, and other sources, to unearth Joe's family and life histories. The book is well researched and explores the horrors of slave life for Joe and his family. Overall, readers will find this biography a compelling story and a fresh look at a legendary moment in western history.

Out Where the West Begins, volume 2: Creating and Civilizing the American West. By Philip F. Anschutz. (Denver: Cloud Camp Press, 2017, 381 pages, cloth \$34.95.)

Paraphrasing Frederick Jackson Turner and Ray Allen Billington, Philip Anschutz argues, "Western conditions cultivated a culture of equality based on skills and leadership, a culture that favored what one could contribute over whose ancestors one claimed" (p. 14). In the second volume of *Out Where the West Begins*, Anschutz and cowriter William J. Convery profile more than one hundred individuals who they claim were instrumental in exploring, "acquiring," settling, and developing the American West from the Cumberland Gap to the Pacific Ocean (p. 12). Compared to Anschutz's first book, which provided sketches of fifty early western business leaders, this second volume includes a greater number of individuals from diverse backgrounds, such as Frederick Douglass, Bridget Mason, Henry O. Wagoner, Booker T. Washington, "Pap" Singleton, George Washington Carver, and Caroline Nichols Churchill. But, as the subtitle suggests, the premise and approach of the book remain deeply traditional and Eurocentric.