



PROJECT MUSE®

Plains Farmer: The Diary of William G. DeLoach, 1914–1964

ed. by Janet M. Neugebauer (review)

Jean Ritter-Murray

Western American Literature, Volume 27, Number 3, Fall 1992, p. 248
(Review)

Published by University of Nebraska Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/wal.1992.0157>

Western
American
Literature

NUMBER 3

It is a double issue:
Patricia T. O'Leary, Introduction
Readings, Special Occasions, New Series
and Jack Newman on the Foreground
David Robinson
Notes
Essay Reviews
Reviews
James C. Ward, David Robinson

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS
1000 UNIVERSITY AVENUE, LINCOLN, NE 68502-0000

➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/532488/summary>

Plains Farmer: The Diary of William G. DeLoach, 1914-1964. Edited by Janet M. Neugebauer. (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1991. 367 pages, \$39.50.)

William DeLoach, Texas plains farmer, faced every test nature and the political climate could devise as he struggled to develop the virgin land for crops that would be the sole livelihood of his growing family. For fifty years he kept a daily diary, probably the most consistent account of its kind, recording the thoughts that occupy a farmer who thinks deeply and asks for his labors only an even break. Few who are hard at such toils have the time and inclination to keep a diary; yet here in simple, unassuming and often deeply affecting language is the absorbing tale of a pioneer farmer's struggles.

Editor Janet Neugebauer has woven into the diary's framework demographic, geopolitical, and technical expositions allowing valuable overviews to laypersons, historians, and students of agriculture who learn, for example, of cotton's role in the nation's agronomy as they follow the work of DeLoach in his cotton fields. World War II's effect on farming income emerges clearly even as the saddened reader grieves with DeLoach over the loss of his youngest son in that war. Steadily, Neugebauer examines the government's role in Great Plains farming, how land prices changed, doubled between 1941 and 1945—then doubled again by 1954—and how the young began to be pushed off the land.

DeLoach was endlessly plowing and planting, then plotting what to do next after sandstorms, drought, hail, and unfavorable markets took their toll. We learn that he kept abreast of the daily news, that he rarely missed getting to the polls and community meetings, that he treasured his family and assisted his neighbors. He hated war and capital punishment ("legalized murder" he wrote of the Hauptman execution after the Lindbergh trial). He was considerate of animals that worked for him. DeLoach liked picnics, song fests, a rare nip of whiskey, and most forms of human companionship—except for the moments at his diary.

The marvelous drawings by Charles Shaw capture varied scenes of farm life and the postures of men and women who live on the Texas plains. This book is splendid in conception and design—a collector's item.

JEAN RITTER-MURRAY

Santa Rosa, California

Desierto. By Charles Bowden. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991. 225 pages, \$18.95.)

Charles Bowden, in the prologue to his 1988 work *Blue Desert*, asks the reader to "Imagine you are on a train highballing through the desert night and out the window conflicting scenes flash across your eyes—a glimpse of moun-