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Savage Frontier: Rangers, Riflemen, and Indian Wars in Texas, Volume III, 1840-1841 (review)

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La Vere's solid research deserves praise, but his synthesis, organization, and vivid prose make this book shine. He handles the history of Spiro in the 13th century as well as he tells the history of Oklahoma archeologists and Arkansas pot hunters in the 20th. The first seven chapters alternate between the 1930s and the rise and fall of Spiro, which creates tension and dread as La Vere builds an appreciation for Spiro, its people, and the significance of their accomplishments and remains. When the men of the Pocola Mining Company detonate explosives in their work, the reader cannot help but feel heartbreak and shame at their crassness.

The book has many strong points, but a few minor adjustments would have made it even better. A detailed diagram of the mounds early in the book would help the reader visualize the scene, especially during the discussion of the significance of the mounds' relationships to each other and to compass points. Illustrations and explanations of key artifacts should have been placed closer to where the items first appear in the narrative. The work contains excellent photographs clustered at its middle, but readers unfamiliar with items such as ear spools, first mentioned on p. 47, have to wait for an explanation and an image. Such minor flaws detract little from the book's entertaining educational impact.

Does the book offer much for those interested in Texas history? Chances are good that at least some descendants of those who lived at Spiro constitute one or more tribes that lived and live in what became Texas; but this book transcends state boundaries and deals with human nature. It tells about the building of empires, centuries ago in Spiro and last century in relic dealing and academics. It tells about society, government, and making a living and supporting a family centuries ago and last century. It shows how differently we view the past now than we did just seventy years ago. And La Vere handles it all masterfully.

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TODD M. KERSTETTER

Savage Frontier: Rangers, Riflemen, and Indian Wars in Texas, Volume III, 1840-1841. By Stephen L. Moore. (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2007. Pp. 448. Illustrations, maps, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 1-57441-228-0. \$34.95, cloth.)

"Thus, scouring the whole country east of the head of the Brazos and it may now be said that not an Indian can be found east of the Brazos *to molest the settlers* or prevent emigration, for the future" (p. 273, emphasis added). These words of Gen. James Smith of the Texas Third Militia Brigade, written in August 1841, are recorded for history in Stephen Moore's third volume of accounts of early Texas Rangers and militia charged with clearing the country of Indians and Mexicans. General Smith's words and Moore's book illustrate the aphorism that history is written by the victors.

Like his earlier volumes, Moore's latest book on the Texas frontier provides a goldmine for genealogists and some ore nuggets for historians. Moore's presentation style, however, diminishes the book's readability. It seems to this reader that Moore tried to use every note he took, regardless of its historical value, and his editors failed

to organize the work in a manner that would afford the reader maximum return. Still, Moore has performed yeoman work in this area of research.

While Moore cannot be responsible for the actions and accounts of men who lived more than 150 years ago, his chronicles, nevertheless, present an attitude that was not only biased but also was cavalier.

Contemporary recorders and Moore dutifully report the name of every white settler killed, but Indians, Mexicans, and blacks usually remained unnamed. Moore reports that Indians "killed a settler named Varlan Richeson and *two black men*, and they captured *a black girl*" (p. 86, emphasis added). A few sentences later, he reports "Pinckney Coatsworth Caldwell, longtime quartermaster for the Texas Army, and a *Mexican man* were killed" (p. 86). Even the owners of slain slaves merited mention but not the slaves. In the next page, Moore writes, "The Indians killed a citizen named Joseph O'Neill and *two black servants* of Major Oran Watts" (p. 87). This practice is repeated throughout the book; the value of Indians, Mexicans, and blacks as human beings was clearly held in low esteem by white Texans.

Clearly, Moore loves his subject and has great admiration for the players in this historic play. It is not surprising that some of the chauvinistic language used by his subjects often creeps into Moore's writing. Indians raided, plundered, and committed depraved acts. The Texans led expeditions, conducted campaigns and enjoyed the spoils of war. When the Comanche attacked Victoria and other coastal towns, they killed several men and stole horses. This is lamented, but when the white Texans drove into Indian villages and killed and captured women and children, burned every home to the ground, and "moved out for home with all they could haul" (p. 226), it was considered justified retribution. The immoral equivalency seems to be lost on everyone.

One other account helps illustrate the callousness of the times and the prejudiced reporting of events by the victors. After George Heard was shot and killed in a battle with Indians, "Gilbert Love stood by the body of Heard to prevent the Indians *from scalping and otherwise mutilating* his fellow ranger" (p. 316, emphasis added). The mutilation of an Indian hardly raised an eyebrow. After an Indian's body was found the day after another clash, "Catharine Dugan took an axe and severed the head from the Indian's body . . . Catherine's mother used the skull as a quill gourd for her sewing supplies" (p. 332).

Perhaps it is not Moore's intent, but *Savage Frontier* provides a stunning view of the bestiality of both the Indian and the white man in their struggle for supremacy over a land called *friends*.

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ALFREDO E. CARDENAS

John B. Armstrong: Texas Ranger and Pioneer Ranchman. By Chuck Parsons, afterword by Elmer Kelton. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007. Pp. 168. Illustrations, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 1-58544-553-3. \$20.00, cloth.)

Chuck Parsons has struck literary gold with his latest offering, *John B. Armstrong: Texas Ranger and Pioneer Ranchman*. The book at once delivers, citing that Armstrong