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## Seldom Heard: Ranchers, Ranchos and Rumors of the South Texas Brush Country by Dian L. Malouf (review)

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San Antonio and Nacogdoches while adding new light on developments in mission lands following their secularization in the 1790s and rounding out yet other events of what happened to Hispanic residents and Anglo settlers in La Bahía.

Stuntz provides a useful synthesis to understand the development of how legal systems help or hinder gender equality, family life, inheritance, and business practices. The social historian will find her work a useful companion to explain the divergence of English common law and Spanish legal practice on the Mexican frontier as it played out in Texas. More casual readers will find it an “easy read” of an altogether frequently complex topic.

*University of Texas at Austin*

ADÁN BENAVIDES

*Seldom Heard: Ranchers, Ranchos and Rumors of the South Texas Brush Country.* By Dian L. Malouf. (Hillsboro, Ore.: Beyond Words Publishing, 2005. Pp. 176. Preface, foreword, illustrations, acknowledgments, bibliography. ISBN 9781582701301. \$39.95, cloth.)

Nationally recognized jewelry designer, photographer, and Hebbronville native Dian L. Malouf provides a second installment of her ongoing romance with the ranchers of the Texas brush country in *Seldom Heard*. Reminiscent of her first tome, *Cattle Kings of Texas* (Beyond Words Publishing, 1991), *Seldom Heard* is a “coffee table book” that provides what might be called a “romantic eulogy” to the industrious, entrepreneurial, and at times, eccentric behavior of twenty-five ranching families living in the rough mesquite and cactus riddled country south of San Antonio. Malouf views these ranchers in much the same way as late-nineteenth-century photographers perceived Native Americans—as a “vanishing race” whose history and culture needed to be recorded and memorialized so that future generations of Americans will not forget them. In the process of dressing up and posing their subjects, however, some of the well-meaning photographers ended up providing rather stereotypical and inaccurate images that didn’t always square with reality. According to the book’s dust jacket, the author spent fifteen years and traveled more than forty thousand miles conducting the interviews for this project, and she is to be commended for her persistence in corralling the various members of ranching families, many of whom live a rather secluded life in remote areas of the Texas brush country. Lady Bird Johnson, no stranger to ranch life in South Texas, provides a brief preface to the book. Malouf adds two or three black-and-white photographs to each of her short vignettes, usually depicting family members and images of significant and/or unusual ranch structures. Virtually all the ranchers interviewed are fourth- or fifth-generation Texans, having inherited their properties from a particularly hardworking, enterprising, or lucky ancestor who began accumulating land and cattle during the first half of the nineteenth century. While reading through Malouf’s musings about the noble character attributes of the ranchers, one gets the feeling that it is this founding generation of ranchers that she is really seeking to commemorate.

Each short chapter ranges in scope and quality. Some provide historically significant information or anecdotes that general readers will find interesting and perhaps even inspirational, while others fail to provide much of a voice to people

that are “seldom heard.” At times the author seems disappointed when the particular rancher she is interviewing doesn’t quite resemble the romantic “cowboy” that she is seeking to memorialize. To be a successful ranch operator in the twenty-first century, she learns, ranchers must be more than cowboys—they must also be astute businessmen who are willing to diversify their operations and employ the latest agricultural technologies. Possessing oil and natural gas wells on their property certainly doesn’t hurt.

Readers interested in Texas history, ranching history, and in the evolution of the ranching industry in south Texas will enjoy this book, the photographs of ranchers, and the interesting—albeit romanticized—stories, anecdotes, and rumors about the ranchers being considered. Malouf is a gifted storyteller, and her descriptions of the rugged Texas brush country are at times poetic. Scholars seeking a more balanced and academic treatment of the topic, however, will need to look elsewhere.

*University of Texas at Brownsville*

THOMAS A. BRITTEN

*Child of Many Rivers: Journeys to and from the Rio Grande.* By Lucy Fischer-West. Foreword by Denise Chávez. (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2005. Pp. 192. Prologue, illustrations, epilogue, index. ISBN 0896725561. \$21.95, cloth.)

The author of this little book, Lucy Fischer-West, grew up and came of age on the Rio Grande in the twin cities of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, the only child of a Mexican mother and a German father. Her father, Martin Franz Jockisch, joined the German navy in 1909 but wound up with a fishing fleet in the North Sea, where he met a Russian sailor who filled his head with tales of the good life in the United States. Jumping ship in New York City in the middle of the winter of 1912, the young sailor found himself in a strange city where he knew no one, spoke not a word of English, had no place to go, and spent his first night on a cold bench in Central Park. In time Jockisch learned English, changed his name to Fischer, worked at various jobs, and by the time the United States entered World War I, he had joined a vaudeville act as an acrobat walking a slack-rope. As a member of the De Perón Trio, he traveled to thirty-two states.

After gaining citizenship in 1934 and working at various jobs, Fischer went to sea with the U.S. Merchant Marine during World War II and sailed a large part of the world. After the war, he was traveling across the country when he stopped in El Paso for a brief holiday and decided to visit Ciudad Juárez to see a bullfight. Instead he wound up at a charity fiesta, where he danced with a beautiful young lady with long black hair named Lucinda Laura Rey. Hoping to escape the violence of the Mexican Revolution, Lucinda’s father had brought the family to Ciudad Juárez from Camargo, Chihuahua, in 1910 and set up shop as a grocer. On their third date, Martin proposed, and Lucinda accepted. After Fischer served another stint in the Merchant Marine, the two were married in 1948.

But *Child of Many Rivers* is much more than just family genealogy. It is also the story of the daughter of Martin and Lucinda Fischer, Lucy Fischer-West. Growing up on both sides of the Rio Grande, speaking Spanish with her mother and English with her father, Lucy was educated at elementary schools in Ciudad Juárez and in