

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

ScholarWorks @ UTRGV

History Faculty Publications and Presentations

College of Liberal Arts

4-2022

Review of Texas Rangers, Ranchers, and Realtors: James Hughes Callahan and the Day Family in the Guadalupe River Basin, by Thomas O. McDonald

William C. Yancey

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/hist_fac



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Yancey, William C. Review of Texas Rangers, Ranchers, and Realtors: James Hughes Callahan and the Day Family in the Guadalupe River Basin, by Thomas O. McDonald. *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, vol. 125 no. 4, 2022, p. 514-516. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/swh.2022.0041.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts at ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. For more information, please contact justin.white@utrgv.edu, william.flores01@utrgv.edu.



PROJECT MUSE®

Texas Rangers, Ranchers, and Realtors: James Hughes Callahan and the Day Family in the Guadalupe River Basin by Thomas O. McDonald (review)

William C. Yancey

Southwestern Historical Quarterly, Volume 125, Number 4, April 2022, pp. 514-516 (Article)

Published by Texas State Historical Association
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/swh.2022.0041>



➔ *For additional information about this article*
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/851356>

comment on page 518 regarding Santa Anna's despotism with the statement on the following page that the Mexican president's harm to Texas would have been limited because he had only a few months left before his term expired. Throughout the text (often with Crisp pointing out the problems in very helpful notes, which would have been far more convenient at the foot of the page), Ehrenberg's self-serving narrative shines a light on Mexican shortcomings, particularly their enthrallment to priests while ignoring or dismissing those of his fellow "Texanians." This is particularly the case with regard to slavery, which anyone would be hard pressed to find in Ehrenberg's Texas.

Which brings us to the second book to be found within *Inside the Texas Revolution*, a biography of Herman Ehrenberg based on a detective story. As Crisp tells us early on, he has been in pursuit of the real Ehrenberg since 1992. Putting the pieces together, Crisp follows the peripatetic Ehrenberg between Germany and Texas, then to the Pacific, where he visited Hawai'i and other parts of Polynesia and South America, before taking up mining engineering in California and Arizona. The inclusion in the book of a number of maps prepared by Ehrenberg during the latter part of his life show him to have been a talented cartographer at his untimely death in Arizona at the hands of an assailant in 1866.

The biography is completed by the chapter introductions, which in a few cases are longer than the chapters themselves. They offer the necessary context to understand much of what is happening, particularly to separate fact from fiction and to contextualize Ehrenberg. Crisp's methodology is especially effective because, although the book is framed as a memoir, Ehrenberg spends a considerable amount of time relating events in which he did not participate. Thus, the chapter introductions not only explain what Ehrenberg is doing, observing, and commenting on, they also provide a distinctive angle on the Texas Revolution by informing us of all manner of activities that get left out of the usual narratives of battles and political shenanigans. In sum, Crisp's *Inside the Texas Revolution* is a welcome and important addition to the literature of that period.

Austin, Texas

JESÚS F. DE LA TEJA

Texas Rangers, Ranchers, and Realtors: James Hughes Callahan and the Day Family in the Guadalupe River Basin. By Thomas O. McDonald. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2021. Pp. 640. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.)

The Texas Rangers have always been a subject of interest to Texans, historians and laypeople alike. For some, the Rangers were the unvarnished heroes of the Texas frontier, representative of the Texas characteristics like courage, rugged individualism, and tenacity. To others, the

Texas Rangers were always racist protectors of Anglo hegemony, killing and abusing Indians, Mexicans, African Americans, and anyone else who stood in the way of Anglo American progress. James Hughes Callahan has been a particularly controversial figure in Ranger history because of his 1855 raid into Mexico, which resulted in the burning of Piedras Negras. Since the 1970s, solid historians have linked the Callahan Expedition to an effort to return to their owners in Texas any enslaved people who had escaped from bondage. In his new book *Texas Rangers, Ranchers, and Realtors: James Hughes Callahan and the Day Family in the Guadalupe River Basin*, Thomas McDonald provides compelling evidence that the Callahan Expedition was not a slave-catching expedition.

McDonald, a retired pharmaceutical executive and independent historian, fully discloses in his introduction that he is a direct descendant of Callahan. However, his reappraisal of the Callahan expedition is not hagiography; he is critical of the Ranger captain on several points, particularly his decision to burn Piedras Negras. McDonald has employed an impressive array of primary sources in his effort to understand the complex relationships, economic interests, and social pressures that motivated people on the Texas frontier during the Republic and early statehood years. In doing so, he has produced a valuable monograph that examines the complexities of life on the edge of settlement during those years. The extended family was central to these frontier settlements. Although Callahan came to Texas from Georgia by himself to fight in the Texas Revolution, he married into the large Day family, who were some of the early settlers of Seguin. The Day home served as a mustering point for several Ranger expeditions, and Callahan's in-laws were involved in every major endeavor he undertook from military expeditions to cattle drives and land speculation.

McDonald's lengthy reappraisal of the 1855 Callahan Expedition is the most intriguing and impressive part of this book. It is an excellent example of historical detective work as the author employs archival sources in both Texas and Mexico, as well as previously unpublished sources to unravel a tangled web of circumstances that resulted in the burning of Piedras Negras, Coahuila, by Callahan and his Rangers. McDonald proves that the Callahan Expedition was not primarily an attempt to retrieve runaway slaves in Mexico (although one of his lieutenants had been involved in efforts to do that). Rather, the expedition was aimed at attacking Lipan Apaches in Coahuila who were believed to have been responsible for raids and murder in Callahan's settlement along the Blanco River. Subsequent confusion over his purpose arose from the fact that at the same time Callahan launched his expedition, a citizens' committee in San Antonio was in talks with subordinates of Santiago Vidaurri, the governor of Nuevo León, who was attempting to form an independent republic in northern Mexico. Vidaurri and his subordinates had worked with Texans to stop Indian

raids before, and Callahan believed he had permission to enter Coahuila in pursuit of Lipan Apaches. However, after crossing the Rio Grande, he fought with a larger Mexican force southwest of Piedras Negras and was forced to retreat to that town. He ordered the town burned to cover his retreat back into Texas.

This book will be a valuable addition to the libraries of Texas history enthusiasts, academic and non-academic alike. In addition to his reappraisal of the Callahan Expedition, McDonald analyzes the complex factors that influenced the decisions of people living on the antebellum Texas frontier. His discussion of Callahan's tragic death and subsequent legal proceedings is an interesting window into the different perceptions held about the role of law enforcement by Anglo and German Texans. McDonald has made an important contribution to the historiography of frontier Texas.

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

WILLIAM C. YANCEY

Texas Brigadier to the Fall of Atlanta: John Bell Hood. By Stephen Davis. (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2021. Pp. 554. Illustrations, maps, notes, works cited, index.)

Stephen Davis's *Texas Brigadier to the Fall of Atlanta* is a welcome addition to the growing scholarship on General John Bell Hood and the Texas Brigade during the Civil War. Serving as the first of two volumes of a comprehensive study on the beleaguered commander, this book sheds much-needed light on the general's military career and the maelstrom of controversy and recrimination that surrounded the Confederate Army of Tennessee.

From the onset, Davis tackles his subject and addresses the elephant in the room, the notion that Hood undeservedly received promotion to full general and the command of an army he was ill-suited to lead. Historians have "concluded that Hood was a nineteenth-century embodiment of the 'Peter Principle'—the American sociological notion that in hierarchical organizations, individuals rise to the level of incompetence," the author writes (1). Davis acknowledges that it is possible to see Hood as an ambitious commander who clamored for promotion. However, history does not work as simply as that. Rather, it is more nuanced and complex than the one-dimensional interpretations that historians have imposed on Hood.

Davis's biography provides a short background of Hood prior to 1861. Because the author's stated purpose is to analyze the development of Hood as a soldier and officer, it is fitting that Davis devotes so little to Hood's background. The general himself wrote only eleven pages in his postwar memoirs about his life prior to the war. During the war, Hood