

## NEW BOOK NOTES

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### George Brosi

Janet Kemper Beck. *Creating the John Brown Legend: Emerson, Thoreau, Douglass, Child, and Higginson in Defense of the Raid on Harpers Ferry*. Jefferson: McFarland & Co., Inc., 2009. 206 pages with bibliography, timeline, notes, photos, illustrations, index, and a foreword by Richard T. Gillespie. Trade paperback, \$35.00.

The basic idea of this book makes sense—to contrast the historical with the literary view of John Brown’s 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, and thus shine light on the origins of the legend. This book includes a very helpful chronology of pertinent personal, literary, and historical happenings throughout Brown’s life and provides background on five contemporary literary figures, including not just white men, but also Frederick Douglass and Lydia Maria Child. The one aspect of the book I found disconcerting was that it does not offer clearly laid-out reprints of the writings of these five. The author teaches English at Appalachian State University in North Carolina.

Christine Blevins. *The Midwife of the Blue Ridge: A Novel*. New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 2008. 420 pages with readers guide. Trade paperback, \$14.00.

This is an historical novel, set in the eighteenth century that follows the protagonist, “Dark Maggie,” from her home in Scotland to life as an indentured servant in Appalachian America.

Neva Bryan. *St. Peter’s Monsters*. Saint Paul, Va.: Brigid Editions, 2009. 294 pages. Trade paperback, \$14.00.

Neva Bryan has had a story in *Appalachian Heritage* and a poem in *Appalachian Journal*. She grew up in the Virginia coalfields where this novel is set.

Sylvia DeLee Davis. *Appalachian Angels*. West Conshohocken, Pa.: Infinity Publishing, 2008. 108 pages with contributor’s notes. Trade paperback, \$12.95.

This is a book of personal essays about angel encounters and near-death experiences from the Kentucky mountains. Sylvia DeLee Davis is a teacher who lives in Richmond, Kentucky.

B. L. Dotson-Lewis. *The Sunny Side of Appalachia: Bluegrass from the Grassroots*. West Conshohocken, Pa.: Infinity Publishing, 2008. 184 pages with photos. Trade paperback, \$15.95.

This book consists primarily of interviews by the author with bluegrass musicians who perform at the “Music in the Mountains” Festival at Summersville, West Virginia. The author was born in the coalfields of Virginia and raised in the West Virginia coalfields.

Gary W. Gallagher. *The Shenandoah Valley Campaign of 1864*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009. 416 pages, with illustrations, maps, notes, and index. Trade paperback, \$19.95.

This is a collection of eleven original essays by noted scholars on over 125 days of warfare that claimed more than 25,000 casualties, yet brightened Abraham Lincoln’s chances for re-election and boosted Union morale while depriving the Confederacy of its breadbasket. The writers utilize recent scholarship and newly uncovered original sources to reexamine many aspects of the Shenandoah Valley Campaign.

Silas House and Jason Howard. *Something’s Rising: Appalachians Fighting Mountaintop Removal*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009. 306 pages with appendices, index, notes, selected bibliography, and a foreword by Lee Smith. Hardback with dust jacket, \$27.95.

This important book paints compelling portraits of eleven courageous people with deep roots in the Appalachian coalfields who are resisting mountaintop removal coal mining. Before he died, Studs Terkel wrote: “This revelatory work is a challenging tocsin shouting out the effects of poverty and exploitations of the Appalachian people by strip miners and other corporate pirates. I am reminded of the fighting spirit of the Eastern Kentuckians when I visited these embattled pioneers in their hills and hollers. Here, Jean Ritchie and others speak out in the fighting tradition of the 1930s and 1960s. It is oral history at its best.” The editors are from the coalfields.

Charles Hudson. *The Packhorseman*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009. 336 pages. Trade paperback, \$24.95.

Charles Hudson is Franklin Professor of Anthropology and History, Emeritus, from the University of Georgia, where he became recognized as a leading authority on the Cherokee. With this volume, he plunges completely into historical fiction. His last book, *Conversations with the High Priest of Coosa* (2007), made the transition from his many nonfiction volumes. This book, his latest, is about twenty-year-old William MacGregor, who becomes a packhorseman for treks into the Cherokee country. “Hudson successfully carries the reader into the Cherokee world of 1735. His characters, settings, props, and human interactions are all convincing and historically, as well as anthropologically, sound. Readers will find this book engaging, entertaining, and enlightening.”—Gregory A. Waselkov.

Izumi Ishii. *Bad Fruits of the Civilized Tree: Alcohol and the Sovereignty of the Cherokee Nation*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008. 260 pages with a bibliography, notes, and index. Hardback with dust jacket, \$45.00.

This book covers the time period from first contact with whites until Oklahoma attained statehood in 1907. It is based on a doctoral dissertation completed at the University of Kentucky under the guidance of the outstanding Cherokee scholar, Theda Perdue. Izumi Ishii first encountered Cherokee history as a undergraduate exchange student to America and now teaches at a university back in Japan.

Sarah Kennedy. *Home Remedies*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009. 69 pages with notes. Trade Paperback, \$17.95.

Sarah Kennedy lives in Rockbridge County, Virginia, and teaches at Mary Baldwin College. This is her fifth poetry book. “*Home Remedies* demonstrates that a real maker can draw resonant poems and intriguing characters out of the least likely material. Kennedy’s sharply delivered work demonstrates how the abrasions and ardors of human relationships have changed over time, and how they have not.”—Brendan Galvin.

C. E. Morgan. *All the Living*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2009. 208 pages. Hardback with dust jacket. \$23.00.

This novel is reviewed on page 79. “Shimmering with sensibility, Morgan’s stunning debut novel traces the emotional awakening of a young woman perched precariously between worlds and desires. . . . Morgan pierces the skin of her characters with a depth and sensitivity seldom displayed by a first-time novelist, and the transfixing story arc is supported by beautifully descriptive passages and her unflinching ear for regional dialect. Brimming with discussion-worthy themes, this is sure to be a popular book-club choice.” —Booklist

Tim Poland. *The Safety of Deeper Water: A Novel*. Morgantown: Vandalia Press, 2009. 267 pages. Trade paperback, \$16.50.

The protagonist of this novel is Sandy Holston, a nurse who has survived a marriage to a violent husband and moves, when he is incarcerated, to a river town to enjoy fly fishing. Then fish die off, a neighbor intrudes in her life, and her husband, who promised to hunt her down, is released from prison. Tim Poland is a professor of English at Radford University in Virginia’s New River Valley.

Frederick Ramsay. *Stranger Room*. Scottsdale, Ariz.: Poisoned Pen Press, 2008. 256 pages. Hardback in dust jacket. \$24.95.

The title refers to the room reserved for hospitality for travelers in a historic Rockbridge County, Virginia, home that serves as the setting for this murder mystery. A killing that happens in this room holds eerie similarities to one that occurred there 150 years earlier. “Ramsay skillfully weaves historical fact into his story, all the while blending brisk action with excellent characterization.”—*Publishers Weekly*. This is Ramsay’s fourth regional mystery. Now a retired physician and Episcopal Priest living in Arizona, Ramsay did his undergraduate work at Washington and Lee in Rockbridge County.

Frank S. Riddel. *The Historical Atlas of West Virginia*. Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2008. 306 pages with maps, index, references, appendices, charts, and diagrams. Hardback with dust jacket, \$30.00.

What is distinctive and very impressive about this historical atlas is that the maps are the author's own, not a collection of what others have done. This allows for the collection as a whole to be much more comprehensive and usable than many similar works. Each of the 127 maps, presented in eight sections, is accompanied by a brief explanatory essay. Frank Riddel is a West Virginia native and a professor emeritus from Marshall University.

J. Stephen Rhodes. *The Time I Didn't Know What to Do Next*. Nicholasville, Ky: Wind Publications, 2008. 75 pages with an introduction by Leatha Kendrick. Trade paperback, \$15.00.

Rhodes is a retired preacher and ecclesiastical administrator who lives in Berea, Kentucky. The poems here “sing in sonnets and in the musicality of free verse lines, in forms received and created, with an impish playfulness and in parables that make his spiritual journal palpable. It is a tribute to the range and craft of the book that the superb set of poems grieving his daughter's suicide do not overshadow the whole, but rather take their place as part of the fabric of a life spent asking hard questions.”—Leatha Kendrick.

David Robertson. *W. C. Handy: The Life and Times of the Man Who Made the Blues*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009. 286 pages with notes, selected bibliography, and an index. Hardback with dust jacket, \$27.95.

W. C. Handy (1873–1958), a native of the northern Alabama hill-country, is widely recognized as an influential figure in bringing the blues into the American musical mainstream. This is an authoritative biography of him. “Robertson's work is a fascinating look at not only Handy's life but the history and business of American music, particularly regarding late nineteenth century and early twentieth century African-Americans.” —*Publishers Weekly*. Robertson is a poet and network TV commentator who has written three previous biographies and a historical novel about John Wilkes Booth. He was educated in Alabama and lives in Ohio.

David Salner. *John Henry's Partner Speaks: Poems*. Cincinnati: WorldTech Editions, 2008. 104 pages. Trade paperback, \$17.00.

After completing an MFA from the University of Iowa's Writers Workshop, David Salner spent twenty-five years working as a manual laborer in West Virginia and other states. He currently works as a librarian and lives in Frederick, Maryland. "In *John Henry's Partner Speaks*, David Salner has translated his original source material, related to the folk-hero, John Henry, into a series of sometime revelatory but always accessible and moving poems."—Ron Offen.

Lin Stepp. *The Foster Girls: A Smoky Mountain Novel*. Boone: Parkway Publishers, Inc., 2009. 238 pages. Trade paperback, \$14.95.

The protagonist of this first novel, Vivian Delaney, comes to Wear's Valley to seek quiet and shed troubles but finds a whole new set of opportunities as well as challenges. "Linn Stepp paints a charming portrait of the Smokies, their people, and a wonderful way of life... A richly satisfying novel of love, family and friendship."—Deborah Smith. Dr. Lin Stepp is a Knoxville businesswoman who teaches psychology at Tusculum College.

Jim Tomlinson. *Nothing Like an Ocean*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009. 163 pages. Hardback with dust jacket. \$24.95.

This is Tomlinson's second story collection following *Things Kept, Things Left Behind*, which won the Iowa Short Fiction Award. These eleven stories are also set in the fictional Appalachian town of "Spivey." In "Overburden," a nostalgic couple return to the Eastern Kentucky mountainside where they first met only to find an unrecognizable barren landscape left by mountaintop removal mining. Tomlinson first moved to the edge of the Kentucky Mountains when he was transferred by his corporate employer. Now retired, he lives in Berea.

Gary Jackson Tucker. *Governor William E. Glasscock and Progressive Politics in West Virginia*. Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2008. 214 pages with a bibliography, index, photos, and illustrations. Trade paperback, \$28.00.

Glasscock was governor from 1909 to 1913 and well represented the progressive politics of his era. Gary Tucker is a historian who is retired from the Wood County, West Virginia, schools.

Stephen A. West. *From Yeoman to Redneck in the South Carolina Upcountry, 1850–1915*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008. 261 pages with maps, bibliography, notes, index, and tables. Hardback with dust jacket, \$45.00.

This book concentrates on Pickens, Spartanburg, and York counties, the first two officially recognized as part of the Appalachian Regional Commission boundary. “West seeks to show how the idealized yeoman became the despised redneck, how social virtues were transformed into cultural vices. In this effort, he draws together important threads of economic, social, political, and cultural history. He does it all with considerable literary grace, in a very persuasive manner. Readers will come away from this book engaged and enlightened.”—Orville Vernon Burton. West teaches at the Catholic University of America.

Charles Wright. *Sestets: Poems*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2009. 75 pages. Hardback with dust jacket, \$23.00.

This is the nineteenth book of poetry from Pulitzer-Prize poet Charles Wright, one of the country’s most acclaimed poets who grew up mainly in Oak Ridge and Kingsport, Tennessee, and teaches at the University of Virginia. “The 69 poems here, not unlike most of his earlier work, show vistas from the Upper South and points of view derived from Taoism, but they share a self-limiting form that is fresh for Wright: each has only six lines, plus a (sometimes quite long) title. In these sestets great yearnings and brief descriptions collide, cancel or reinforce each other: “The heart of the world lies open, leached and ticking with sunlight / For just a minute or so,” says one poem. In another, “The past is so dark, you need a flashlight to find your own shoes.” Mortality is omnipresent, but so is beauty, in and around Charlottesville (where Wright teaches), in our musical heritage, in the night sky. Wright’s compression tries to see that every subject, every image, receives its due.”—*Publishers Weekly*.