

Texas and Texans in Children's Literature

*Frances Gates Rhodes
Texas A&M International University*

January 3, 1959 was a day of deepest mourning for students of Stephen F. Austin Elementary School in Eagle Pass, Texas. Our Christmas break was over and we were back in school after all of the joys of the holidays. But, even more significant was the fact that the United States Congress had chosen that day to officially declare Alaska to be the 49th state. Children draw comfort from simple things: Texas was, up till that fatal day, the largest state and, therefore, the grandest and best state. How could we cope? I don't recall which adult first reassured us by telling us that were the ice to melt, Alaska would be about half the size it claimed to be. We relaxed and had a naughty little laugh every time Alaska was described as being the largest state in the entire Union. We KNEW the truth. Now, some fifty years later, I would venture to surmise that each of us who had been in such deep mourning has gotten over the anguish. Sadly, with the rate of Global Warming which IS melting much of Alaska's ice, we might learn whether the jokesters were right or not.

Even after being knocked so unceremoniously from the Largest State slot, Texans, as a general rule, are still "state proud." We never lost that. Many of us were raised by people who firmly believed that we were Texans first, Americans second, and Citizens of the World third. Texas is not perfect, for example, July, August, and September are WAY TOO hot, but the rest of the year is more often lovely. We do have some pockets of prejudice, against just about any group, in fact, but most Texans have worked very hard to eliminate prejudices... or tone them down if they are too deeply rooted, at least. We do have some very worthwhile positive aspects of our state and our people, which outweigh the negative aspects.

Looking at how Texas and Texans are depicted in Children's Literature has been a delightful task for me. Trying to limit the number of books I want to discuss has been the most difficult part of this research. I was reminded of my Dissertation Chairman, Dr. John Bordie, who gently told me that although those new data were fascinating, I had to put them aside for another project else I would never finish my Dissertation within my life time.

HISTORY OF TEXAS IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Texas schools teach heavy doses of Texas history and those Texans who are now between the ages of 65 and 95 most likely learned, really learned, their Texas History from a little book provided, free of charge, to Junior High students by the Magnolia Petroleum Company (later Mobil Oil Company). Texas History Movies: A Cartoon History of the Lone Star State,ⁱ is unique because it was a collection of four-framed cartoon strips that had originally been issued in the Dallas News in 1926. Unlike most books, the pictures were the major emphasis and the subscript text below the four frames were reminiscent of the text shown in silent movies (thus, the title's reference to "Movies.") Although largely accurate from a historical point of view, today's audiences find some of the text to be non-PC. For example, in one frame, a Texan refers to the Mexicans as "pepper bellies" and all of African decent looked more like Al Jolson's blackface minstrel character than a real person. After Pepper Jones Martinez, Inc. acquired the publication rights (Magnolia had earlier donated the rights to the Texas Historical Society in 1961), a group of Texas historians and advisors produced a revised edition that they asserted was more accurate Historically, and definitely more Politically Correct! In other words, the revised version was bowdlerized.

Reminiscent of a Japanese Manga, The New Texas History Movies was written and illustrated by the late Jack Jackson. This large sized book contains multiple frames of black and white drawings with script squares and/or dialogue bubbles crowding each page. The drawings are far more intricate and detailed than the earlier original Texas History Movies. As a person suffering with macular degeneration, I find the book difficult to read. Younger readers who are more accustomed to the Manga format do not seem to have any difficulties. Jackson, like so many of us, had experienced the original Texas History Movies during his childhood in South Texas. He had always dreamt of creating an improved version (without the stereotypes and racial slurs of the original) and during the last year or so of his life, he devoted himself to the project. The best part of the book, in my opinion, is the final essay placed after the cartoon section entitled "A Bit of History About Texas History Movies."ⁱⁱ

TRADITIONAL LITERATURE

The Legend of the Bluebonnet,ⁱⁱⁱ written and illustrated by Tomie dePaola may or may not have been written with Texas in mind, but Texans claim it as ours for several reasons: Comanches once roamed throughout the high plains of Central and West Texas and the Texas Bluebonnet *Lupinus texensis* (Fabaceae) is our State Flower. She-Who-Is-Alone, a young orphaned Indian girl, is being raised by her tribe during a time of dreadful famine exacerbated by a serious drought. Ultimately, the Shaman is sent to commune with the Great Spirits to learn what the People must do in order to regain harmony with nature. A "great sacrifice" needs to be made. No one in the tribe is willing to part with his/her important things, they all have excuses why their sacrifices would not be needed. She-Who-is-Alone bravely sacrifices her warrior doll, the last link to her loving parents. The Great Spirits, of course, are pleased and the following morning, the hills and valleys are covered with beautiful Bluebonnets. Some have felt that this story is too sad and too frightening (it does speak of a child's worst nightmare – abandonment) for a very young child, but a slightly older child can, however, learn that heroism is attainable even by young children such as themselves

CONTEMPORARY REALISTIC FICTION

Contemporary Realistic Fiction is a popular genre at almost every age. Whereas the book Rules of the Road^{iv} by Joan Bauer does not originate in Texas, its main characters do travel from Chicago to Dallas and back, and thus, in a stretch could qualify as a "Texas" book. The main character, tall, gangly sixteen-year-old Jenna works after school selling shoes at Gladstone's. Jenna is a cracker-jack shoe saleswoman. She can really sell shoes. Elderly Mrs. Madeline Gladstone, the company President, decides that it will be Jenna, with her brand new driver's license, who will drive her, in her huge old Cadillac, on a business trip to visit other Gladstone stores and attend an important shareholder's meeting in Dallas. Jenna learns a lot about life on the trip, "Never eat at a place called Mom's, because it's a safe bet Mom's been dead for years." And she also discovers that Mrs. Gladstone's slimy son is plotting a stock take-over to shove his mother aside in a proposed merger with an inferior quality shoe company. That nefarious plot is thwarted, thanks to Jenna.

The Tequila Worm^v by Viola Canales is based on the author's own experiences as an Hispanic girl going to school in McAllen, Texas and then being offered a full scholarship to the prestigious St. Stephen's Episcopal School, a boarding school in Austin, Texas. In the book, the school is called "St. Luke's." The main character, Sofia, is a full participant in the Hispanic culture of her family and community. She is embarrassed to be a Mexican American with her lunch of bean tacos while the Anglo kids have these wonderful looking lunches made with white bread. After she is called a "Taco Head," a very understanding Anglo coach helps her take pride in her heritage. Sofia uses the taunt "Taco Head" as the impetus to study even harder and "beats" her tormenter by earning the highest grades in her class. Her excellent academic record earns her, in turn, an offer of a full scholarship to St. Luke's Episcopal School in Austin. Sofia wants to go very badly but she has to convince herself, her parents, the "*comadres*," and all of her extended family that such a move would be the best for her in the long run. Each chapter of this charming book rings true since it focuses on a vivid Mexican American tradition or value.

Nothing happens in Antler, Texas. However, for Toby Wilson that changed When Zachary Beaver Came to Town.^{vi} Kimberly Willis Holt addresses issues of coming-of-age, disabilities, grief, and abandonment. It is summer and Toby and his best friend, Cal McKnight, are thirteen-years-old with

nothing interesting and new to do. Toby's mother has gone off to Nashville to become the next "Tammy Wynette" and Cole's older brother is fighting in Vietnam. Then it happens. The biggest excitement to hit town arrives in the form of a small aluminum travel trailer pulled by a powder-blue Thunderbird. A sign on the trailer invites the curious to see the fattest boy in the world, for a small price of \$2.00. Of course, in no time at all, half of the town is in the parking lot of the Dairy Maid clutching their \$2.00, waiting patiently to see the world's fattest boy, Zachary Beaver. When Zachary Beaver's "keeper" drives off and leaves him alone in the small trailer in the parking lot, Toby and Cal, become concerned and begin leaving bags of eatables on the trailer porch. Slowly, the barriers are lowered and the three boys become friends and, each, in his own way, helps the others through difficult times.

Louis Sachar's Holes^{vii} is Contemporary Realistic Fiction with hints of Modern Fantasy. This Newbery Award winning novel tells of Stanley Yelnats who has been sent to serve time at Camp Green Lake in West Texas.

Stanley was not a bad kid. He was innocent of the crime for which he was convicted. He'd just been at the wrong place at the wrong time.

It was all because of his no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather.^{viii}

Stanley and the other boys at Camp Green Lake (there is no lake, nothing is green, and it certainly isn't a pleasant summer camp) must dig a hole five feet in diameter by five feet deep every day. No one tells them why, only that doing so will build character. Oh, yes, by the way, if they should find anything interesting they are to take it to the Warden or her staff immediately. At first, Stanley is a soft, slightly chubby boy who has never done anything like hard labour in his life. Campmates, with their colourful nicknames ("Armpit," "X-Ray," "Barf Bag," and "Zero") are, in comparison to Stanley, street-wise and, even hardened. When he is unable to complete his first few holes, the silent one, Zero, a veritable teenaged digging machine, helps him. In exchange for teaching Zero how to read, Stanley begins to get assistance digging his daily holes. The story has several embedded flashback stories, which keep the lively pace going. Although they are not aware of the fact, Zero is the great-great-grandson of the one-legged Gypsy woman who had so thoroughly cursed Stanley's "no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather" and his entire line. At the end, by Stanley's helping Zero -- carrying him uphill on his back to a place where the water runs up-hill -- during their escape from Camp Green Lake, the Gypsy woman's curse is finally broken.

Small Steps^{ix} is the sequel to Holes. This time, however, the story is not about Stanley, or even Zero, but, instead, it is about Theodore Jordan, formerly known as "Armpit." Theodore had been sent to Camp Green Lake because of anger issues. He had lost his temper in a theatre when a boy had tripped him thus causing him to spill his bucket of popcorn and his soda. In response, he then proceeds to beat his tormenter unconscious. He has now served his time and has returned to his family home, a duplex in East Austin. One of his counselors at the halfway house stressed to him that he must take "small steps." He is to remember that, if he is trying to cross a fast running stream, he can get safely across, eventually by taking small steps. However, if he tries to rush and takes large steps, the rush of water can knock him off balance and sweep him away. Theodore's goals are to get his GED, go to college, lose the nickname "Armpit," and continue to take small steps. His job with a local landscaper installing underground sprinkler systems for wealth homeowners in West Austin is almost child's play for the large muscular, slightly menacing looking African American teenager after his time serving his sentence at Camp Green Lake. Theodore has a genuine kind heart and is learning how to control his anger. His inability to say "no" to another former Camp Green Lake boy, X-Ray, lands him in a lot of dangerous, upsetting trouble. Ultimately, it is Theodore's basic goodness that enables him to bounce back -- a stronger, wiser, young man.

HISTORICAL FICTION

Texans are often described as being of Mexican, African, Native American, or Anglo ancestry. At one time, in fact, anyone who was not either Mexican American, African American or Native American was automatically identified as an "Anglo." Of course, the fact that many of these so-called "Anglos" are actually German American, Irish American, Czech American, or even Jewish American, was not

sufficient to keep them from being called “Anglo.” Several excellent Historical Fiction books have been written about, for example, the Germans, Jews, and Irish who fled discrimination and /or oppression in their home countries. Such a book is With the Wind, Kevin Dolan: A Novel of Ireland and Texas by Bryce Milligan.^x In the 1830s the Irish suffered grievously at the hands of the English under harsh and unfair penal codes. Almost every family had members who had emigrated hoping for a better life elsewhere. The only private landowner in the neighborhood, Patrick Donohue, has offered to pay the passage, food, and tools for Kevin’s older brother, young Tom Dolan, to go to Texas with the Donovan family and, in exchange, work for Mr. Donohue for a year in Texas. Ma decides that she wants twelve-year-old Kevin to go, too, and says:

“...I’ll not be sending out one of my boys into the world without someone to look after him.”

That was Ma/s kind of logic. She would not send one because the dangers were too great, but she would send two because the Lord would not grieve her so by letting her lose them both.^{xi}

After a vindictive nighttime raid by the British, the Donohues and the two Dolan boys leave to begin their new lives in Texas. The steerage class passage and the landing in New Orleans are arduous and, for some unlucky souls, fatal. Kevin contracts cholera and almost dies. The early days are rough, less than half of the Irish who had left with the Donohues and Dolans survived to actually reach Texas. The Irish land in Copano Bay and go to Refugio to await the Spanish governor who will be, if all goes well, issuing land grants to the immigrants. Eventually, the Donohues are granted a large number of acres while the Dolans, because they are minors, are granted much smaller adjoining acreage. Of the two brothers, Kevin has always been the more analytical and keener observer, thus Pa entrusted him with the responsibility of finding the best place to settle. Kevin explores the entire area and identifies the two best home sites. First the Donohue’s house is built and then the Dolan’s. Snakes, Indians, and the Spanish keep the colonists on their toes. Tom’s betrothed, Mary O’Reilly, has sent word that she could not wait any longer and would be there in December. The book ends on Christmas night as the two families build a huge Irish bonfire to welcome the Christ Child, and, by chance, to serve as the beacon for the wagon delivering Mary to them. With folk such as these, one knows that the Irish in Texas would be (and have been) successful.

Much of what went on in the Alamo during the famous battle that ended on March 6, 1836 has entered the realm of legend. Fully aware of this fact, Margaret Cousins consulted with the distinguished, historian, Walter Prescott Webb, while writing The Boy in the Alamo (first published as We Were There at the Battle of the Alamo)^{xiii}. The story begins in Nacogdoches, Texas, in the smithy as blacksmith Todd Hunter and his orphaned nephews go about their daily work. Suddenly, some strangers ride up. The leader of the men is Davy Crockett who, with his group of Tennessee Volunteers, is on his way to Bexar (San Antonio) to join forces with the “Texians” awaiting the advancing Mexican army headed by Mexican dictator, General Santa Ana. Buck, whose girlfriend has recently run off to marry another fellow, joins the group and becomes a Crockett Volunteer. Billy wants to go with them but Buck refused, stressing Billy’s tender age. Of course, Billy runs away to follow Buck and join in the upcoming battles. He is a stowaway, hidden between the trunks lashed to the roof of the stagecoach leaving Nacogdoches heading south and is not discovered until the following morning, miles from home. One of the passengers, a Virginia gentleman, Col. Gray, admires the boy’s courage and buys him food and pays for him to travel as close to Bexar as the coachman dares to go. Billy does meet up with Buck and the Crockett Volunteers. Davy Crockett decides that leaving the boy alone in the unknown, dangerous area around Bexar would be worse than taking him with them, so Billy becomes an actor in one of the most famous battles in Texas history. The details of the days leading up to the battle, the battle itself, and the days following the end of the battle are sobering and should cure most young boys of romanticizing war. Billy eventually returns home to Uncle Todd and Aunt Elvira in Nacogdoches, a mature, responsible young man, no longer just a carefree boy

In the Acknowledgement page of Battle of the Alamo: You are There^{xiii}, Bryce Milligan^{xiv} gives “...thanks to Margaret Cousins, whose children’s novel The Boy in the Alamo first inspired my interest in Texas History.”^{xv} Milligan’s book is a “Plot-your-own” story. The book begins with some basic history

of Texas and important dates for background information. The reader is then introduced to the main character, fourteen-year-old Thomas Benton, an Arkansas farm boy who, at the insistence of his immediately older brother, fifteen-year-old Robert who has just gotten married, takes the gift of Robert's canoe, a long dirk knife, and four dollars in coins and heads down the Ouachita river to the Red River to the Mississippi River to New Orleans and adventure. The reader engages in an interactive relationship with the text since select passages of text are interrupted by two choices such as:

If you decide to go by sea, turn to page 11.

If you want to join Sterne on the riverboat, turn to page 43.^{xvi}

Other toggle points do not require the reader to make choices, but merely to turn to a specific page. Young boys are often the biggest fans of this format since, among other reasons, the actual reading of the text involves a greater degree of physical activity than reading a standard book could ever provide. Many youngsters have reported to me that they enjoy not only reading this kind of book, but they also enjoy re-reading the book and making different choices. I assume that a mathematician could calculate the possible number of outcomes in this sort of book, but those calculations are far beyond the scope of most English teachers.

After Texas gained its Independence from Mexico, it continued to attract European immigrants. Janice Jordan Shefelman researched her own German family who settled in the Texas Hill Country around 1845. From her research, she wrote The Texas Trilogy^{xvii}, a fictionalized account of how her great-grandfather, Wilhelm Jordan, and his daughter, Ernestine Wilhelmine Jordan (nicknamed "Mina") lived. The first two books, A Paradise Called Texas^{xviii} and Willow Creek Home^{xix} followed the family storyline quite faithfully. The third book, however, Spirit of Iron is totally fictional, but, as Shefelman says, this "...could have happened."^{xx}

A Paradise Called Texas begins in Germany. Mina and her parents live with her Opa (her father's father) and her Uncle Christian. The year is 1841. The family is peasant farmers and Christian, the older son, is about to get married. A promoter working for the Adelsverein or Verein, a group of idealistic German nobles who are offering German immigrants the opportunity to start anew in the west with homesteads of 320 acres per family in a paradise called "Texas" (hence the title.) The German legal system determined inheritance by primogenitor, thus Uncle Christian (who fought and argued constantly with his younger brother, Ernst) would be the sole heir to Opa's farm and house. The passage to Texas was Opa's gift for the future of his younger son and his family. The sea voyage to Texas in steerage was as harsh and brutal as any you have ever read about. The peasants were definitely landlubbers. Arrival in Galveston was not at all what the German immigrants had been led to expect. Unfortunately, worse was yet to come. Those who had survived the ocean trip were soon herded onto yet another ship and taken further down the Texas coast to Indian Point which proved to be an open beach inhabited by a wan, hungry, sickly group of German immigrants who had been dumped ashore some time earlier to await supplies and transportation to be sent by the Verein. Their first Christmas in Texas a few days after their arrival was a cold, miserable time, only made bearable by Mina who improvised a Tannenbaum out of driftwood and some of her hair ribbons. Pioneer life was not easy for anyone, but especially so for young children and delicate women. Mina's mother became ill and died of a raging fever in January. In March, Herr Jordan and their friend, Herr Kaufman, were able to pool their resources together to purchase an ox team and wagon from a German family fleeing Texas and wanting enough money for passage back home. Getting away from the mosquito ridden gulf coast was tantamount to salvation for all but the newborn Kaufman baby who died en route to Victoria, Texas. From there, the family traveled to New Braunfels and then to Fredericksburg where they received ten acres each but not the 320 acres promised. Hard work, Indian problems, and illness continued to plague the Germans, but the book ends cheerfully— Papa is going to marry the gentle young Lisette Bickenbach.

In the second book, Willow Creek Home^{xxi}, a summer drought, and epidemic illness in 1847 force Mina, Papa, and his new wife, Lisette, to move to a larger land grant deep in Comanche territory. The land they settle along with other German immigrants is more fertile than their original land had been. Among the excitement Mina faces is the birth of a baby brother, then during Papa's absence Mina chases off a Comanche with a shotgun blast, and later she escapes from a would-be Comanche kidnapper. She

attends school for the first time in several years and is increasingly more interested in a good-looking neighbor boy, Daniel.

The third book in the series, Spirit of Iron,^{xxiii} continues with the same characters and locations. Mina is now fifteen-years-old, but all of her experiences in this book are totally fictional. When Comanches kidnap her Lipan Apache friend, Amaya, along with a very young German boy named Max, the Texas Rangers set out to recover them. Mina, who does not want a dowry, does not want to be a proper lady, chops off her long blond braids, convinces Amaya's injured father Chief Custaletta, to allow his son, Nakona, to guide her in following the Rangers. Mina's subsequent adventures would be exciting for a boy, but even more so since she has broken many of the social conventions required of young women of her socio-economic class. Mina is, at first, rejected by the Texas Rangers, then, accepted. Her assistance in rescuing Amaya and Max is invaluable.

Another book about the German immigration experience in Texas is Letters to Oma: A Young German Girl's Account of her first Year in Texas, 1847.¹ by Marj Gurasich. The author is of German (but not of Texas-German) ancestry. She lived in the Houston area for over thirty years and became interested in the strong German influence in Texas.^{xxiii} After extensive research on "the history of Industry, Texas, for an article on the 150th anniversary of town founder Frederick Ernst's arrival in Texas,"^{xxiv} she undertook to write a story that begins about the same time as the 2nd of the Texas Trilogy, 1847. There is a vast difference between the two families' backgrounds in the Fatherland. The Jordans were farming peasants in Germany. They left to come to Texas with very few possessions and, ultimately, settled in the frontier wilderness of Central Texas. The von Schotts, on the other hand, are well-educated city folk forced, in East Texas, into a difficult rural life they knew little about. This second family brings many lovely things (most of which they lose to fire or flood) with them that should have made their lives easier and far more graceful. In Germany, Professor Max von Schell had written papers condemning the German government and was forced, with other "free-thinkers," to flee for his very life. These mostly University students and professors also suffered as a result of the failure of the Adelsverein or Verein to make good their promise of land, tools, seeds, and help for new German immigrants. Christina Eudora von Schott, her parents, and two young brothers endure similar hardships to those of the Jordan family, but their suffering seems to be less raw-bone, and, although Frau von Schott is stronger, at her very core, than Frau Jordan, she, too is run-down, exhausted, and unable to ward off infection and dies soon after giving birth to her fourth child, Louisa. Mina shoulders the responsibilities of primary caregiver for her siblings, the home, and her father. The band of Lipan Indians, which Mina meets, is a far cry from the almost noble Lipan Apaches who become friends of Tina Jordan and her family. This group of nomadic traders go from settlement to settlement trading, accepting charity of all kinds, and sadly, kidnapping babies, Louisa in particular. When she realizes that her baby sister has been taken, Mina mounts her mare and bravely enters the Lipan camp before the Indians are able to move on. She gains entry with an English speaking young warrior as translator into the teepee of Chief Big Owl whose squaw has the stolen baby. Mina's stubborn streak which had been the bane of her much more traditionally female mother enables her to remain firm and calm to persist until she is able to persuade Big Owl to swap her most prized possession, the carved cuckoo clock given to her as a parting gift from her Oma, for the "useless female" infant. After a breathless moment, the swap is accepted and Tina leaves the Lipan camp with her beloved baby sister. The book ends with Mina looking forward to a successful future as an American. She, like Tina, also has a young man with whom the future is assumed to be shared.

Slavery represents our nation's greatest shame. Texas, sadly, was one of the states that allowed slavery and it became the western-most state of the Confederate States of America. Nevertheless, Texas had its share of citizens who did not own slaves and who deplored the institution. Muddy Banks by Ruby C. Tolliver^{xxv}, begins two years before the end of the Civil War (1863), when a young twelve-year-old slave known simply as "Boy" slips over the side of a Confederate steamer headed south through the Sabine Pass between Texas and Louisiana. He swims to the Texas side and emerges thoroughly covered

in thick, sticky mud from the wide mudflats bordering the shore north of Sabine City. Boy is found and given refuge by the widow Miz Banks, a transplanted Yankee, who, although she is categorically opposed to slavery, buys him, for his own protection, from his Master, the Captain of the steamer. Miz Banks disapproves of the fact that the youth does not have an actual name, but she tells him that she will call him “Muddy Boy Banks” until he chooses his own name. Muddy had given his dying mother a promise that he would escape from slavery. This become increasingly more difficult to do because Miz Banks is good to him in ways no other white person had ever been in his experience. She treats him like a thinking, feeling human person. Muddy proves, in many small ways that he is a fast learner and an honourable person. While he is secretly preparing to run away, again, in order to fulfill his promise to his mother, he does not realize that Miz Banks has already given him his freedom. She, however, does not tell him since she knows that, until the Civil War is truly over, Muddy can only be safe from unscrupulous slave sellers while he is known to be her slave. The growth and development of the young Muddy Banks (slaves were often called by their Master’s surnames) is a worthwhile story, but the most fascinating part of the book is best expressed by Tolliver, herself, in the Epilogue: `

Perhaps historians have neglected to record the Civil War battle of Sabine Pass, Texas, because it was so unbelievable. How could forty-one Irishmen, one cavalry surgeon, and a young engineer, behind crudely- built ramparts with only four thirty-two pounders and two twenty-four pounders accomplish all this in only one hour and forty minutes?

Capture two gunboats carrying fourteen guns,

Capture over six hundred prisoners,

Retrieve many rounds of ammunition plus a quantity of small arms,

Send three gunboats, seven transports carrying six thousand troops and a general back to sea,

Completely rout the remainder of an armada of twenty-seven ships,

And halt the long-planned invasion of Texas by Union forces for several months.

BUT THEY DID!^{xxvi}

At the end, Muddy has chosen his name, which is then inked onto his freedom papers. He has not had to abandon the Widow Banks while still fulfilling his promise to his mother.

First published in 1956, Old Yeller by Fred Gipson^{xxvii} has gained the status of “Classic.” Virtually all Americans know the story of the ugly “ole” yellow dog and the boy who loved him, either from reading the book or seeing the Disney movie. Times are rough in the late 1860s; the economy is suffering after the disruptions of the Civil War and people have to work hard just merely to survive. Fourteen-year-old Travis has been left in charge to help his Mama watch out for Little Arliss and care for their frontier home near Salt Lick, Texas, after Papa and a group of their neighbors have pooled their resources and gone north on a cattle drive to Abilene, Kansas. What Travis wants is a horse, but what Travis needs is a dog, and, sure enough, a dog soon appears -- a stray dog, a wily dog, a smart dog, a brave dog, a strong dog, a loyal dog, a loving dog, a big ugly yellow dog. At first, the dog seems to cause as many problems as he solves, but soon, he and Travis become an inseparable team and Old Yeller saves Little Arliss from a bear, Travis from a herd of wild hogs, and Mama and the neighbor girl Lisbeth from a rabid wolf’s attack. The certainty of Old Yeller contracting rabies, himself, is instrumental in Travis’s ultimate coming-of-age experience. After Old Yeller’s death, Travis goes through a period of intense mourning that is only broken by the sight of Old Yeller’s spotted pup (which acts more and more like his father) and Little Arliss playing together. Travis says, “the way I figured it, if he [the pup] was big enough to act like Old Yeller, he was big enough to start learning to earn his keep.”^{xxviii}

Losing a parent can be one of the most devastating experiences in the life of a child as twelve-year-old Elizabeth James discovers in After Pa Was Shot by Judy Alter^{xxix} when a drunkard guns down her father the day after Christmas, 1904. In order to support her growing family, Elizabeth, B.J. and Henry, the pregnant Mrs. James must walk to town each day to work as a seamstress in one of the clothing stores in Center, Texas. But, when baby Maggie is born, she can no longer spend the long hours away from home. Against the wishes of her brother-in-law, Charlie James, and other relatives, she is determined to move

into town and operate a boarding house. When a tornado takes much of the roof off of their little country home, and Uncle Charlie braves the storm in order to check on the little family, Ma says, "Wasn't it a good thing Charlie came to see after us! It just shows how much we need a man around the house, even if he is only a boarder."^{xxx} Soon after, she finds a two-story house in Center that will work perfectly. Uncle Charlie helps the family move and he and Ma discuss the fact that she will have to either board all women or all men. Since she believes she needs a man around the house, she chooses to rent to men only. The boarders begin to appear: First, Mr. Beaver, an oil field worker; second, Mr. Andrews, a bookkeeper for Ben Short, the man who had murdered Pa, but was never punished for the crime; third, Mr. Eastman, B. J.'s teacher come Fall, and fourth, Mr. Millard who has come to town to work in the bank. Of the four men, Elizabeth really distrusts and dislikes Mr. Joseph Millard who soon begins courting Ma and persuades her to marry him. After the wedding, Mr. Millard changes drastically and, when he discovers that the house is not Ma's property but is only rented, he really turns ugly. This con man has embezzled from the bank and, in his effort to escape, kidnaps baby Maggie to use as a shield and protection. Brave Elizabeth is part of the rescue team that snatches Maggie back and bags Mr. Millard. Ma is wiser and announces that she will seek a divorce (not as common a step in 1905 as it is today) because "It won't be any worse than being married to a bank robber who is in jail."^{xxx} Indeed, she is much less likely to feel she needs a man around the house after this unpleasant experience.

Jewish immigration to Texas has followed the general patterns of Jewish immigration to the entire Western Hemisphere. Many Ashkenazi Jews and "*Conversos*" (Jews who converted to Roman Catholicism during the Spanish Inquisition) have come through Mexico, the Caribbean, as well as Central and South America beginning with the Spanish Conquistadores. The Pogroms carried out in Czarist Russia inspired a wave of Jewish immigrants seeking freedom at the turn of the 19th/20th Centuries, and, of course, the Nazi Holocaust of World War II brought many more Jews to the Americas during the mid-20th Century. Dede Fox Ducharme did not write of her own Jewish family's immigration experiences in The Treasure in the Tiny Blue Tin^{xxxii} However, her research and the pride she feels as a Jewish Texan enabled her to write an exciting story of Max Miller, a twelve-year-old boy whose family has recently immigrated from Russia to Texas in order to escape the persecution. The year is 1912 and, unlike most of the boys in the small East Texas town, Max actually enjoys going to school. He is constantly badgered and bullied by the blacksmith's son, Joe. The Miller family lives over his Uncle's store and Max helps out by delivering groceries to customers. His uncle buys a beautiful new bicycle so that Max can deliver the orders faster. With intense determination, Max teaches himself to ride by going up and down the alley between the back of the store and the blacksmith's shop. Joe heckles and harasses him every step of the way. The Miller family are observant Jews and many of the Jewish rituals and customs are explained in the book, thus allowing non-Jewish children the opportunity to understand what is really going on when Max is determined to look for his peddler father after he does not come home for Passover. In Max's mind, only a grave illness or accident could keep his father away. After writing a note explaining where he has gone, Max sneaks out the back of the store and sets out on the new bicycle to find his father. Joe follows him on his mare, Maggie -- the last tie to his deceased Mother. At first, Max does not want Joe tagging along since all of his previous experiences with him have been less than pleasant. Joe, however, won't leave and shares food and resources with Max. After awhile, the two boys accept each other and then they become good friends. Their search for the missing father is both exciting and tragic, but ultimately victorious.

BIOGRAPHIES

Known more for his adult novels of historic multi-volume family chronicles, John Jakes wrote Susanna of the Alamo: A True Story, illustrated by Paul Bacon^{xxxiii} This fascinating picture book recounts the story of the only adult Anglo survivor of the battle of the Alamo, Mrs. Susanna Dickinson. After the battle, Mrs. Dickinson, her infant daughter, the other Mexican Texan women and children, and two African Americans, one a slave and one a freeman are taken before General Santa Ana who is quite taken by the lovely young widow and her infant daughter. He offers to adopt the baby girl, take her to Mexico City with him, and educate her. Naturally the grieving young widow refuses. The women are then each given a blanket and \$2.00 in silver coins. Mrs. Dickinson is sent east with the two black men to

protect and guide her to General Samuel Houston to tell of Santa Ana's prowess and military might. She is portrayed as a noble, brave, patriotic woman. Unfortunately (or fortunately depending upon ones viewpoint), the part of her story, which is not told, is really the part that is inappropriate for young children. After Texas won its independence, her lot in life was unfortunate. She married four additional times, was poverty stricken, and lived a truly sad, pathetic life until her death in 1888.^{xxxiv}

Tales of a Texas Boy by Marva Dasef^{xxxv} is a collection of twenty vignettes, interspersed with period photographs. The author had heard her father tell stories of his childhood and young adulthood spent growing up in West Texas during the Great Depression, but she did not begin to seriously collect those stories until he was 84 years old. She admits to taking a bit of artistic freedom in some of the details in order to flesh out certain parts in some stories, but she also cites two excellent website addresses where she checked facts to be certain that her accounts are accurate to the time and location. The dialect is right on the mark for West Texas and, when read aloud, sounds completely authentic. For example:

Pa tol' me to get to sleep early so we could leave before dawn. I was excited, so didn't know how I'd get to sleep, but I didn't want to argue with him none. Pa was takin' me along with him to visit with a friend of his, name of Mr. Norfleet. He owned a big ranch down south east of us in Hale Country.^{xxxvi}
Reading a book such as this one can often inspire kids of all ages to begin recording their own family stories before anyone reaches the age of eighty-four.

CONCLUSIONS

The corpus of book written and published each year about Texas and Texans continues to increase and children are, thus, able to enjoy the state through many genres. Many of those books deal with Multicultural issues, and, as such should be of interest to teachers, parents, and librarians from all over our Great Nation, not just those of us in the Great State of Texas.

ⁱ Texas History Movies

ⁱⁱ New Texas History Movies

ⁱⁱⁱ The Legend of the Texas Bluebonnet

^{iv} Rules of the Road

^v The Tequila Worm

^{vi} When Zachary Beaver Came to Town

^{vii} Holes

^{viii} Holes, p. 7

^{ix} Small Steps

^x With the Wind Kevin, Dolan: A Novel of Ireland and Texas

^{xi} With the Wind Kevin, Dolan: A Novel of Ireland and Texas p. 12

^{xii} The Boy in the Alamo

^{xiii} Battle of the Alamo: You are There

^{xv} Battle of the Alamo: You are There, Acknowledgement Page

^{xvi} Battle of the Alamo: You are There, p. 25

^{xvii} The Texas Trilogy

^{xviii} A Paradise Called Texas

^{xix} Willow Creek Home

^{xx} A Paradise Called Texas, p. iv

^{xxi} Willow Creek Home

^{xxii} Spirit of Iron

^{xxiii} Letters to Oma, p. x

^{xxiv} Letters to Oma, p. 162

^{xxv} Muddy Banks

^{xxvi} Muddy Banks, p. 153

^{xxvii} Old Yeller

^{xxviii} Old Yeller, p. 184

-
- xxix After Pa Was Shot
xxx After Pa Was Shot, p. 81
xxxi After Pa Was Shot, p. 187
xxxii The Treasure in the Tiny Blue Tin
xxxiii Susanna of the Alamo: A True Story
xxxiv www.tamu.edu/.../dickinson_susannah.html
xxxv Tales of a Texas Boy
xxxvi Tales of a Texas Boy, p. 38

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Atler, Judy. (1991) After Pa Was Shot. Ellen C. Temple Publishing Inc. and E-Heart Press Inc.: Lufkin, TX and Dallas.
- Bauer, Joan. (2005) Rules of the Road. Puffin: New York.
- Cousins, Margaret. (1958) The Boy in the Alamo. Illus. Nicholas Eggenhofer. Corona Publishing Co., San Antonio,
- Daser, Marva (2007). Tales of a Texas Boy. Texas Boy Publications
- dePaola, Tomi. (1996) The Legend of the Bluebonnet. Illus. Tomi dePaola. Putnam Juvenile: New York.
- Canales, Viola. (2005) The Tequila Worm. Wendy Lamb Books: New York.
- Ducharme, Dede Fox. (1998) The Treasure in the Tiny Blue Tin. Texas Christian University Press: Fort Worth.
- Frantz, Joe B., ed. (1985) Texas History Movies: Story of the Lone Star State. Pepper Jones Martinez, Inc., Publishers: United States of America.
- Gipson, Fred. (1956) Old Yeller. Harpers: New York.
- Gurasich, Marj. (1989) Letters to Oma: A Young German Girl's Account of Her First Year in Texas, 1847. Illus. Barbara Mathews Whitehead. Texas Christian University Press: Fort Worth.
- Holt, Kimberly Willis. (1999) When Zachary Beaver Came to Town. Holt: New York.
- Jackson, Jack. (2007) New Texas History Movies. Illus. Jack Jackson. Texas State Historical Association: Austin.
- Jakes, John. (1986) Susanna of the Alamo: A True Story. Illus. Paul Bacon. Scholastic: New York.
- Milligan, Bryce. (1999) Battle of the Alamo: You Are There. Illus. Charles Shaw. Eakin Press: Austin.
- (1986) With the Wind, Kevin Dolan. Illus. Paul Hudgins. Corona Publishing Company: San Antonio.
- Sachar, Louis. (1998) Holes. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux: New York.
- (2006) Small Steps. Delacorte Press: New York.
- Shelfman, Janice Jordan. (1983) A Paradise Called Texas. Illus. Tom, Karl, and Dan Shelfman. Eakin Press: Austin.
- (1987) Spirit of Iron. Illus. Tom, Karl, and Dan Shelfman. Eakin Press: Austin.
- (1985) Willow Creek Home. Illus. Tom, Karl, and Dan Shelfman. Eakin Press: Austin,
- Tolliver, Ruby C. (1987) Muddy Banks. Illus. Walle Conoly. Texas Christian University Press: Fort Worth.