white cambric, [unintelligible], cheap hosery, etc.; cotton cards, cost here 8½ pr Dz. I send you a couple of late papers. I wrote you in my last concerning selling your cotton there. Such as yours is worth about 30¢, Boins quality much less. The freight, duties, permit, etc. will nearly eat up poor cotton. Freight from Alleyton must come down to 6¢ before cotton will pay, unless of very good quality. I sent you some papers by Falkner, also to Bremond who has kept me supplied with Houston papers.

[unsigned]

Matamoros May 14th 1865

Dear Fred

I wrote you a few days since, since which I sent to you by Mr. Dumble a hat, which with the one sent to you by Sawyer completes your wants in that line. The cloth I have yet found, nor have I seen anything of Wash Hill. Do you want it dark bleu? Since you exchange has become more plenty and can be bought at five dollars to the pound or 12½ advance which is a little less. There has been quite an excitement upon the expectation of the Yankees marching upon Brownsville. Yesterday Col. Ford had a fight and took about eighty prisoners, several hundred stand of arms. I do not believe there is immediate danger of their attacking Brownsville. You need not make any purchase of exchang by drafts on me as I can obtain a supply here. Send me papers by every mail. Put them in a big invelop—the postage is not much.

[unsigned]

The Battle of Palmito Ranch, discussed in this letter, was the last land engagement of the Civil War. Lee had surrendered on April 9, 1865, but news of the end of the war had not yet reached the Confederate troops in Texas by May 13. Like Colonel John S. Ford and his men, Rice seems to have had no indication that the war was in its final stages and that he would return to Houston before the end of the summer.

Steven Strom
Assistant Editor

Book Review

Indians, Cattle, Ships, and Oil: The Story of W. M. D. Lee. Donald F. Schofield. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985. Pp. 240.)

Houston's modern face is concrete, glass, and steel. Yet behind this glistening veneer lies a history of people, of workers, and of Houston entrepreneurs, many of whom are now forgotten. William McDole Lee is not a household name. Yet he was one of that bold band of hardy entrepreneurs who opened up Texas and Houston for commercial exploitation. Born in Wisconsin, Lee was a Yankee who wore many hats in his 83-year life. He began in 1869 as a trader and merchant among the tribes in the U.S. Department of Missouri (Kansas, Illinois, Missouri, Colorado, New Mexico, and parts of Oklahoma and Texas). Trading with the southern Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes, and operating as provisioners to army soldiers at Camp Supply, Lee and his partner became prosperous from their operations in supplies and buffalo hides. Lee's initial wealth came in large part from his role in destroying an irreplaceable resource of the expanding U.S. frontier—the many thousands of buffalo grazing on the plains.

Whether the hides were secured legally or illegally, Lee vigorously pursued his enterprise. Donald F. Schofield, author of *Indians, Cattle, Ships and Oil: The Story of W.M.D. Lee*, captures this side of Lee's entrepreneurial personality:

> The idea of violating government orders by transporting contraband out of the region did not seem to bother the men (Lee and his partner) so long as he [sic] was also exploring new inroads into the hide trade. White hunters were just too successful to be ignored. (p. 35)

The frontier ethic of these early commercial capitalists sometimes traded in a respect for the traditional values of honesty and legality for an ethic of profitability and enhanced accumulation. Lee's dealings with the Native American (Indian) tribes deteriorated as the buffalo herds declined, for the tribes could no longer trade valuable hides for Lee's supplies.

The profitable trade in hides was ending, and Lee moved on to a new career in the cattle business. Purchasing cattle with capital gained from exploiting Native American tribes and decimating buffalo herds, Lee became one of the

largest and most successful ranchers in the Texas panhandle. Schofield notes that

> . . . the ranch had been built into one of the largest and potentially more profitable organizations of the Southwest. (p. 61)

Yet Lee prospered in part by paying his workers, the famous Texas cowboys, a rather low wage. Here Schofield chronicles a chapter in Texas history which has rarely been told—the series of cowboy strikes over low wages and poor working conditions. Yes, that Texas hero, the cowboy, that symbol of independence and hard work, was perhaps the first Texas worker to organize and to strike against the exploitative cattle capitalists of the Panhandle. Indeed, Texas Rangers were brought into the Panhandle, on the side of the ranchers, to keep the cowboys in line. At first, the ranchers were forced to grant higher wages, but soon—with the help of the Texas Rangers and other hired gunmen—they were able to restore the poor working conditions and low wages necessary to keep their profits high. And, as Schofield notes,

> . . . anyone thought to have participated in the protest was fired from the crew and even blackballed from working other outfits. Lee went so far as to order that once a man had been discharged he was not to be fed. Not surprisingly, the strike ended quickly. (p. 64)

While this may have been one of the first uses of police forces to put down Texas workers trying to organize to redress legitimate grievances, it was not to be the last in Texas history. One major weakness of Schofield's analysis is that he generally presents the struggle from the point of view of the ranchers; more attention to the cowboys' perspective (including the published literature on the subject) would have provided a balanced account of this important period in Texas labor history.

In the late 1880s Lee moved out of the stagnating cattle business and began his third "life," with a series of port and oil exploration activities which brought him to the greater Houston area. In 1888 Lee joined with several partners in a one-million-dollar investment in a deep water channel project at the mouth of the Brazos River. This was a period during which a number of entrepreneurs had realized that the absence of an adequate port on the Texas coast was a profit-making challenge. Lee and his associates could see that a Texas port would secure much of the profitable international trade then going through New Orleans and Chicago. After more than a dozen years and investments, however, the Brazos outlet never materialized as the major port on the Texas coast. Unfortunately, Schofield does not explain the reasons for the port's failure.

In the early 1900s Lee settled into Houston, enrolled his daughter in a finishing school, and founded the West Columbia Oil Company. One of the Houston area's first oil entrepreneurs, Lee began his *fourth* economic "life"

by prospecting for oil in Brazoria County on the estate of Governor James S. Hogg. When his crews struck oil, Lee moved to East Columbia. But a series of dry holes dampened his spirits, and Lee moved belatedly into drilling at the Spindletop field near Beaumont. Schofield presents rather limited information on this critical period of Lee's life, so it is difficult to assess Lee's significance in the early oil industry.

Schofield's book is important in bringing to the forefront the role of W.M.D. Lee, the multi-talented entrepreneur, in helping develop Texas in the 1880-1920 period. A few scholars, including Roger Olien and Diana Olien, in *Oil Booms*, are beginning to do the critical probing of the oil industry that is badly needed. Indeed, it is remarkable that so little first-rate scholarly analysis has been done on the oil industry in the U.S. There are several good books on OPEC; but there is only one decent history of the oil industry—that by Williamson et al., *The American Petroleum Industry*, a set of books which is uncritical and now out of date. And most books on particular oil men and oil companies are "puff" or "vanity" books with little critical or comparative analysis. Schofield's book has some of these weaknesses. He frequently presents Lee's activities with little analysis of the surrounding political and economic context. Chapters have no contextual introductions or analytical summaries helping the reader thread through the details. And there is no analytical conclusion, only a brief epilogue on Lee's death. Had Schofield provided the reader with more of the historical context—such as the major trends in the oil or cattle industries in 1880-1920—this would have been a much stronger book. Even the brevity of the book (139 pages of text) suggests an absence of synthesis and analysis. The reader easily loses sight of the forest for all the trees, the lush details that Schofield provides. A flawed book, it is nonetheless a welcome addition to the literature on the founding entrepreneurs of Texas and of Houston.

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