

and sheepmen who attempted to tame and conquer the Devils River country. Dearen illustrates the difficulty of such a conquest through the exploits of legendary figures such as John Hays, Bigfoot Wallace, John Bell Hood, and William Rufus Shafter in the region while also revealing the experiences of immigrants along the lower road, escaped slaves, Mexican shepherders, and Black Seminole scouts often deleted from the history of southwestern Texas.

Secondly, Dearen's study is the story of the land itself, a unique Texas frontier "where nature and hostiles seemed bound in an unholy conspiracy against uninvited intrusion. The Devils River country represents the convergence of three major ecological regions, the Edwards Plateau, the Chihuahuan Desert, and the Tamaulipian Thornscrub. Indeed, the characteristics of each of these regions create in the Devils River a remarkably inhospitable environment marked by harsh terrain and severe, prolonged drought as well as a variety of predators both human and inhuman. Yet, despite the seemingly forsaken nature of the region, through hard work, endurance, and sheer determination settlements, towns, and ranches did develop in the area contributing to at least some level of civilization by the dawn of the Twentieth century.

Overall, *Devils River, Treacherous Twin to the Pecos, 1535-1900* is well researched and well written. However, Dearen's brief chapters and journalistic style may lack the scholarly depth desired by historians and academics. Nonetheless, *Devils River* vividly portrays the untold story of an often neglected region of Texas while providing a foundation for more focused studies of the Devils River country.

John B. Caraway
Clyde, Texas



River of Contrasts, The Texas Colorado by Margie Crisp. Texas A&M University Press, College Station. 2012. Content. Foreword. Preface. Acknowledgments. Notes. Index. Pg. 229. \$35.00. Cloth.

The Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, was known for his recognition of the changing nature of the universe. It was he who acknowledged that one "cannot step twice into the same river; for other waters are ever flowing." Artist and author, Margie Crisp, understands that the

philosopher's conclusion was more than simply recognition of the passage of time. She has taken it as a call to try and capture one of Texas' grand rivers with words of emotional crispness and with illustrations of incredible detail and beauty.

The history of the Texas Colorado is similar to many other rivers. The early 50's were filled with grand engineering projects with dual goals of controlling floods and generating hydroelectric power by building dams across Texas' rivers. The results of this pattern are familiar to any family who has fished, camped, or owned property beside a reservoir. On the upper Colorado, however, lakes never filled with water or filled so quickly with soil washed off from depleted grasslands that they achieved the fate of every captured river and silted into shallow, murky pools. Even the Highland Lakes around Austin, known for their beauty, have had to overcome polluted runoff, agricultural chemicals, and over-development. The images of last summer's drought may not be the last time we see the bottom of Lake Travis, and in Crisp's telling, the fate of our Colorado River is yet to be determined.

The author introduces landowners up and down the river who tend to their little slices of the flow and the land surrounding it with a combination of rampant optimism and the realization their efforts are limited by decisions others made long ago. Overgrazing has left only 1% of Texas' original grasslands, forcing owners to contend with both the erosion and the invasive saltcedar trees planted to try and prevent it. Crisp's words and emotional investment in both the people and their efforts are richly detailed and warmly communicated.

The author's love of her subject is reflected in both her remarkable illustrations and her flowing prose. In much the same way she creates her drawings with layers of detailed, careful strokes, her words are equally lush. There were moments where the words flowed too densely, but the reviewer's commitment to her work paid off repeatedly with images of visual clarity and warm detail. In her journey down the river from the Llano Estacado to its mouth at Matagorda Bay, Crisp provides the reader with a passionately worded description of details even the most regular river visitor will have missed. I highly recommend her depiction of a lunch of tuna crackers (p. 84) to anyone unable to appreciate all of life's simple pleasures.

If the problems of Texas' rivers were easily solvable we would not be facing such uncertainty with our water supply. The author's ability

to capture both the inherent futility of taming wild rivers and the utter necessity of finding a shared commitment to a proper balance among competing forces is remarkable; to do so in a way that speaks to the reader's heart is what makes her work exceptional.

Beyond simply reading such a work, owning it is a way to capture and hold a snapshot in time described by the words and images. In a hundred years, will we still recognize the river she describes? Her own words (p. 35) recommend this work to any reader who understands these lessons. "How, I wonder, can I feel so keenly the loss of something I have never known?" After reading *River of Contrasts* one can no longer say they have not known.

Gary Pinkerton
Silsbee, Texas

➔ *I'll Be Here in the Morning: The Songwriting Legacy of Townes Van Zandt* by Brian T. Atkinson. Texas A&M University Press, College Station. 2012, Contents. Preface. Introduction. Prelude. Verse. Bridge. Chorus. Coda. Notes. Selected Discography. Index. Pp 250. \$24.95 Cloth.

Townes Van Zandt was, is, and will probably always remain an enigma to those who follow Texas music. Diagnosed in early adulthood as manic-depressive and schizophrenic, his was a tortured and all too-brief life filled with contradictions. The poetry of his lyrics often danced on the razor edge of genius. Take, for instance, the following lines from "Our Mother the Mountain": "So I reached for her hand and her eyes turned to poison, and her hair turns to splinters and her flesh turns to brine; she leaps 'cross the room, she stands in the window and screams that my first-born will surely be blind." The upbeat songs were few and the dark-tinged many. According to Harold Eggers, Jr., long-time friend, manager, and road companion: "Townes believed that you can't sing the blues unless you've lived them to the extremes and beyond. As Steve Earle has said, Townes would go to the depths of darkness where we were all afraid to go, and then he'd come back and tell us about them. Townes lived his songs right to the end. That may be what killed him." (xiii)