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Joseph A. Pratt, Christopher J. Castaneda. *Builders: Herman and George R. Brown.* College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999. xxi + 326 pp. $36.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-89096-840-6.

Reviewed by Paul Carlson (Department of History, Texas Tech University)
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Brothers Herman and George R. Brown turned their building company, Brown & Root, into one of the largest and most successful engineering and construction operations in the world. They were Texans (from Belton) and their company came to possess the myth and character of Texas–it was big and bold.

Started in 1919 by Herman (1892-1962) with a loan from his brother-in-law Dan Root, the company struggled at first. George (1889-1983) joined the company in 1922, and they graded and surfaced roads. Dynamic growth came in the 1930s Depression years when they won a contract for constructing a large dam across the Colorado River in Central Texas, and during World War II the company burst onto the national scene. After the war, the brothers took their operations overseas, and in the 1950s they were wealthy and their company enjoyed national prominence.

After Herman died in 1962, George sold Brown & Root to Halliburton Company. However, the Brown Foundation, established by the brothers some years earlier, carries on philanthropic activities of all kinds.

This dual biography, crisply written and refreshingly direct, is well done. It is largely uncritical business history. The Browns were big thinkers who took on ambitious projects, and, at least as related here, they succeeded at making money–money they poured into charitable projects and into politics. They were conservative Democrats who were sometimes willing to bend the rules of fair political contributions to support conservative business candidates.

It is a book of substance, and typical of the many new books coming from Texas A&M University Press, it is attractively designed and handsomely packaged.

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