

Paul Bergeron, Stephen V. Ash, Jeannette Keith. *Tennesseans and Their History*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000. xiii + 357 pp. \$30.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-57233-056-6.



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Published on H-South (May, 2001)

Updating Tennessee History

The preface states that the intent of this volume is to provide a basic text of Tennessee history, comfortable for use in the college classroom as well as for those of the general public seeking an informative and engaging background of Tennessee history. With this in mind, the authors have succeeded remarkably.

Since the purpose of the volume is to provide an historical base, rather than to present an historical thesis, scholars and academics will find a place for it among standard histories instead of among ground-breaking historiography. It can supersede earlier histories of Tennessee as it brings the Tennessee story up to the edge of the twenty-first century. For more in-depth coverage, historians would do well to consult Van West's *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*.

Teachers will find *Tennesseans and Their History* a welcome addition to the classroom; its style is both comfortable and challenging at a college level, and absorbing as well. The inclusion of suggested readings provides valuable assistance for teachers looking for supplemental texts. The

use of sidebars allows for re-engaging the attention of readers whose interest may require occasional rekindling. The indexing is consistent and thorough; the table of contents and illustrations listing are utilitarian, with tables and maps listed separately from general images. There is no modern map of political jurisdictions for the geographically curious. Map 4.1, titled "Indian Treaties in Tennessee," is reproduced in black and white and may require magnification to distinguish between tight hashing and close lines.

The authors narrate Tennessee's complex beginnings easily. Without assaulting the reader with taxing narrative, Bergeron et al., relate such incidents as John Sevier's arrest by North Carolina officials for his disloyal actions involving the creation of the aborted state of Franklin, yet still being called upon to represent a soon-to-be Tennessee county in the North Carolina legislature. Relating such intricate events in a basic text is a formidable task; the authors prove themselves quite capable.

Since Bergeron et al. handle the complex narration so well, the occasional lapses in relating

straightforward events interrupts the reader's thought process. One such example is the sudden use of "Nashville" at the beginning of the third chapter (p. 47), previously called Nashborough. Readers will deduce the transition easily enough, but the absence of a short phrase such as "Nashborough, called Nashville by 1789" seems out of place in reading which otherwise flows effortlessly.

Amusement awaits the reader as early statehood is related--in 1796 Tennessee elected a legislature and proceeded to send Senators Blount and Cocke to Philadelphia only to discover that Tennessee wasn't yet a state, begging the question of election validity (pp. 68-69). Fortunately statehood was achieved relatively quickly, sparing the reader another narrative of intricacy similar to the aborted state of Franklin.

There is a hint of bias in the treatment of antebellum politics and economy. Phrases such as "Luckily for the Democrats . . ." and "Thus the Democrats had a victory at last" (p. 105) generate very clearly the intense bipartisan environment of the period. The authors clearly state which points of view are presented, yet by presenting them from various perspectives (in the case, the Democrats') they succeed in drawing the reader into the intense feelings of the period in a light that creates a personal feeling for the reader. The treatment of Tennessee's agricultural industry is brief, yet still addresses basic issues that often confuse the novice of antebellum economy, in particular providing a point of reference for the distinction between farms and plantations (p. 111).

Coverage of the Civil War seems brief if one considers society's interest in the war today. The authors have kept perspective chronologically--it covered just four years. Key battles such as Shiloh are related concisely as is appropriated for a general text. The recurring theme of the three regions of the state--West Tennessee, Middle Tennessee and East Tennessee--are most vivid at this point as

the authors stress the pro-Union sympathies in East Tennessee. Although the differences are treated in prior chapters, from this point forward these division in Tennessee are continually addressed in a political framework up to the present day.

Tennessee's early re-entry into the Union after the war enabled the state to avoid the military administrations which other Southern states endured, and the authors are quick to highlight this difference; then the shared experiences of Jim Crow society are addressed.

The Tennesseans enjoyment and intensity of the War of the Roses could easily be one of the most intriguing treatments in the book. Following the negative Brownlow-Klan climax (pp. 171-178), the War of the Roses present a hotbed of politics in Tennessee in a refreshing light (pp. 205-207). In this case two brothers, Robert Love Taylor and Alfred Alexander Taylor ran against each other for governor, while campaigning on the same stage in 1886.

The authors lay a solid foundation for an understanding of modern Tennessee politics and this is illustrated best in the account of Ed "Boss" Crump, the Memphis politician whose influence on the state's political scene spanned the years between the first world war and the second.

The impact of Oak Ridge and also the Tennessee Valley Authority is concisely recounted. The electrification of rural Tennessee is one of the states' high-water marks, yet in spite of the increased use of sidebars in the latter part of the book, none seem to address this event.

The treatment of desegregation includes sidebars which bring the issue to life. The authors highlight the fact that Tennessee did not have a program of massive resistance which was played out in other Southern states. The authors bring out the role of the reorganized Highlander school in training civil rights activists, especially Martin Luther King, Jr. (pp. 303-306), concluding the civil

rights chapter with King's assassination in Memphis.

The text's final chapter draws together the elements of Tennessee's economy and culture and relates them to a broader national context. It addresses increasing industry, the development of country music (including the obligatory sidebar about Elvis Presley, p. 321), and a greater emphasis on education. The conclusions drawn are not surprising--Tennessee's progress in education statistically still lags behind the national average, its role in the evolution of the blues is often overshadowed by the popularity of country music, and noting that much of its appeal to industry is related to its lack of a strong union stance in the general population.

Tennesseans and Their History succeeds in its intention to be a concise and interesting state history. While there have been a number of books on Tennessee history (one need only review the lists of suggested readings to glean some titles), this text will clearly stand out. It is well written, informative, explains intricacies without extraneous detail and is laid out with sidebars and images that enhance the narrative. Teachers of college level Tennessee history will welcome this book to the classroom, and Tennesseans desiring a review of Tennessee history will find this book a delight.

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Citation: Frances Holly Hodges. Review of Bergeron, Paul; Ash, Stephen V.; Keith, Jeannette. *Tennesseeans and Their History*. H-South, H-Net Reviews. May, 2001.

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