

H-Net Reviews

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Rob Simbeck. *Tennessee State Symbols*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002. xvi + 155 pp. \$15.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-57233-184-6.

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The Zebra Swallowtail: Tennessee's Official State Butterfly Plus Thirty Other State Symbols

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In *Tennessee State Symbols*, Rob Simbeck celebrates Tennessee's collective cultural heritage as conveyed through its thirty-one official symbols. Altheus Press published the first edition of this work, entitled *Tennessee State Symbols: The Fascinating Stories behind Our Flag and Capitol, the Mockingbird, Iris and Other Official Emblems*, in January 1995. The second edition, without the lengthy subtitle and which was published by the University of Tennessee Press in 2002, boasts a new cover, and includes Tennessee's four most recently adopted symbols—the state tartan, the state amphibian, the state reptile, and the state festival.

In *Tennessee State Symbols*, Simbeck briefly acknowledges the importance of Tennessee's unofficial symbols, such as Graceland, the Ryman Auditorium, and the Smoky Mountains, as well as occasional symbols that were associated with the nation's bicentennial celebration in 1976, such as "The Tennessee Salute" and "The Pride of Tennessee." However, he stresses that the scope of the work includes only those thirty-one official symbols that the state has adopted by legislative action. Simbeck's concluding chapter is an informative discussion detailing the process by which a proposed state symbol moves through the Tennessee Legislature and becomes signed into state law.

Rather than organize the main body of the book chronologically and present the symbols in the order in which the state adopted them, the author situates the

chapters topically, beginning with the most commonly recognized symbols, the state flag and the state capitol. He devotes each chapter, which is typically only three to four pages, to an individual symbol. The work's methodology is its greatest strength. Simbeck identifies the symbol, recounts the history of how that object became an official state symbol, and explains the significance of the object to Tennessee's shared culture. For example, he indicates whether the object was selected because it is common in Tennessee, like limestone; threatened by development, like the bobwhite quail; or selected by a group of the state's schoolchildren, like the passionflower. Simbeck adds anecdotes and local history, such as his recounting of how the students in Sherrill Charlton's biology class at Gallatin High School chose the Zebra Swallowtail as the state butterfly.

The book's major shortcoming is not having color photographs of the official symbols. Color images would have enhanced the reader's understanding of the official state "seal, the flag, the capitol, six songs and a poem, four insects, two birds, a mammal, two fish, a reptile, an amphibian, two flowers, two trees, two gems, a rock, a folk dance, a jamboree and crafts festival, and a tartan" (p. xi). The black-and-white images that are included fail to leave the reader with a lasting impression of these symbols.

Readers can view vivid color images of each of Tennessee's state symbols on the state's official website or the Tennessee Blue Book web page.[1] The work relies heavily on the Tennessee Blue Book and other secondary

sources, including the *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*. It does, however, draw from a few primary sources, including the *Nashville Tennessean*, Nashville's daily newspaper, and audio records of legislative functions.

Like Kathy Fenney's *Tennessee Facts and Symbols* (2000), which is part of Capstone's The States and Their Symbols series, *Tennessee State Symbols* is an easy-to-understand quick read that acquaints the reader with the state's official symbols. It will appeal both to Tennessee's

younger junior high and high school social studies students, as well as adult readers. Tennessee historians and other interested Tennessee residents might also be interested in reading the lyrics to the state's seven official state songs or learning that the Tennessee Cave Salamander is the official state amphibian.

Note

[1]. Available at <www.state.tn.us/education/websyms.htm> or the Tennessee Blue Book website at <www.state.tn.us/sos/bluebook/online>

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