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## BOOK NOTES

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*Last of the Blue and Gray: Old Men, Stolen Glory, and the Mystery that Outlived the Civil War.* By Richard A. Serrano. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2013, viii + 222 pages, paper \$27.95.)

As Americans continue to commemorate the sesquicentennial of their Civil War, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Richard A. Serrano, formerly of the *Kansas City Times* and now a *Los Angeles Times* Washington correspondent, offers a curious tale from the lead-up to the war's centennial observation. The "last of the Blue and Gray," the oldest and last surviving veterans of the Union and Confederate armies, were reputed to have been Albert Woolson and Walter Williams. Woolson died on August 2, 1956, and Williams on December 19, 1959, both, of course, well over 100 years old. Serrano chronicles the passing of the Civil War generation, exploring the false claims of several would-be "veterans," and concludes of Woolson and Williams: "One of them indeed was a soldier, but one, according to the best evidence, was a fake" (p. 5).

*Almost Pioneers: One Couple's Homesteading Adventure in the West.* By Laura Gibson Smith, edited by John J. Fry. (Guilford, Conn.: Globe Pequot Press, 2013, xvi + 216 pages, paper \$16.95.)

*Almost Pioneers* reveals, according to historian John J. Fry, the "hopes, dreams, and motives" of an Iowa couple, Laura and Earle Smith, who labored from 1913 to 1916 on a homestead claim in southeastern Wyoming. Laura's revealing memoir, written in the late 1930s, is followed by a substantial, interpretative afterword by the editor that provides additional biographical and historical context. According to Fry, the Smith's story is of interest in part because they were "willing to go backward to go forward, willing to launch out into the unknown in order to move closer to realizing their dreams" (pp. vi-vii). But ultimately they left their dry-land farming adventure behind after gaining title to the land, assumed the role of speculator and absentee landlord, and pursued their dreams back in Iowa.

*Biting through the Skin: An Indian Kitchen in America's Heartland.* By Nina Mukerjee Furstenau. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, xviii + 168 pages, paper \$19.00.)

In *Biting through the Skin*, journalist Nina Furstenau describes the trials and joys of growing up in the only Indian family in Pittsburg, Kansas, in the 1960s and 1970s. Furstenau understandably calls this childhood memoir a "food journey" (p. xi) because of the central role that Indian food played in the milestones of her young life. Indian language and dress faded in importance for Furstenau, which made her ever more possessive of her mother's recipes. She highlights several of these recipes in each chapter and through them explores themes such as cultural adaptation and teenaged uncertainty, ultimately finding meaning by accepting the world as it is.

*West of 98: Living and Writing the New American West.* Edited by Lynn Stegner and Russell Rowland. (Austin: University of Texas Press, xxiii + 392 pages, cloth \$45.00.)

Time spent in the American West changes a person, but the change varies by individual experiences. Lynn Stegner and Russell Rowland, themselves accomplished authors and residents of the West, asked prominent western writers to write about "what it means to be a westerner" and to explain "when and in what form that sensibility of being Western was borne in upon them" (p. xi). The result is a collection of sixty-seven deeply personal musings about the West. Although the contributing authors address many classic western themes such as vast open space, natural beauty, and the rugged cowboy, they all express the common theme of "interdependence." *West of 98* is a window into the soul of the West.

*Storm Kings: The Untold History of America's First Tornado Chasers.* By Lee Sandlin. (New York: Pantheon Books, xxv + 266 pages, cloth, \$26.95.)

This fascinating and readable history, which deserves a more accurate, scholarly title, traces the history of Americans' attitudes about and encounters with tornadoes from the time of the Puritans, who believed they were the work of Lucifer, to the "Super Outbreak" of 2011. Along the way, we learn about Ben Franklin's contributions to the science of "landspouts"; the skill of Miami Indians in predicting oncoming storms in Kansas Territory on a windless day; the creation and development of the National Weather Service (first housed in the U.S. Army's Signal Corps); and, especially, the work of often clashing nineteenth-century atmospheric scientists such as James Espy, an "electrifying speaker" (p. 51) who became a national celebrity known as the "Storm King."

*Voodoo Priests, Noble Savages, and Ozark Gypsies: The Life of Folklorist Mary Alicia Owen.* By Greg Olson. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2012, x + 171 pages, cloth \$30.00.)

This volume expands our understanding of the amazing life and career of St. Joseph, Missouri, native Mary Alicia Owen by uncovering manuscripts, plays, and poetry untapped by previous scholarship. Owen arrived in St. Joseph as a young girl in 1850, just a few years after the founding of this western Missouri town, and her interests paralleled those of the city in all its diversity and color. Alongside her two unmarried sisters, Mary Alicia lived her entire life in the house her parents built, but her career as a collector of stories, artifacts, and legend took her to faraway places and garnered her European colleagues and an international reputation. Olson's cross-disciplinary approach to Owen provides an in-depth look at the broad range of her writing, including her lesser-known works of fiction and romance.